



Lauren Cohen, Youth Coordinator

Children's Mental Health Forum
June 21st, 2011

Let's Talk about Youth Voice and Policy

- Why is youth voice important in policy making?
- What happens when we don't listen to youth voice as we make sweeping decisions and programmatic changes?
- Why are my co-presenters and I here?

What has the State done to help Empower Youth?

- Created Via Hope with mental health transformation dollars
- Continue to fund and support our youth advocacy efforts along with the Hogg Foundation
- Hope to bring major statewide stakeholders to the table to hear what youth have to say

The Via Hope Youth Program

- Youth and young adults ages 14 to 24
- Individuals with an interest in changing the way we view mental health and in being change leaders in Texas
- Participants are welcome regardless of diagnosis or lived experience



Basic Beliefs of the Via Hope Youth Program

- We respect youth
- We believe in including them in every step of our program
- In order to have a successful program, we recognize the importance of youth buy-in
- In order for our program to meet youth needs, we must be youth guided

How we Built our Youth Guided Program

- Held eight focus groups across the state
- Approximately 40 participants
- Built consensus with the youth around their two favorite ideas
- Started creating them with their input every step of the way



Two Major Youth Initiatives: Media Project

- Started off nebulous then moved into an art and written piece project
- Collecting pieces created by youth connected to themes associated with mental health
- Pieces will be displayed online
- An art exhibit at the youth retreat with a voting process and awards given

Two Major Youth Initiatives: Mental Health Advocacy Retreat

- Youth Mental Health Advocacy Retreat
 - University of Houston, August 5-7, 2011.
 - 35 participants interested in becoming advocacy leaders in their community and who want to help build the Via Hope youth program.
 - Theme is Stand Up... Reach out.
 - Offer youth advocacy tools and create a vision and framework for a youth advocacy network.

Vision for the Future of Our Youth Program

- May change with larger youth input
- For now:
 - Vary the ways that we engage youth in our program
 - Continue to strengthen the youth mental health advocacy network across the state
 - Support systems that connect with youth so they can programmatically move toward youth guidance and focus on youth mental health
 - Create a space for youth to become trained as positive peer supports

Ways You can Help Our Program!

- Let people know about us
- Connect me with youth who might be interested in getting involved
- Let me know about programs or organizations that focus on youth and mental health or advocacy
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**Closing Questions or
Comments?**