

YOUTH MOVE NATIONAL PRESENTS

# #THINGS2CONSIDER

## Roles for Youth Advocates

### WHAT IS A YOUTH ADVOCATE?

A youth advocate is a youth or young adult with lived experience within youth serving systems. That might mean they have mental health needs, have been in foster care, or have experience in juvenile justice. Youth advocates view their background and lived experience as a strength, and they use it to advocate for change. Their objective is not only to advocate on behalf of youth, but also to empower youth to create change themselves! Youth advocates can be mentors for youth, demonstrating positive personal and professional development, and critical life skills. They do this by sharing their own experiences in a safe way to create peer connection and inspire youth.

### ROLES OF THE YOUTH ADVOCATE

Youth Advocates have a lot to offer. They are also adept at telling their story to make a positive impact. They are trailblazers paving a path for the youth and young adults coming after them. They do this in several ways: writing blogs or poetry, facilitating youth groups, creating safe and positive environments for youth, speaking on panels, developing and running workshops, networking, joining local, state or, national committees, participating in meetings, running focus groups, being a resource, and even evaluating and improving youth programs and services. Basically, if you are a young adult with lived experience, can share your story with others effectively, and want to help solve problems or improve systems – there is a way for you to do that! Some youth advocates like data and research, and they might run focus groups or things like our [What Helps What Harms](#) project. Others might prefer to work with people, and might be youth peer providers and advocate for youth in treatment or agency meetings. Being a youth advocate is combining your lived experience and skills with what you are passionate about to bring change!

### ROLES & OPPORTUNITIES

Roles can vary from board to board. They might include being a voting member, chairing a sub-committee, or filling an elected position such as president. There are always plenty of different opportunities once you are on a board or committee. If you want to learn what each role does, do not be afraid to look for a mentor on the board to help teach you the ropes and board culture. Another opportunity and great way to learn skills is to volunteer for projects the board may have, such a sub-committee on a specific topic you are knowledgeable about.

**Check out these resources if you are a youth advocate or working with youth advocates!**

[#Things2Consider - Creating Youth Advisory Boards](#)

[#Things2Consider - Strategic Sharing](#)

[Youth Advocate to Advocate for Youth](#)

[The Voice of Youth](#)

### MEANINGFUL ROLES FOR YOUTH ADVOCATES

Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
Websites	Focus Groups	Co-Lead Workshops	Advisory Groups	Strategy Groups
Information Repositories & Kiosks	Surveys	Present at Conferences	Networking & Peer Support	Steering Committees
Media Releases	Face-to-face Interviews	Serve as Expert Panelist	Support Groups	Decision-making
Feature Stories	Public Meetings & Forums	Facilitate Groups	Family Advisory Councils	Hired in Staff Roles or Peer Roles
Fairs & Events	Suggestion Boxes		Youth Advisory Councils	Leaders in Youth Movement & Family Movement
Open Houses	Interviews			
Fact Sheets, Brochures, and Leaflets	Patient Experience Trackers			

### SUPPORTIVE ADULTS SHOULD CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING WHEN YOUTH ADVOCATES FOR CHANGE

- Youth are experts on their own stories. Their lived experience and stories are invaluable.
- Trust in their capacity to learn! They have the voices and the power to make change within their communities and youth serving systems.
- Share knowledge and skills with youth advocates, offering mentoring, coaching, and opportunities for growth.

With a seat and a voice in meetings or systems that are geared toward youth services, youth advocates can be valuable team members and partners for change. There are roles for Youth Advocates at every level of a project, program, or agency!

words by  
**CHANDA WATTS**

This product was partially funded by a contract with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Contract #HHSS280201500007C. The views, opinions, and content expressed in this document do not necessarily reflect the views, opinions, or policies of the Center for Mental Health Services (CMHS), the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), or the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).