

# Focus Groups

## why FOCUS GROUPS?

Focus groups are another way to include youth in review processes and may be conducted as a follow-up to a survey or as the sole means of soliciting youth input. Focus groups usually involve six to ten youth.

Within this small group environment, it is possible to obtain a great deal of information in a short period of time. Proper planning is required to conduct productive focus groups with youth.

Although young people only spend one or two hours together, they will be contributing to a much larger perspective that can make a difference for all children, youth, and families in the child welfare system.

## CONSIDER the following:

1. Schedule sessions that are one to two hours in length at a time when youth are available. Avoid times near holidays or school exams.
2. In advance of the session, create five or six focus questions.
3. Hold sessions in a space that offers few distractions. A community conference room or library meeting room is ideal.
4. Recruit youth who have had a range of experiences while in foster care and who have achieved or who plan to achieve a variety of outcomes.
5. Develop a transportation plan for those attending.
6. Provide refreshments, particularly if youth are coming from school to participate.
7. Provide “table toys” for youth to “play with” during the session. Pipe cleaners, plastic Slinkys, and other inexpensive manipulatives work great.
8. Provide name tags to facilitate communication.
9. Create an agenda which includes the following items: welcome, review of agenda, review of goal of the meeting, review of ground rules, introductions, questions and answers, and wrap up.
10. Determine how you will record the session. If a co-facilitator is not available, arrange for audio recording. If you audio record, you have to also make a plan to have the recording transcribed. (Remember, you may need permission to audio record youth.)

Most youth will welcome participating in a focus group that will ultimately lead to better services for youth in foster care. Emphasize that, although they will only be spending one or two hours together, they will be contributing to

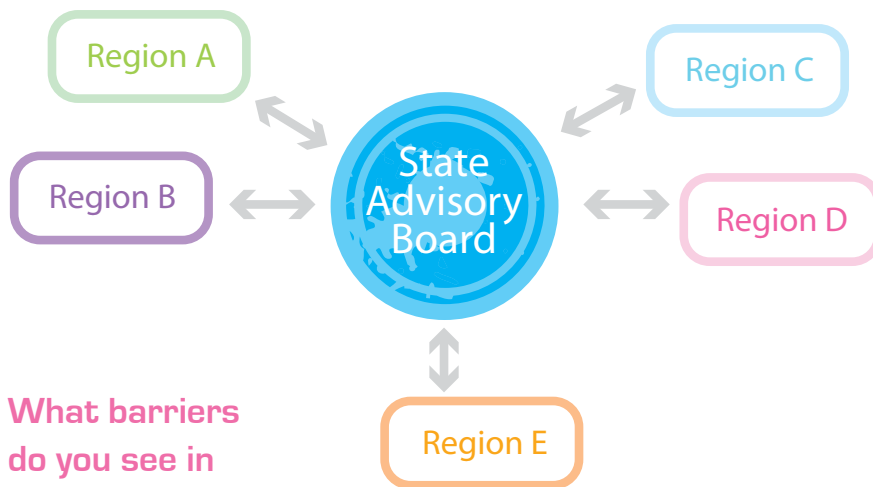
a much larger perspective that can make a difference for all children, youth, and families in the child welfare system. Several samples of focus group questions are included.

## Questions about YOUTH ADVISORY BOARDS

There was heightened interest in the creation of YABs during the Child and Family Service Reviews, specifically that through the second round of CFSRs that older youth were a key stakeholder whose participation was lacking in this process, and thus brought about the further development of Youth Advisory Boards. Some items that YABs in other states have accomplished, including tuition waivers for all

foster youth, Medicaid extensions, legislation requiring sibling visits, development of worker visitation forms, mentoring programs, policy review and implementation, community service projects, driver's license and insurance laws, speakers and training bureaus, etc.

The following diagram is a model of suggested State and Regional Youth Advisory Board interaction:



What level of involvement in youth advisory boards (YAB) have you previously had?

What are your expectations of this meeting, or of the advisory board?

What is in it for you, personally? Or what is in it for youth?

What barriers do you see in maintaining an effective Regional YAB?

What solutions do you suggest to address these barriers?

What benefits do you see by having a YAB, internally for youth and adults, and from a state agency or private organization standpoint?

(to youth) What do you need in place to successfully develop and maintain a YAB (both Regional and State)?

# Questions about CHAFEE

1. What is the best service/program you received to help you prepare for leaving care?

2. What scares you the most about leaving care?

3. In what ways have you been involved in your case planning? (be specific)

4. How can the State involve you more in your case planning?

5. Do you have someone you can call with problems (or something you are really proud of) after you leave care?

Is that person:

- Relative
- Foster parent
- Facility staff
- Teacher
- Other (list)

6. What could help you have a great school year this year? What worries you most about school?

7. What do you plan to do after high school?

8. Are you aware of the ETV?

9. If the State could do one new thing to help youth prepare to leave care, what should it be?

10. What didn't we ask that we should have?

## Chafee

The John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program was created in 1999 to address concern for youth who were not likely to achieve permanency before leaving foster care. The Chafee Program increased funding to states by awarding each state at least \$500,000 to provide services to older youth in foster care. Chafee allows states and tribes to establish eligibility criteria for their participation in Chafee services, provide room and board for youth who leave care at 18, and can extend Medicaid services.



# Questions about CFSR

**1. Does your caseworker include you in making case plan decisions? (deciding where you will live, your permanency goal, what services you need and will receive, your contact with your family members, evaluating how things are going for you)**

- \* **Does your caseworker encourage you to discuss the issues described above?**
- \* **Do you get a copy of your case plan?**
- \* **Does your case plan help you to understand what to expect from your caseworker, what your caseworker expects from you and others involved in your case?**

**2. Do you have an independent living case plan?**

- \* **Who helped you develop the independent living plan?**
- \* **What suggestions do you have to improve the case planning process or the case plan itself?**

**3. How often do you see your caseworker?**

- \* **Do you feel like you have enough contact with your caseworker?**
- \* **Are the meetings with your caseworker helpful? Suggest ways that these meetings are helpful or might be improved.**

## CFSR

Each CFSR is a two-stage process consisting of a Statewide Assessment and an onsite review of child and family service outcomes and program systems. The ultimate goal of the reviews is to help States improve child welfare services for families and children who receive services. CFSR focus on safety, permanency, and family and child well-being.

**4. Have you been given the opportunity to participate in services that will help you achieve your goals? Elaborate.**

- \* **Which services have been the most helpful in assisting you to achieve your goal of returning to your family or to achieve independence?**
- \* **Which services have been the most helpful to your family?**

**5. Do you see your siblings and/or your family? What suggestions or comments would you make about having visits with your siblings and/or family members?**

**6. What do you think a caseworker could do to prevent youth from having to move to multiple placements?**

**7. In what ways are you included in policy development with your state agency?**

# Youth Systemic INTERVIEWS

Please answer the following.

Age \_\_\_\_\_

Race(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Male \_\_\_\_\_ Female \_\_\_\_\_

Placement \_\_\_\_\_

Number of placements you have had \_\_\_\_\_

How long have you been involved with Child Welfare (CW)?  
\_\_\_\_\_

How many workers have you had? \_\_\_\_\_

What is your case plan goal? \_\_\_\_\_

Top ten things that you would change about the CW system.

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)
- 4)
- 5)
- 6)
- 7)
- 8)
- 9)
- 10)

## Questions to use as A GUIDE FOR RESPONSES

How does your program prepare you for discharge?

How is community involvement encouraged?

How are family and adult relations encouraged?

How are your strengths identified?

How are negative stereotypes dispelled?

How does your program allow you to take ownership of your treatment plan?

Top ten things you like about the CW system.

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)
- 4)
- 5)
- 6)
- 7)
- 8)
- 9)
- 10)

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### What are you successful at?

What resources are available to help you pursue your goals?

What supports do you need to help you be successful?

Who do you credit for helping you reach your goals?

How is the treatment plan right for you?

How has the program helped you develop lasting relationships?

What would you change?

How much have you participated in creating it?

Describe your permanency plan.

Do you know how you got it?

What does your permanency plan mean to you?

Do you agree with your permanency plan?



What advice would you give to adults about creating relationships with you?

What emotional support do you need?

What is important to you today?

How do your goals become part of your treatment plan?

What community support do you need?

How are you able to pursue your personal goals?

# DEBRIEFING the Meeting

Use this form to debrief your focus group meeting:

Let us know about your experience at the Focus Group Meeting.

1. Did you have enough information in advance of the meeting to fully participate?  Yes  No
2. Did you have an opportunity to express your ideas, concerns, and opinions?  Yes  No
3. Did you feel that your ideas and opinions were taken seriously?  Yes  No
4. Did you learn something about yourself as a result of this experience?  Yes  No
5. What was the most interesting part of this meeting?
6. What could have made this a better meeting?
7. Would you be interested in participating in other meetings like this?  Yes  No
8. Would you be interested in learning more about getting involved in improving the system?  Yes  No

If yes, please provide contact information:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Cell: \_\_\_\_\_ text?  Yes  No

Facebook: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Social Worker's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

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