

Youth Tip Sheet: Your Life – Your Future

Recommendations for Successful Dissemination and Use

The Building Bridges Initiative Youth Tip Sheet, *Your Life-Your Future: Inside Info on Residential Programs from Youth Who Have Been There*, was developed by the members of the Building Bridges Youth Advisory Group. There are two versions of the Youth Tip Sheet with parallel content – one short and one longer. It is strongly recommended that organizations planning to use and distribute this document first inform, train and discuss the Youth Tip Sheet with administrators, providers, on-site personnel, organizational liaisons, family members and others to make sure that everyone is informed and aware about the content and the intended purpose: to empower youth.

Through participation in the Building Bridges Initiative and the use of tools such as the Youth Tip Sheet, you can play a critical leadership role in your organization, community, state and nation to support the empowerment of youth. We, the members of the Building Bridges Youth Advisory Group, encourage you to promote the dissemination of the Youth Tip Sheet through many channels, thereby increasing the likelihood that the information will reach a broad audience and serve as a valuable resource for youth. Please work with your professional contacts, youth and family organizations, professional associations, community organizations, government agencies at all levels, and across all child serving systems to promote the use of this tool and the adoption of strong youth-guided practice.

Ideas for Disseminating the BBI Youth Tip Sheet

- Provide the Youth Tip Sheet to youth who are considering, entering, or already in a residential program (in addition to agency-specific orientation materials).
- Establish a practice whereby the local/county entity (gatekeeper) that approves all residential stays *always* provides a copy of the Youth Tip Sheet to youth, family members, and providers whenever there is a referral to a residential program.
- Put quality assurance checks in place in your organization (for ex., youth sign-off on chart) to monitor that all youth receive the Youth Tip Sheet.
- If applicable, customize the ‘more information’ box at the end of the Youth Tip Sheet (perhaps using a sticker) to include local or state organizations known for their independent advocacy on behalf of youth.
- Although it is anticipated that the short version of the Youth Tip Sheet will be most appropriate for the majority of youth, make the long version of the Youth Tip Sheet available to youth who are interested in more detail.

- Provide the long version of the Youth Tip Sheet to providers, advocates and others who wish to learn more about what youth want to know about residential programs.
- Both versions of the Youth Tip Sheet should be disseminated widely through:
 - youth organizations
 - family organizations
 - a wide range of providers across all systems
 - all state and local public agencies responsible for youth and family services
 - agencies that make referrals to residential programs
 - other locations that make sense in your community, especially those recommended by youth
 - professional associations (national, state and local)
 - funded system-of-care communities
 - managed care organizations
 - youth legal services providers
 - social networking sites
 - conferences
- If possible, we recommend that you print the Youth Tip Sheet (short version) front-back on a card-stock paper (4.25 x 5.5) so it stands out from the usual paperwork.

Suggestions for How to Use the Youth Tip Sheet

- Ideally, a peer youth advocate or youth mentor would spend time with each youth going over the ideas covered in the Youth Tip Sheet. We know that this type of tool is most effective if it is linked to support to help the youth navigate the system.
- The Youth Tip Sheet should be reviewed with each youth at different times during his/her stay in the program. Youth may be overwhelmed by new information or in crisis when they first enter the program. They will likely have new questions or thoughts after they have experienced the program. A youth advocate or mentor should regularly revisit the issues addressed in the Youth Tip Sheet.
- The youth and providers who developed the Youth Tip Sheet believe that the provider community should be 'prepped' about the content, intent, and desired response to the Youth Tip Sheet. You can do this by sharing more information about the Building Bridges Initiative's values, principles, and promising practices. It is highly recommended that any organization or community using the Tip Sheet conduct an orientation on the Tip Sheet content, as well as more thorough training on youth-guided care. This should include residential program staff, community provider staff, care coordinators across-systems, administrators, family members, youth, community leaders and policymakers at all levels.

Transforming Relationships Among Youth, Families, Providers and Communities

- The philosophy and practice of youth-guided care are central to the Building Bridge Initiative. The following definition of youth-guided care was developed by youth. *“Youth-guided means that young people have the right to be empowered, educated, and given a decision-making role in the care of their own lives, as well as the policies and procedures governing care for all youth in the community, state, and nation. This includes giving young people a sustainable voice and the focus should be towards creating a safe environment enabling a young person to gain self-sustainability in accordance to their culture and beliefs. Through the eyes of a youth-guided approach, we are aware that there is a continuum of power and choice that young people should have based on their understanding and maturity in this strength based change process. Youth guided also means that this process should be fun and worthwhile.”* (Source: Youth-Guided Pyramid <http://systemsofcare.samhsa.gov/headermenu/youthguided.aspx>). This definition forms the philosophical basis for youth-guided practice in the Building Bridges Initiative.
- Youth who are informed and educated will ask more questions and have more opinions and ideas about what is important to them in their experience in a residential program. The youth involved in the development of the Youth Tip Sheet expressed a concern that youths’ efforts to advocate for themselves could inadvertently have negative repercussions if providers are not open and responsive. Organizations need to be prepared to take the time to respond to the questions that youth have and partner in new ways with youth, as individuals, and in program governance. Youth deserve honest, constructive and compassionate responses to their questions and meaningful opportunities to be involved.
- If you consider the questions asked in the Youth Tip Sheet, it will likely prompt your organization to re-evaluate your program - from how you connect youth to peer advocates, to how you conduct pre-admission tours and orientation, to your program’s practices to engage youth, to how you and your community partners relate to one another, to how you involve youth in their own treatment planning and in agency-wide decision-making. If your organization endorses and adopts the Building Bridges Joint Resolution, uses the Youth Tip Sheet and incorporates the principles of youth-guided care, it *will* change the way your organizations provides services – and likely with improved results as research points to better outcomes when youth are actively involved in their own care.

Visit www.togetherthevoice.org for more detailed information on the Initiative, as well as tools to help your organization and community transform using the principles that guide the Building Bridges Initiative.