

LESSONS LEARNED

THE CONCEPT AND VALUE OF “MENTAL HEALTH” CAN BE INTERPRETED IN A VARIETY OF WAYS; AND IT IS IMPORTANT TO LOOK AT THESE NARRATIVES ACROSS COMMUNITIES AND CULTURES, ESPECIALLY IN UNDERSTANDING WHY BIPOC AND LGBTQ2S+ YOUNG PEOPLE MAY NOT BE SEEKING MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES.

["MENTAL HEALTH" IS] "REALLY STIGMATIZED, ESPECIALLY IN MY TRIBAL COMMUNITY, THEY JUST DON'T. IT'S A LOT OF THINGS THAT WE'VE BEEN THROUGH, LIKE GENERATIONAL TRAUMA, THAT WE JUST DON'T TALK ABOUT IT...SO THAT'S KIND OF HOW IT IS, FOR PEOPLE IN MY TRIBAL COMMUNITY TO JUST GO AND TALK ABOUT IT, MOVE PAST IT, REGARDING YOUR 'MENTAL HEALTH'... A LOT OF LOSS OF OUR LANGUAGE AND CULTURE GOES HAND-IN-HAND WITH HOW WE ARE 'MENTALLY ILL,' I GUESS."

ENSURE LGBTQIA2S+ & BIPOC REPRESENTATION IN MENTAL HEALTH PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

Many of the young people involved in YMCI affirmed the importance of having someone with similar or shared lived experiences as providers. This peer connection makes seeking help easier. Young people also emphasized the importance of this representation being visible within all levels of staff and leadership.

YMCI APPROACH

Recruitment across all YMCI opportunities was intentionally exclusive to BIPOC & LGBTQ2S+ youth and young adults

CREATE ACCESSIBLE SPACES AND PROVIDE ACCOMODATION MEASURES ACROSS ALL EFFORS

Prioritizing accessibility is also prioritizing safety. Not all young people are in environments that promote discussion on emotional wellness, provide an understanding of peer support, or are affirming to LGBTQIA2S+ identities. Some may live in environments where the only access to technology is not in a private space without the use of headphones.

YMCI APPROACH

YMCI provided questions around accessibility needs/ accommodations on registration forms and enabled closed captions for all training, workshops, focus groups, and fellowship/council meetings

LEVERAGE FUNDING TO DECREASE BARRIERS TO WORKFORCE ENTRY FOR YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULTS

Many young people are unable to access training and other professional development opportunities if they are actively seeking employment or currently employed in a role that does not offer paid time off or sick days. Providing compensation for young people to participate in learning opportunities can significantly increase recruitment and retention, as well as an ultimately more diverse workforce. By lowering barriers to participation, we anticipate an expansion of the youth peer workforce which adequately reflects the communities being served.

YMCI APPROACH

YMCI Fellows were compensated \$30,000

YMCI Peer Connect trainees were compensated \$1,000 for completing training

PRIORITIZE LGBTQIA2S+ & BIPOC REPRESENTATION WITHIN YOUR LEADERSHIP TEAM (CONSULTANTS, ETC.)

Hire staff and consultants that reflect the communities you aim to serve in order to ensure that youth and young adults involved in your project are able to connect and identify with the lived experiences of your team.

YMCI APPROACH

All YMCI Project Staff identified as young adults with lived experience across youth-serving systems, and all training, workshops, and fellowship/council meetings were facilitated by LGBTQIA2S+ and/or BIPOC youth

PROVIDE ONGOING TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Young people currently employed within the field of YPS and/or other mental health roles should be able to integrate their learnings into their current work, while also gaining knowledge and skills that can open up different opportunities for professional advancement (i.e. promotions, job shifts, advisory council, professional network broadening)

YMCI APPROACH

YMCI provided both live and pre-recorded coaching workshops centering on topics requested by training participants

Provided online modules with coaching webinars and companion worksheets addressing diverse topics

UTILIZE VIRTUAL PLATFORMS & INTENTIONAL PARTNERSHIPS TO EXTEND OUTREACH & INCREASE GEOGRAPHIC DIVERSITY

Developing and facilitating virtual spaces created more opportunities for young people across the United States to join the training, workshops, and events. This offers a valuable form of peer support and professional learning, especially for BIPOC and LGBTQIA2S+ youth.

YMCI APPROACH

YMCI recruitment strategies included identifying a community partner serving youth and young adults, to help promote and increase the visibility of our opportunities within historically underserved communities.

All opportunities to engage in YMCI efforts were completely virtual, resulting in an engagement with over 150 youth across 16 states and the District of Columbia. We even had some international representation!