9 | INFRASTRUCTURE AND FRAMEWORK

9 | INFRASTRUCTURE AND FRAMEWORK

An organization's culture and capacity to support YA peer success is dependent on its infrastructure, including the policies and procedures that determine how work roles and responsibilities are assigned, carried out, and coordinated. We have identified five aspects of organizational infrastructure not specifically addressed in other chapters that will require direct attention in order to effectively integrate the young adult peer role into your organization. As described below, these aspects serve as mechanisms for organizational change and learning.

Organizational Infrastructure and Framework Domains
- Committed and strong leadership;
- Strong organizational communications that endorse the young adult peer role;
- Connecting & working with human resources (HR);
- Effective staff hiring & accountability practices;
- Young adult peers influencing policy and practice.

COMMITTED AND STRONG LEADERSHIP

Employees take their attitudinal cues from organizational leadership and their supervisors, particularly around the prioritization of goals and tasks. Thus, establishing an inclusive culture that promotes successful employment for young adults diagnosed with SMHC begins with organizational leadership, particularly the CEO and project directors, but also with other high-level clinical and administrative executives and the board of directors. Leadership can demonstrate its commitment to the young adult peer role by:

> **With regard to YA role development, *leadership* must:**
> - Project hope and optimism;
> - Role model good practice;
> - Communicate about implementation challenges and the plan to address them;
> - Find and assign resources supporting implementation.

- **Projecting Hope and Optimism.** Leaders demonstrate commitment by extolling the virtues of the YA peer role. Organization leaders show their enthusiasm by sharing stories of:
  o The direct contributions of agency YA peers to improvements in client outcomes and overall quality of agency services;
  o Former or current agency clients who have become YA peers and are successfully impacting the lives of their clients.

Leaders motivate employees by projecting optimism and hope in both the tone and content of their communication to their agency. Ambivalent communication about YA peers will often weaken the leader's credibility in building a case for why change is needed within the organization to integrate the YA peer role.

- **Role Modeling.** Organizational leaders serve as role models by meeting with YA peers and their supervisors to express their appreciation for their efforts, and troubleshoot system- and agency-based challenges as they arise. They also visibly bring YA peers into decision-making about the young adult service design. A photograph of YA peer training graduates standing strong with elected or appointed officials and other agency leadership is a strong endorsement of the role.

Leaders who get behind a concept or innovation, such as YA peers, before it is a mainstream TAY treatment model component demonstrate the highest credibility with key stakeholders. These early adopters often take a public stand and are well positioned to develop that role moving forward by working with young adult peers.

- **Communicating About Implementation Challenges and the Plan to Address Them.** Successful leaders provide relevant and truthful information about implementation challenges and how they will be addressed. Thus, leadership can and should openly:
  o Recognize that the introduction of the YA peer role may challenge staff perspectives on treatment approaches;
  o Provide education and training necessary for non-peer staff to understand the YA peer role, as discussed in chapter 8;
  o Specify to non-peer staff that their job duties now also include: 1) understanding the YA peer role, 2) connecting clients to YA peers as indicated, 3) respectfully communicating and coordinating services with YA peers, and 4) supporting the inclusion of the YA peer voice in team meetings;
  o Reiterate that non-peer staff jobs are not at risk , though staff will be evaluated in part by their efforts and progress toward supporting the YA peer initiative;
  o Support constructive dialogue among YA peers and other staff by providing team building tools and strategies (chapter 8).

  Leaders should also address employees' questions, generate creative ideas, and prioritize ideas to address any lack of motivation to champion and/or support the YA peer role. One useful tool is cross-training, with both YA peers and non-peer staff (e.g., team leaders, social workers, psychiatrists) to educate each other on their respective professions and job responsibilities.

- **Finding and Assigning Resources to the Young Adult Peer Role**. Funding and staff time should be available to support the best-practices described in this manual. Resources can be obtained through state contracts and grants for transition-age youth program and policy development. Local foundation grants can been used to strengthen the YA Peer role in a program. Any proposed budget should include sufficient and ongoing training for staff, supervisors, and YA peers on matters described in this Toolkit.

STRONG ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATIONS THAT ENDORSE THE YOUNG ADULT PEER ROLE

Organizational communication, or "messaging," is the transmission of key information related to an agency's mission, culture, practice, and strategic initiatives to employees and stakeholders. For employers, messaging is designed to engage employees and stakeholders in supporting a new or challenging initiative by extolling its virtues and negating unsubstantiated concerns. These messages can now be disseminated widely through social media, including CEO Blogs, Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram.

Messages endorsing the YA peer role can fully or even partially make the business case for the role's integration (chapter 2). This includes explaining how the YA peer role will:
- Improve services and outcomes;
- Benefit non-peer staff;
- Enhance the potential for organizational development and growth;
- Increase diversity in the workplace;
- Increase service enrollment of YA clients and their families.

Messaging that endorses the YA Peer role is especially important to counteract long-held stereotypes of young adults diagnosed with mental health conditions. Organizational leaders should **share stories with staff that describe YA peers as capable, confident, and collaborative**. These stories often describe how young adults diagnosed with SMHC came to be peers, and how they enhance the team's functioning and positively influence client outcomes. First person accounts of employers, peers, and clients can powerfully illustrate this message. Pictures, narratives, and articles depicting young adult peers as successful (e.g., acting as mentors or volunteers helping others) are also valuable.

> Organizational message statements are meant to be influential, both externally and internally.

Internal messages are designed to influence and direct staff priorities and activities. Internal messaging strategies target managers, supervisors, and co-workers, and should be designed to foster awareness, acceptance, and support of the young adult peer role. Important internal messaging strategies should include:
- The identification and empowerment of **champions** among management staff who actively promote, encourage, and guide the implementation of the YA Peer role.
- **Trainers and speakers who can speak from direct experience:**
  - o YA peers who share specifics about their success as peers and their own recovery,
  - o Management and supervisors who have overseen or otherwise played a role in implementing a YA Peer initiative. Many of the best trainers and organizational champions are former detractors who have become converts;
- Stories and statements in **internal publications**, such as employee newsletters and brochures;

- Written stories and posters physically placed on **office walls and in corridors**;
- The very **presence of peers** in the workplace is itself the strongest message. Peers have been trained to tell their story and explain their role, and can use those skills with other employees. Peer influence will be stronger when there are more of them and in positions of higher authority (see below).

External messages are meant to influence a wider audience, including external stakeholders such as funders, government agencies, community members, consumers, family members, and potential employees. Primary goals of external messaging are to develop alliances, recruit and hire, and obtain funding. For example, the Young Adult Vocational Program of Eliot Community Human Services in Massachusetts regularly distributes newsletters that present perspectives of both peer mentors and program clients. In addition, The Massachusetts Department of Mental Health (DMH) supports various consumer groups, including the statewide Transformation Center (which operates the certified peer specialist training in Massachusetts), to sponsor a young adult driven website, called Speaking of Hope, which generates many of these messages.

An organization's primary messages are most broadly expressed through its mission statement, associated list of objectives, and other communications of organizational "values." These statements should state, reflect, and support the organization's dedication to YA peer providers as key to the overall service approach. Mission statements most visibly offer a window into organizational purpose and direction. They also offer insight into the language used by senior managers in communicating the organization's service approach. Mission statements with a tight focus and activist tone are associated with better organizational performance. For providers that serve primarily transition-age youth, here is a sample mission statement:

> *"Believing that **all transition-age youth can recover and grow**, the staff of this organization, through a cooperative effort with the community, will ensure a safe, caring environment, **the availability of Young Adult peer providers**, and vocational and social opportunities that support clients in becoming contributing members of society and leading personally fulfilling lives."*

Providers that serve multiple populations, including transition-age youth, may not have the opportunity to be as specific in their mission statement about the value of YA peers. However, mission statements can include important value statements, for example:
- Peer providers greatly enhance the quality of our services while improving outcomes;
- Young adult services include a focus on vocational and career development.

Mission statements can also include useful objectives, such as: "*We aim to employ [N] young adult peer mentor(s) on each treatment team, who will be respected and integrated members of the teams.*"

In addition, messages are often embedded in key organizational planning and policy documents, including policy and practice change statements that embrace the integration of the YA peer role. For example, an organization can affirm its support for young adult peers by stating in a published organizational report or white paper: "*We are committed to growing peer employment opportunities for young adults and will take affirmative steps to employ, retain, and advance young*

people in our organization." Another example: *"As we continue to expand our young adult services, we realize that peer support and empowerment are essential to our business strategy. We are committed to creating an environment in which young adult peers are valued and respected."*

CONNECTING AND WORKING WITH HUMAN RESOURCES DEPARTMENTS

Human Resources (HR) departments generate agency policies and procedures regarding personnel management (e.g., hiring, retention, and termination), company-wide wellness initiatives, non-discrimination and diversity efforts, benefits management, and trainings. The impact of HR activity on staffing, organizational culture, and practice implementation is very relevant to the integration of YA peers.

Previous toolkit chapters discussed multiple areas in which HR plays an important role: ADA and reasonable accommodations, wellness initiatives, compensation, hiring and evaluation standards, and trainings. Here, we discuss issues that typically arise when program developers and HR do not have preliminary discussions about the YA peer role, including: peer job classification, qualifications and pay, pre-screening in hiring, organizational policies, and benefits.

> **HR responsibilities for YA peer implementation include:**
> - Peer job classification, qualification, & pay;
> - Pre-hiring screening and questions;
> - Changes in HR and other organizational policies;
> - Benefits counseling

Because many YA peers have often had limited employment experience, HR will at times need to be more deliberate and patient in educating YA peers about the organization and its personnel policies. HR can offer group presentations that allow for questions, but should also provide opportunities for individualized staff consultation.

Peer Job Classification, Qualifications, & Pay
As discussed in chapter 5, we have found that HR departments usually have not been involved in the development of YA peer job duties or the overall job description, and are often the last to know about this new, unique position before hiring takes place. In these cases, HR is not ready with the appropriate classification(s) for the peer job, which can hold up hiring. This occurs most frequently in larger organizations that have many HR protocols and practices that necessitate multiple levels of approval.

HR's early involvement in shaping the YA peer role can create the conditions for the efficient hiring of YA peers and the identification of any agency policies/practices that could impede this process. When program leadership includes HR in the discussion about the need for a "peer" job classification in advance of hiring peers, the potential for creating that classification is greatly enhanced. In fact, union contracts often allow for the creation of new job types, but time for

sharing information and negotiation is needed. Regardless, HR staff, program developers, and unions will need to maintain a flexible perspective as they continue their discussions. When helping to develop a YA peer job description, HR must:

- Recognize that common requirements of direct service jobs can be less relevant to the YA peer job than other qualifications, such as lived experience and ability to tell one's recovery story. In order to recruit the best YA peers, typical requirements of direct service workers may need to be loosened, such as educational qualifications (chapter 5).
- Take care to not automatically screen out or otherwise diminish the overall qualifications of YA peer job applicants with criminal records and/or incomplete education degrees, particularly in light of the job's essential duties and responsibilities (chapter 5).
- If there is no "peer" job description yet approved, work with program leadership (and unions if relevant) to link to or create the appropriate job classification based on the essential job functions.
- If a new "peer" job class is created, establish a series of job grades based on the job's requisite essential responsibilities and qualifications, and toward promoting competitive hiring, providing fair compensation, offering training/educational opportunities, and determining clear promotion pathways. Identifying a clear path for promotion should reflect management's view that these employment opportunities are not viewed as dead-end jobs.
- Ensure that salary and benefits reflect the duties and skills required for the particular YA peer role, both as a matter of fairness and in order to attract high quality YA peer candidates.
- Clearly outline responsibilities, performance standards, salary range, and paths for promotion in YA peer job descriptions.

Pre-Hiring Screening & Questions
Best practices regarding peer job interview questions and screenings were discussed in chapter 5 with regard to three common qualification factors:

- Disability
- Criminal Record
- Education

To summarize, the basic best practice rules regarding YA peer applicants are:

- Consider the above factors as job criteria only when directly relevant to the peer job's duties and performance expectations;
- Ask for information about these factors only when directly related to the essential job duties and performance expectations, and narrowly so;
- When criminal convictions are relevant, ask about them later in the process, and certainly not at the initial interview (except with regard to disqualifying criteria). The idea is to provide all eligible applicants with a fair chance to initially present themselves on equal footing with other applicants, and to not discourage them from further pursuing the position.

Changes in Human Resource & Other Organizational Policies

It is not uncommon for agencies to have HR policies in place that have not been written in a way to fully support the hiring of qualified YA peers. Human Resources should work with program staff to **identify policies that are likely to impede the recruitment and retention of YA peers and make the necessary changes**. Several important examples of how to recognize potentially detrimental policies for the hiring and on-the-job success of YA peers are discussed below:

Language

While employing YA peers, an agency should look and listen for any terminology or other style of language that stereotypes or stigmatizes people diagnosed with SMCH, including clients and community members. The presence of stigmatizing language in policies can be very discouraging for YA peers. It is better to use language that communicates the value of "lived experience" of mental health difficulties and recovery:

Stigmatizing language in organizational policies	
Stigmatizing Language in Policies	**Non-Stigmatizing Language in Policies**
"The mentally ill" (Non-person first)	*"Person diagnosed with..."; "Person with the lived experience of..."*
"Severe and persistent mental illness" (Not recovery oriented)	*"Severe mental illness"; "Serious mental health condition which the person has experienced for years"*
"Non-compliant" (Judgmental/Blaming)	*"Not participating in treatment because ___"*
"Lacks insight into his/her mental..." (Judgmental/Unclear)	*"The client disagrees with the clinical assessment. More specifically..."*

Health and wellness improvement options should ideally be universal to all staff

Normalizing individualized health and wellness support for staff will improve overall productivity and morale, and negate the impression that people with health issues are given special job advantages. Benefits for all staff regardless of their health status could include access to "reasonable accommodations," including flexibility in work schedule and time off beyond the coverage of the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA). In addition, agency policy can emphasize clinical supervision that is *regular, individualized, and supportive*. For more information see https://drc.arizona.edu/workplace-access/universal-design-workplace.

Dual Relationships

Provider agencies are rightly concerned about dual or overlapping relationships between practitioners and clients that could impair the practitioner's focus on the preferences and best interests of the client. In this regard, some agencies have prohibited the hiring of current or former clients as provider staff based on the heightened possibility of their having existing

romantic or other personal relationships with current clients. We recommend against such a broad prohibition because former or current clients can work at YA programs where they have not been clients. (And when such a prohibition is not applicable to non-mental health clients, it inherently institutionalizes prejudicial practices.) A better approach is to use the agency's dual relationship conflict policies that are applied to all job applicants.

Some agencies have prohibited former clients from working as provider staff at the program from which they have received services. One reason is that provider staff may be uncomfortable having former program clients as colleagues, particularly those to whom they have provided direct case management or counseling. In addition, the possibility of relational conflicts with current clients is raised here, though mitigated by the length of time since the job applicant was a program client.

We recommend against blanket prohibitions of former program clients working as peer staff. First, there can be tremendous benefits to clients working with former clients. Short of having a "conflicting" relationship, such former clients tend to have a strong sense of a real shared lived experience that fosters validation and a sense of kinship. Former program clients can be the best guide for current clients in navigating a complex treatment and vocational system of support. Most importantly, former clients in the role of YA peer are the most direct evidence to transition-age youth clients (and their families) that growth and recovery (using this program) are in reach.

Additionally, there may be a limited number of successful YA peer candidates available to work with a program's clients, particularly so in rural areas. Thus, excluding former clients from working as YA peers without an individualized conflicts assessment is essentially a denial of access. There may be instances in which having a client or former client as a peer is not a good idea, but we suggest that this be assessed on a case-by-case basis according to agency policy.

In addition, we recommend that agencies explore the ethical and practical implications of hiring former clients. Agency leadership should support discussions among staff to play out some scenarios and fully understand risk in relation to client benefits. It may make sense to bring in a therapeutic ethics expert to lead discussions towards applying existing ethical standards (organizational and peer professional) toward hiring former clients. It also makes sense to work with clinicians to establish comfort levels for working as fellow employees with former clients. Involving Human Resources in these discussions will help ensure they are comfortable with the outcome.

> An agency's dual relationship policies should be clearly communicated to all staff.

Benefits Counseling
Providing a livable wage and benefits is essential to creating a thriving YA peer workforce. Some YA peers receive government benefits, such as Supplemental Security Income (SSI), and their taking a paid peer position will often impact these benefits. **HR should incorporate benefits counseling into its HR orientation policies in order to promote job opportunities**

for and retention of YA peers. This counseling can provide important information to help a peer maintain benefits while working, and can assist in developing strategies for getting off benefits smoothly. This includes using the Social Security Administration's Trial Work period and the extended period of eligibility, and taking advantage of the Ticket to Work program, which connects people with disabilities to free vocational supports. For more information, see SAMHSA's SOAR-WORKS project.

Agencies should also review their health insurance policies to see how they will affect YA peers who are hired, particularly those who are part-time employees. In Affordable Care Act Medicaid Expansion States, most peers have been able to access health insurance as they transition to employment, but in non-expansion states, health insurance coverage gaps continue to be present. Nevertheless, the majority of states have a Medicaid Buy-in provision, which allows people with disabilities whose earnings and resources might otherwise make them ineligible to purchase Medicaid coverage while working (as of 2015, 46 states had the buy-in provision). If an employer finds that YA peers are unable to access health insurance that will cover the care that is supporting their recovery, they may want to lower their health insurance eligibility standards (e.g., hours worked per week) to be more inclusive. For more information, see Connecting Youth and Young Adults to the Affordable Care Act from YouthMove (2014).

Effective Staff Hiring and Accountability Practices

For YA peers to succeed in the workplace, staff will need to be understanding and supportive; this is particularly true for staff who work on treatment teams with YA peers. But as noted earlier, some staff are not supportive of YA peers, and may even undermine the peers' efforts. Thus it is important to hire, evaluate, and hold accountable staff who possess the capacity and willingness to support the YA peer role. Important criteria for staff include:

- **Open-Minded, Respectful, & Compassionate**
  o Empathetic & excellent at listening;
  o Interested in different and contrasting perspectives, for example on a variety of traditional and non-traditional approaches to treating SMHC;
  o Not paternalistic, understands and accepts dignity of risk, & empowerment;
- **Capacity to Motivate & Support Client Development**
  o Possesses motivational skills;
  o Cares about own development;
  o Demonstrates patience in developing client's vocational skills, especially when teaching skills for the first time;
- **Embraces the Notion of Mental Health Recovery**
  o Believes that people can and do recover from SMHCs;
  o Understands the myths and prejudices that face individuals with SMHCs;
- **Understands & Values the Peer Provider Role**
  o Understands the role and its benefits;
  o Willingness to take on the challenges to integrating peer providers;
  o Excitement, on a personal level, to partner with YA peers;

- **Understands & Values Young Adult Life & Culture**
  - o Understands that young adults have a unique culture;
  - o Understands how and why young adults have different needs from older adults.

Hiring qualified staff is not enough for ensuring performance, particularly for tasks and responsibilities not typically taught in school. Performance evaluations and accountability of staff working with YA peers are also important. It is necessary for companies to hold employees accountable for their performance by evaluating and taking action on staff performance in light of agreed-upon performance standards or targets. Accountability strategies often include the following elements:
- Process and/or outcomes assessments for individual staff members, not just their program overall;
- Clear responsibilities for the staff's supervisor regarding performance evaluation;
- Feedback on performance that is direct and timely;
- Clear expectations for the impact of performance evaluations, including performance improvement plans, recognition and opportunities regarding positive evaluation, and negative actions regarding continual poor evaluations.

YOUNG ADULT PEERS INFLUENCING POLICY AND PRACTICE

A key role, and perhaps the most difficult one, of the YA peer is to influence the treatment team and organizational culture and practice. There are several institutional barriers that inhibit YA peers from actively participating in and influencing organizational decisions. First is the stigma of having a diagnosis and second is the stigma of youth. "Adultism," or the attitude that young people have little or nothing of value to offer to older adults, can be found in many organizations. As a result, the input of YA peers might be stymied or ignored because of stereotypes associated with age and/or having a mental health diagnosis. Fortunately, there are proven approaches for YA peers to actively participate in organizational decisions.

Young adult peers can have the most influence on organizational planning when they:
- Make up a significant portion of the service provider workforce in relation to other professional groups;
- Are educated on the best & evidence based practices;
- Are active participants on committees and workgroups relevant to their work;
- Are in an organizational leadership roles.

As noted by Jones in her guidance manual, Peer Involvement and Leadership in Early Intervention in Psychosis Services: From Planning to Peer Support and Evaluation[xci] (page 14):

> *A "critical mass" of peers…is likely to bolster peer confidence and involvement because any individual member can (in most circumstances) count on "back up" from other peer members. In addition, "critical mass" facilitates projects in which peers are able to check in with someone they feel will understand if they are feeling disempowered or "unheard," or, for example, if a peer felt that a comment during a committee meeting was offensive but is not sure if they are "being over-sensitive" or "over-reacting." Sometimes the ability to exchange a nonverbal wink or "knowing look" with a peer across the room during a meeting can make a world of difference.*

Young adults are at a disadvantage in any provider policy discussion because they are newer to their work and less familiar with agency practices, acronyms, and organizational terminologies. Therefore, YA peers should be provided with opportunities to attend **trainings and workshops** on current and best practices and policies related to young adults. Ideally, more experienced staff could mentor and support YA peers to promote their perspective in the organization.

YA peer involvement in agency workgroup and committee discussions about practice and policy involvement will not influence provider decisions unless their participation is active. YA peer involvement is not truly active unless they:
- are involved in workgroups from their inception;
- have a voice during these meetings;
- that this voice is actually heard and valued.

For example, a provider may create a workgroup to address difficulty engaging young adults in treatment. YA peers may find themselves placed in a workgroup with non-peer older staff, whose focus starting off is to address young adult "non-compliance" with medication because of their' "lack of insight" into mental illness. Under the right circumstances, YA peers are likely to challenge the premise of this approach. This would require that the YA peers have received the requisite trainings for their role and YA peers make up a significant number (e.g., one-third) of the group. Ideally they are being mentored by a more experienced employee. Then these YA peers could introduce the idea the medication discontinuation is due to many factors that need to be addressed, including not experiencing benefits, experiencing significant side effects, and/or being homeless and disorganized. By enhancing the discussion these young adult workgroup participants demonstrate the importance of young adult clients' experience and opinions in contributing to agency improvement efforts.

When considering young adult membership in workgroups, it is also important to consider **which YA peer(s) might be the best match for workgroup involvement** (i.e., the peer that has the most interest in and experience with the topic). For example, if there's a workgroup on the use of guardians with young adults, it is important to involve a peer who is interested in the issue and perhaps has experience to share on this matter.

A common barrier to active YA participation is that older adults will often talk over YA peers who are less experienced and may be a minority in the group. Our recommendation is that at least one **older adult at the meeting be responsible for facilitating the peer's involvement**, by creating space for a YA peer who is trying to speak up, and by directing questions to the YA peer. Having

a facilitator who is adept at ensuring total participation is key. Another best practice is to require that there is **more than one YA peer participating** in the event.

Dr. Nev Jones, in her guidance manual referenced above offers an excellent chapter [2] on the meaningful involvement of YA peers in program planning, emphasizing asset-based community development, partnerships with peer organizations, and project planning matching.

In addition, Jonathan Delman offers advice on the use of community-based participatory action research methods to involve peers in [Young Adults Getting Involved: Participatory Action Research & Transition Age Youth](.).[xci]

Young Adult Integration into Organization Leadership

Organizations that employ YA peers benefit from having at least one experienced YA peer in a leadership position within the organization. That YA peer can play a major role in developing young adult related policies and practices, training staff who work with YA peers, and in helping to supervise YA peer staff. Good peer leaders not only advise other staff, but **centralize peer education** for YA peers. Peer staff leaders can organize quarterly meetings among peer staff to share positive stories around their work, discuss common issues, and provide emotional and practical support. At some agencies, the peer leader also acts in a supervisory capacity, offering administrative supervision and conflict resolution.

A number of provider organizations employ a [peer in senior management or as a vice president](.). This visibility sends a clear message to staff that the role matters, the organization is serious about its implementation, and there is technical assistance available within the organization. For example, Advocates, Inc. in Massachusetts has Vice President of Peer Support and Self-advocacy, who "is responsible for developing and overseeing peer support and self-advocacy for the entire organization, as well as oversight of all human rights mechanisms." In addition, at Thresholds in Chicago, the Director of Recovery oversees client advocacy groups and works as a liaison between client advocacy groups and administration in addition to ensuring that the peer voice is infused in all agency departments.

With regard to provider agencies generally focused on adults, there is unlikely to be more than one peer in an organizational leadership position, which will typically be held by a more experienced older adult. Some thought should be given as to how **adult and young adult peers can collaborate to bring forward the young adult voice and lived experience.** At the very least, both young adult and older adult peer groups should come together on occasion to discuss common issues. YA peers can work with the older adult peer leader to strategize on improving quality and advocacy with leadership, and to make changes that improve how an agency thinks about, works with, and treats YA peers and clients. YA peers benefit significantly from mentoring opportunities with more seasoned peer provider staff.

In addition, providers should **build relationships with peer-run organizations** in their locality for technical assistance, guidance on employing peers and to more readily recruit peers. In addition, YA peers introduced to such organizations also benefit by being exposed to examples of successful peer employment, important policy and advocacy issues, and access to peer support

groups. Below are resources for peer-run groups:
- Adult driven peer policy and advocacy organizations in most of the 50 states (often funded in part by SAMHSA);
- Local Chapters of YouthMove, a national organization led by young adults whose aim is to promote the youth voice in all aspects of mental health decision making.