



100-DAY CHALLENGE CASE STUDIES

HENNEPIN COUNTY, MN: AUTHENTIC YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

Hennepin County’s active and authentic engagement of youth with lived experience in every aspect of the 100-Day Challenge – including planning, policy development, implementation of ideas, and community outreach – helped to make the Challenge a success. Youth have remained actively engaged in the County’s efforts to end homelessness and continue to support county-level decision-making.

HOW HENNEPIN COUNTY MADE IT HAPPEN

The Hennepin County 100-Day Challenge Team set out to actively and authentically engage youth, including meeting youth where they were at and facilitating the involvement of youth at all levels of decision-making. Adult 100-Day Challenge team members are dedicated to engaging youth in the ways in which they would like to be involved in the initiative, including providing flexibility and understanding around expectations for meeting attendance.

Key to authentic youth engagement during the Hennepin 100-Day Challenge was ensuring that involvement in the initiative was accommodating to the needs, schedules and obligations of youth team members. The Hennepin 100-Day Challenge team hosted their meetings at the local community college where youth team members were taking classes to increase ease of attendance and utilized text messaging for communication with youth team members.

One of the goals for Hennepin County following the 100-Day Challenge was to merge existing youth councils at individual organizations or agencies into a formal youth advisory council to support county-level decision-making. The Hennepin County CoC Youth Action Board met for the first time in March 2018, providing an opportunity for youth with lived experience to inform local homeless and housing policies.

Key Takeaways:

- Youth with lived experience should be actively involved in defining “youth voice” and “authentic youth engagement” in your community. Adults working to authentically engage youth should meet youth where they are at and support their involvement in new and ongoing efforts.
- Adults should work to accommodate the needs, schedules, and obligations of youth with lived experience, particularly through scheduling and communication strategies.
- Youth feedback should be continuously sought and incorporated into youth homelessness efforts.
- Authentic engagement includes empowering youth as they build their capacity for leadership.
- Youth should be compensated for their time and expertise.
- Youth action boards can serve multiple roles in a community, including empowering youth, providing opportunities to become involved in local decision-making processes, and providing opportunities for compensation.

LESSONS LEARNED

1) Continuously Solicit and Incorporate Youth Feedback

The Hennepin County 100-Day Challenge Team continuously solicited feedback from youth with lived experience during the 100-Day Challenge initiative to help with activities from planning through implementation. The 100-Day Team worked to engage youth from Day 1 of the initiative and keep youth engaged throughout the process, including the involvement of existing youth boards in providing guidance on topics related to the juvenile justice and foster care systems. Hennepin County found that youth feedback is key to developing effective services, as well as thinking about systemic policy design that impacts youth at-risk of and experiencing homelessness. Authentic youth engagement and the incorporation of feedback from youth experiencing homelessness has continue beyond the 100-Day Challenge and into the County's everyday efforts to prevent and end homelessness.

2) Support Capacity Building and Youth Empowerment

The Hennepin County 100-Day Challenge created new opportunities to empower youth with lived experience and build their capacity as leaders in local efforts to prevent and end youth homelessness. The Hennepin 100-Day Challenge Team emphasized that authentic youth involvement should go beyond soliciting feedback to providing valuable opportunities, support, and experiences for youth with lived experience. Youth participation in the 100-Day Challenge and other ongoing youth homelessness initiatives In Hennepin County provides opportunities for youth with lived experience to build their resumes, share their experience and expertise with community members and provider staff, and gain knowledge and skills as decision-makers. Youth members of the 100-Day Challenge Team were also empowered to attend conferences regarding youth homelessness to learn, network with other individuals working in the field, and share their knowledge.

3) Compensate Youth for Their Time and Expertise

Authentic youth engagement includes recognizing the value of work contributed by youth with lived experience and providing compensation for their time and expertise in initiatives such as the 100-Day Challenge. Youth with lived experience have been hired through a contract with the YMCA to participate on Juvenile Justice and Foster Care Youth Action Boards. The Hennepin County 100-Day Team has established both short- and long-term goals to increase employment within the homeless response system for youth with lived experience, including providing funding to nonprofit providers for the creation of youth-dedicated employment positions. The Hennepin County 100-Day Team also stressed the importance of working with youth to determine what incentives and forms of compensation may work best for them, including consideration for how different forms of compensation may interact with other benefits or compensation they receive.

4) Define "Youth Voice" and What It Means for Authentic Youth Engagement

Hennepin County continues to work with youth with lived experience to define "youth voice" and what authentic youth engagement should look like in practice. Hennepin County's 100-Day Team is working to ensure that there is a sustainable and ongoing commitment to authentic youth engagement throughout the community, and that this commitment is reflected in the County's programs, policies, and systems design. Youth with lived experience are at the forefront of defining youth voice and authentic youth engagement, as well as shaping the path forward for continued youth engagement and involvement at all levels of decision-making in Hennepin County.