

Unstable, unhoused, and out of home youth

- Dr. Kineka Hull: [00:03](#) Welcome to Elevate Youth Programming, a podcast for adolescent pregnancy prevention programs and other youth-serving agencies. In each episode, we will discuss best practices, tips, and strategies to strengthen your programming. Each episode will cover a specific topic discussed with experts from the field. Listen along as our guests join me to discuss these relevant topics. I'm your host, Dr. Kineka Hull. [00:00:30] Homelessness is a major social concern in the United States, and youth are most at risk of becoming homeless. Each year, thousands of US youth run away from home are asked to leave their homes or become homeless, placing them at risk for being involved in the juvenile justice system, engaging in risky behavior, becoming teenage parents, dropping out of school, and falling victim to human trafficking. [00:01:00] Personal responsibility education programming is an opportune place to provide skill building to increase protective factors for youth, increase resilience, refer youth to resources, and build relationships that foster trust and create a safe space for youth.
- [01:17](#) In this episode, we speak with Martine Jones and Maria Kelly to learn tips and strategies to increase program and organizational capacity to support youth at risk for and [00:01:30] experiencing runaway and homelessness, as well as how to support survivors. Martine Jones is a training and building capacity associate for Youth Justice at the Runaway and Homeless Youth Training and Technical Assistance Center. Inspired by her personal journey through the foster care system, she channels her expertise to champion research-informed and evidence-based strategies for prevention, intervention, and aftercare practices [00:02:00] for Runaway and Homeless Youth Program grantees. Maria Kelly aspires to cultivate her lived experience and love for learning and community to foster equitable impacts across generations. Her passion for child welfare advocacy policy and law is fulfilled in her consultant role with Youth Collaboratory, youth catalyst team. She's a current graduate student at the University of Connecticut. Welcome to the Elevate Youth Programming Podcast, [00:02:30] Maria and Martine. How are you?
- Maria Kelly: [02:33](#) Good. Good. Thanks for having us.
- Martine Jones: [02:36](#) Thank you for having us, and I'm feeling really, really good. I'm at a 10 right now.
- Dr. Kineka Hull: [02:41](#) I am at a 10 and very excited too. And looking forward to our conversation. I know that with both of your professional and lived experience, this is going to be a wonderful conversation for our listeners. Let's start by introducing our listeners to [00:03:00] your organization, the Youth Collaboratory. Can you

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tell us a little bit about your organization and the services that you provide?

- Martine Jones: [03:06](#) Absolutely. Youth Collaboratory, we are a nonprofit, and we provide services for other organizations and community to provide TA. We have our focus areas that we are centered around. We have liberation and building community, and then we have Youth Housing Justice. I personally work in the Youth [00:03:30] Housing Justice focus area as a training and building capacity associate, and Maria is our consultant on our Youth Catalyst Team.
- Dr. Kineka Hull: [03:39](#) Perfect. Can you tell us a little bit about the Youth Catalyst Team, Maria?
- Maria Kelly: [03:42](#) Our Youth Catalyst Team is a group of youth and young adults who have lived experience as well as professional experience. And really, we are just comprised of a bunch of advocates, change makers, liberators that both work at the local level, some at the federal [00:04:00] level. And so we really use this space, I think majority for community building, but as well as taking the learnings that we're learning in and outside of this space, bridging that within Youth Collaboratory, but as well as again, bringing it back home to our communities.
- Dr. Kineka Hull: [04:14](#) Perfect. Thank you. One big thing that the Youth Collaboratory houses is the Runaway and Homeless Youth training, Technical Assistance and Capacity Building Center. Can you [00:04:30] tell us a little bit about that work?
- Martine Jones: [04:32](#) The Runaway and Homeless Youth Training and Technical Assistance Center, RHYTTAC, is provided by the Family and Youth Services Bureau, FYSB. It's a provided funded Runaway and Homeless Youth grant, and we support grantees and allies in the field with technical and training assistance, TTA services and support. And when it comes to TA, we have a variety [00:05:00] of options like the potential TA topics. We have COC like continuum of care, we have aftercare, we have outreach strategies. The menu is kind of limitless. We definitely want to support where we're needed, and we also are very relationship based. We want to build a relationship as we're offering TA, as we're offering strategies, we want to already build on the strength that these communities and grantees have.
- Dr. Kineka Hull: [05:29](#) All right, [00:05:30] let's level the playing field for our listeners because we know that terminology and using person-first language is important. Just to make sure that we have a firm understanding of terminology in the runaway and homeless

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space, can you define a couple of terms for us and help our listeners know the best phrasing to use when we are supporting young people in the field? Some [00:06:00] definitions that we could start with rather than saying homeless, saying youth experiencing homelessness. What are some key terms and things we should consider? Can you define a couple of terms for us?

Martine Jones:

[06:13](#)

I would personally say I really like the first person method, the first person based language. I think that that's always going to give more dignity to the people and more integrity to the people you're talking about. Instead of just being foster youth, [00:06:30] it's like a youth who was in the foster care system or a youth who has formerly been in foster care. I think especially if you're not in that group, it can seem a little bit dismissive and some even say a little bit degrading and minimizing of that experience. Also, some people are like, "I'm more than my experience. I'm a person who experienced this. That is not how I always identify myself." And a lot of foster youth programs in general, they usually have a [00:07:00] STARS program or they have another name for their alumni that don't just identify them as foster youth because a lot of youth who have been in foster care don't really like to be another statistic. Yeah, I definitely think first person language is always the best way to identify someone or to talk about another group.

Maria Kelly:

[07:21](#)

Yeah. So really just piggybacking off of that, a lot of times really centering again, the youth and not to be too repetitive, but the youth and really [00:07:30] a human first perspective I think is definitely what, at least in my community is what we like to subscribe to. And recently one of our coworkers, our colleagues that's on the Youth Catalyst Team had said something that was so beautiful. It's just a person who has lived, a person with experience who has lived instead of lived expertise. I think a lot of times really when we're even saying someone who has experienced X, it's really centering their identity around their experiences. And not everyone wants to be named [00:08:00] under that label or doesn't identify themselves with everything that they've been through. And then there's people that are.

[08:06](#)

I'm all about fluidity and duality, and I think sometimes when we're creating terms, they just inherently can't be generalized. It's individualized. Usually what I like to do is just say, "What language do you prefer?" Because sometimes it really is like a case by case, person by person basis. And I think that's a really great practice that I've seen pretty effective in my communities.

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- Dr. Kineka Hull: [08:26](#) Thank you for sharing that. That's something really to take to heart. [00:08:30] There's a saying that says, "I'm glad I don't look like some of the things that I've been through." And I think that we all have been through something as my grandmother used to say. "If you live long enough, you're going to experience something." And so just making sure that you are being, like you said, fluid and inclusive enough to say, "What is your preference?" And not always assuming I do like that. Thank you for providing that context. Let's discuss data and trends among youth who may have experienced [00:09:00] running away and being homeless.
- Maria Kelly: [09:03](#) I'll just start right off with kind of naming the ones that I think we see that are most prevalent in the system, but oftentimes the most overlooked, which is Black youth, Indigenous youth, and as well as LGBTQIAS+ youth. And we see significantly increased risk of homelessness, [inaudible 00:09:22] running away with those populations. And a lot of times these are also dual impacted youth, youth who have served [00:09:30] either time in the carceral system, juvenile justice system, as well as the foster care system. That risk that we see, the increased risk for these populations are often interconnected, interdependent on one another. And so again, just in the name of again, that fluidity is really naming kind of the multiplicity of different systems and experiences that these specific youth are facing.
- Martine Jones: [09:55](#) One of the trends that I'm seeing right now is the under [00:10:00] utilization of the Foster Youth to Independent vouchers, FYI vouchers as well as the Family Unification Program Youth Vouchers, FUPY, these vouchers, they're now starting convenings across states to invite youth and young adults to come and speak on their experience with these vouchers and experiencing being unhoused. I think a lot of the issues right now is even [00:10:30] with these vouchers, it's still hard finding affordable housing because these vouchers only can do so much. They can only pay like 30%, and they're only for a certain amount of time, like an X amount of years. And youth are still finding that this gap between being able to afford housing. I think those are the main trends that I've been more privy to as of late.
- Dr. Kineka Hull: [10:53](#) Are there any other trends or data that you would like to share?
- Maria Kelly: [11:00](#) I would, and this is [00:11:00] I guess more theoretical, but trends that I've seen is kind of the decolonial aspect of when we're even examining what homelessness and running away is. And so I looked up the statistic that we often see in this work is that 4.2 million young people experience homelessness in

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America. And so when we look at that, the people that were reported and we know reporting is so much harder in rural areas or in overcrowded [00:11:30] systems like New York City, certain parts of California, but then there's also the very real roots of where this lies. I'm always like, okay, what's the root of homelessness? What's the root of running away? And it really is the displacement of Black and Indigenous people of Black and Indigenous bodies post conquest colonialism. And I really like to be intentional with naming that when we're these conversations, because this data is often... It's not here by coincidence.

[11:58](#)

Again, a multiplicity of reasons as to why [00:12:00] this is here. A lot of the trends that I've been seeing is kind of rooted in that decolonial framework of, okay, we know this is systemic, this is structural, and so are we examining this case by case? Again, people need immediate housing. There's immediate crises to be solved. At the same time, it's also a matter of investing in communities, investing in families, so that over time, over a continuum, we have less young people needing that immediate needs met, immediate crises absolved. I mean, it's a very [00:12:30] nuanced area and I think we're just kind of opening our eyes up to that kind of framework, especially in federal spaces. But it's definitely just some food for thought. And I've been trying to educate myself more there.

Dr. Kineka Hull:

[12:42](#)

That was very well stated. We sometimes get into the reactive mode, which is important. When you see the need for immediate assistance, you have to rally around and provide support, but you also have to be thinking proactively [00:13:00] and looking upstream at several of the social determinants that impact that and historical trauma and historical context. And so that's something that we have to be mindful of, but sometimes it's kind of hard to prioritize. And the majority of the time the prioritization is the immediate need. And so a lot of our listeners are FYSB grantees. So you mentioned FYSB earlier, Family Youth Services Bureau. [00:13:30] A lot of them are listening and they are doing the personal responsibility education program, but we also have other youth serving agencies who are listening, and they all want to know best ways to inform their practices and their program, meaning in ways to support youth who may be experiencing or have experienced homelessness or being unhoused.

[13:56](#)

And so as we know, the hallmark of public health is a three tiered [00:14:00] system or prevention with primary prevention being education and increasing protective factors and building capacity of programs. And so we mentioned RHYTTAC, and that

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link is in the resource card if you want to log on to their website and see what type of technical assistance and other types of resources that they provide. But what are some recommendations that you would give our listeners on increasing education besides going to your website, [00:14:30] how to increase protective factors and how to build capacity of their programs?

Maria Kelly:

[14:35](#)

I think really just a following of what we were just talking about is that early intervention and that really, I mean, it applies here too. I believe that early intervention is so effective and it can be a lot more costly in the moment, but over time the data shows that it's very much cost effective and saves a lot of money and also helps a lot of people and communities. [00:15:00] When I think about in relation to my own experiences, but as well as the experiences of my counterparts, early intervention looks like for us, again, is investing into families. If I think of I come from a family, a lineage of people who were in the child welfare system, the carceral system and other systems as well. And so I do believe that while we are focused on youth, a lot of times, again, like you said, there's both the upstream and what currently exists right now.

[15:28](#)

And so investing into [00:15:30] parents specifically too, and I feel like it's tricky because we're so youth centered, which is great and very much in spaces that youth voices are critical, I see that's needed as well as if we're looking at primary prevention and those immediate assistance, I think oftentimes parents are kind of left out of the conversation, especially parents who have experiences using substances in the carceral system. And so a lot of times I think inherently these prevention practices sometimes disconnects youth with their parents and their families. And so kind of thinking about [00:16:00] ways in which we can identify protective factors that includes the whole family chosen or biological, etc.

Martine Jones:

[16:07](#)

I would love to definitely uplift what Maria shared. I think community and family engagement is so important because these connections are associated with just better outcomes in general. I think providing better strategies and better practices for youth, yes, it can definitely be so influential, but also it can be so hard when your people, your community [00:16:30] is so far removed, it's a divorce from these ideas that you're learning. And so it's kind of like a language barrier when you're developing and learning all these different practices and bettering your emotional wellness, it's hard to keep communicating with your family and having those permanent connections, which is something we look at in aftercare and all

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these other strategies we have with the organizations. We should also be building that as well with our family. And I also just want to talk about the mental [00:17:00] and emotional health challenges.

[17:02](#)

I think a statistical insight would just be like we have to determine is this inclusive? Is this piece that we are trying to push out? Is this best practice we're trying to push out inclusive? Because when we're talking about Black youth and foster care, they experience higher rates of mental health issues in comparison to their counterparts, very similar to Indigenous youth. We are experiencing a different kind of racial stress [00:17:30] than our counterparts are. For example, we are more likely to face diagnosis of depression or anxiety. And so how is this best practice inclusive to the trauma-informed care approaches that are tailored around racial equity, and we need more equitable approaches for our youth of color.

Maria Kelly:

[17:51](#)

Yes. That just made my heart so full. And I think also what I heard in there was intergenerational healing, which is something that I think and healing in general, [00:18:00] I feel like, especially for Black and brown communities, we've talked about it Martina, but that's just not something that's really accessible, nor is it talked about. If y'all haven't, I don't know if this is available, but the Spark talks, a youth with lived expertise had created a Spark talk, a video basically just about mental health. And in that was just talking about how we don't really talk about mental health, but also we very rarely talk about healing and what that looks like on a generational level. So yeah, I definitely think, again, just ideating some ways in which what does intergenerational healing look on [00:18:30] the micro level, macro level and everything in between? And so that's kind of when I looked into tertiary, but prevention, connecting youth to supportive services.

[18:40](#)

And I think that's kind of sometimes where there may be more room or more capacity for intergenerational healing to occur. And I know a lot of this I'm just going to bring back to myself because while I am a consultant in the work, I think a lot of times just speaking about myself instead of generalizing, because I know healing looks different throughout everyone's journey, but I think the third kind of level [00:19:00] of prevention I think is where there's more capacity for healing within a community, finding communal healing networks. Me as a Pacifica Indigenous woman, finding different Indigenous Native American communities here. And a lot of times that's integrated into different powwows and those communal

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events. That's kind of just sometimes a seminal part of the culture in general.

Dr. Kineka Hull:

[19:23](#)

No, I think that's great. We talk about the primary and the education and trying to prevent, but sometimes [00:19:30] like you said, you're looking at generational context and generational experience. It may be that the primary prevention sometimes is shortened or missed, and we go to that immediate reactivity phase, right? We are immediately reactive and so we bypassed everything and we're straight into tertiary, and we're trying to connect youth with services. But I liked how you mentioned being inclusive and how being [00:20:00] equal is not always being equitable. And that sometimes in doing so, you have to be very mindful that you're using trauma-informed approaches to not re-traumatize and to allow the individual who you are trying to provide assistance the ability to be receptive, right? And sometimes your delivery and your approach are very important. We may deem it a best practice, but it may not be the best practice [00:20:30] for the person who we are trying to support.

[20:33](#)

And so when we think about that, one thing that sometimes as a practitioner or as a person, we miss some of the signs that assistance may be needed. We miss the right way to verbalize that we are an ally and we are there to support. And so when we are trying to do that secondary prevention, which is mandated reporting and first responses, [00:21:00] we are more of a hindrance sometimes than a help. Are there any recommendations outside of the ones that you've already given that you would have our listeners think about on how to be a help and how to be a first responder and how to make sure that we are properly reporting? Because as you said with the statistics, we know that reporting is underrepresented.

Martine Jones:

[21:25](#)

Absolutely. Because when [inaudible 00:21:27] and I first introduced, are we being inclusive, sometimes [00:21:30] these questions are hard to ask, especially primarily in education. In education, when we look at these curriculums and we look at how they are interacting with our marginalized youth, I think it's ingrained to be more harmful. Some of the practices are rooted in discipline and rooted in order, and this is whatever narrative, but a lot of the times these practices are not inclusive. Coming from a Black girl that went through this educational system, a [00:22:00] lot of the ways that I would engage would be not looked at as strengths. It would be looked as weaknesses. It wasn't like, "Oh, you have a big personality, you can be a leader." And so not understanding that how personality not being closely affirmed can be so discouraging to our youth.

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- [22:17](#) When we are engaging with education and putting in best practices, let's really look at, "Hey, how are they going to thrive? What is already familiar with them and how can we meet that youth where we're at, what is familiar with them, how can we meet them [00:22:30] where they're at and build off of that?" And I'm very, very big on ecology and working from the ecology framework of your environment is so important to you. Young people, we are soaking up everything that we see, and it's not that we always mimic it, but we are very mindful of the spaces and that's how we're navigating. So the curriculum is not built for them to thrive.
- Dr. Kineka Hull: [22:54](#) One thing that I like about the Youth Collaboratory, and we also try to do this... [00:23:00] I'm at RTI in our work is include youth voices and include individuals who have lived. And so I know that both of you are speaking from a professional as well as lived experience, but tell me a little bit more about the youth involvement that you have on your projects. Tell me a little bit about the Youth Catalyst Team and the way that youth are involved in informing products and advocacy.
- Maria Kelly: [23:30](#) [00:23:30] Kind of like full scope in the work that we do, I think that we're exploring, and I think most organizations, we still have a lot of room for growth and improvement, but I think right now what it looks like is kind of that dual investment approach that I briefly named earlier, which is investing in our community as the Youth Catalyst Team and seeing in which ways can we share power, in which ways can we utilize our expertise to inform the different deliverables that come our way? Some [00:24:00] through RYTECC like Martine mentioned earlier, some through other organizations at the federal and the local level as well. And then taking those learnings and investing them both in our communities at home, but in ourselves too. I think what we're really trying to achieve is what does model youth engagement look like? Youth equity, youth leadership. And while I don't think we have necessarily a model yet, we know of some things that resonate with us and how we want to be seen, how we [00:24:30] want to be heard.
- [24:31](#) We want autonomy, we want power, sovereignty, and it's really difficult to kind of want those things when our society doesn't even support that we've been basically saying for Black, Brown and Indigenous folks. I think we're still learning how to navigate youth leadership in spaces that are inherently meant to reject that.
- Martine Jones: [24:51](#) Yes, one of the recent projects we just did with our consultants, we did a listening session where I made a structure to

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[00:25:00] reach out to the consultants and have them explain their take on what is a successful authentic youth listening session. I think that a lot of the times when there comes with collaboration with youth, young adults, there's a lot of censorship which really does eliminate that authentic piece. And one of my priorities is definitely eliminating some of the erasure and censorship that comes with young adult collaboration and just trying to really [00:25:30] amplify and uplift their experiences, their knowledge. This is youth, young adult centered, they created this, this is their work, this is their contribution. What I'm trying to do is move past performatism, like if things are performative versus if things are authentic when it comes to youth, young adult collaboration and just trying to be as transparent as possible.

Dr. Kineka Hull:

[25:54](#)

I like the couple of things that you both described about being collaborative and not performative [00:26:00] and being authentic. And so I know that a lot of programs and agencies that our listeners represent are trying to elevate lived and youth voices. And so I know you said that you don't have the perfect model sauce all the way ironed out, but what are some recommendations that you would give our listeners who are wanting to be more collaborative and wanting to be more authentic? And I like the fact that you have [00:26:30] your Youth Catalyst Team as consultants, right? And so a lot of times, like you said, we have to be transparent. It is a little bit of tokenism/ it is a little bit of being performative, and it's not always a equal or equitable or collaborative way that things are done. And so I like the fact that your Youth Catalyst Team are your consultants. What are some other good practices that you would recommend for our listeners?

Martine Jones:

[26:57](#)

Yes, paid consultants. [00:27:00] Compensation is something I'm very big on. It's not just put your money where your mouth is, but it's also when doing a lot of this work and trying to engage with youth and adults, especially to speak on unhoused population and all these different issues, yes, they're interconnected, but when you are looking out for youth and young adults to be experts on this, you have to be willing to compensate them because I believe it's predatory to name that you want [00:27:30] to have your work be centered around youth and young adult to have gone through a certain experience, have this lived expertise that you're not really getting anywhere else and not equitably compensate them or not equitably value them in a way of understanding where they come from because that is something that I've experienced and now being a staff member, but I was a former consultant. Organization might come to you like, "Hey, we're looking for

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youth, young adults to do this and do this work," but how we want to support you is how maybe we're supporting [00:28:00] our staff that doesn't have this experience, but you might need to rethink that.

[28:03](#)

I think it's really important for people to look at what is this call for? What do you have to bring to the table that you are now inviting these youth adults for? I think maybe three years ago I was saying just invite us to the table. We need a seat at the table. Oh, center us. But now it's like now that we're at the table, I'm starting to realize what's keeping us here at this table?

Dr. Kineka Hull:

[28:23](#)

Right.

Martine Jones:

[28:24](#)

What do you have to really provide? And it's important for organizations to really look at that call and be like, [00:28:30] do we have the infrastructure right now to make this call? It's not just about applying the platform, it's not just about the acknowledgement anymore, but it's also about compensation and really examining what your values are and showing up for it.

Maria Kelly:

[28:44](#)

Yeah, that part, literally. What is going to keep us here and allow us to still have room for growth? I don't know. My head initially went to Audre Lorde's quote of the master's tools, "We'll never dismantle the [00:29:00] master's house." And I think that's exactly what we're seeing in these spaces. It's the same tools that are used to uphold a variety of isms. And so I think even kind of going further into youth leadership, that's really I think a model that I would love to see. Again, whether that's possible, I don't know whether there's room or capacity in a system and I hope to not sound pessimistic, but I also think there's the reality of what exists for youth and young [00:29:30] adults and what capacity there is. But nonetheless, I would love to see... Let me backtrack a little bit.

[29:35](#)

Native American leadership in certain nations and tribes, the community, the tribe chooses a leader based on what's happening, what need is there, and the leader does not stay there all the time. If a leader is not leading, it's like, "Okay, you're out. That's the harmony of it. You're out. We choose another leader." And whatever needs are met, okay, that's great. Then we have another leader. It's very much again, just fluid [00:30:00] and allows for needs to be met based on whoever's experiencing what, who's most impacted and communally people choose who their leader is going to be. For

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youth leadership, I would love to see that we choose what we want to see.

Dr. Kineka Hull:

[30:13](#)

I know a lot of times compensation is important, but like you said, sometimes it can be more meaningful if you're giving opportunities that are level set changing and equitable. I know one thing that I like to do when I'm working with any young person [00:30:30] or anyone with lived experience or anyone who may have less experience than I may have is to provide the opportunity. If you're doing some type of research or deliverable, go to a conference, put their name on the publication. Some of that has very long-lasting and life-changing implications. The compensation is great and should be also included when possible, but also having some things that will also have some [00:31:00] type of long-term or sustainable or reciprocal return on investment. And so a lot of times when you say we think about things that are investments that are made to save money down the line, and that's a big phrase, ROI or return on investment in public health in a cost saving method, but that return on investment is the change in situation or change in livelihood and change in opportunities.

[31:28](#)

That could be something [00:31:30] that may not be tied to some type of monetary thing. And if that's the least that you can offer someone for their time and their expertise, I feel like that's something that every professional should offer. I mean that takes it to that, again, that collaborative piece and not being performative and not doing things that are treating people like a token or a number to just say, we tried or we did something that was in our best interest. Let's shift this a little [00:32:00] bit. As our listeners are thinking about ways to better support young people who have lived, what are some things that they should talk about or think about?

Maria Kelly:

[32:11](#)

Kind of going off the professional development, but I honestly just thought a lot of times our young people, before we even go to different convening seminars, our lived expertise is our education and that is something that is truly invaluable. But I think in the spirit of lived expertise as education, [00:32:30] one thing to consider is really just valuing young people as that. I think a lot of times we can say we value young people, but I've seen that in spaces that don't allow for meaningful relationships to be fostered.

Dr. Kineka Hull:

[32:45](#)

As our practitioners are working with young people. Something that's challenging is the provision of health education and programming to young people who may be in transit. And so trying to reach [00:33:00] them in out-of-home setting so that

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could be foster care, that could be youth who are experiencing homelessness or youth who have run away. What recommendations would you give to our listeners on the best way to reach and support young people?

Martine Jones:

[33:19](#)

I know we hear it all the time, meet you where they're at, and sometimes I think it can be so flat because it's like that looks so different. That is so vague, but there's [00:33:30] nuance. It's not to be vague, it's just to be real. Everyone is going to look so different. But I think that really what is so key on meeting a youth where they're at is asking them, having them practice that autonomy, having them practice those critical thinking of like, "Hey, what is the best way that I can use your services?" Because that is what would help for me because I was so used to these limitations, the amount of limitations that are on, whether it's foster youth, youth who've been in the juvenile [00:34:00] justice system. It's like there's so many limitations, whether it's your age, your gender. We are just under so many different restrictions.

[34:07](#)

When services are provided to help us with these programs and provide these services to help us, really let us know what time we're on. We're on our time. That is going to give us that autonomy and the confidence, also build that relationship, build that trust of like, "Oh, I'm trusting that you really are an ally. You really are here to support me." We kind of do a similar thing with some of the work we do at Youth Collaboratory with [00:34:30] one of the grants. We kind of provide a TA menu, so it's a technical assistance menu where we list all these things that we do provide and we also say, "If there's something off the menu that you want help with, let us know and we'll work with that." And that is something that is so helpful, and these are skills that people are getting in higher spaces and higher spaces people want to hear your ideas and see how can you articulate these ideas? How can you shift and see where things can be better?

[34:57](#)

Why not start with the youth instead of me providing a service [00:35:00] that you might not fit into? Like I was speaking earlier about that inclusivity, really meeting youth where they're at.

Maria Kelly:

[35:06](#)

Yeah, I just think coming from a place of curiosity at all times, being open to learning, I think that's definitely, at least from the people, the social workers, the case workers who are still in my life and who I do still account to what had allowed me to even survive. They did have answers, but they never acted as if they had all the answers. They were transparent in what they could

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and couldn't do and they were real. And so I think that [00:35:30] could just be pretty simple, but I think in practice it can be a lot harder because of the trainings that we see. It's very much geared towards folks to think that they need to have all the answers. I mean, there's so much pressure on caseworkers to have all the answers to be able to provide a hundred percent of themselves and usually they have nothing left, which is why we have burnout and low retention rates, et cetera. What I've seen that has been so beautiful is when practitioners can be people too.

Dr. Kineka Hull: [35:54](#) I want to go back to something that you said, Martine, about meeting [00:36:00] young people where they are. And I think a lot of times for some practitioners that can be hard. Right? A lot of the go-to for places where we find young people are schools or after school programs or community-based settings, which may not always be where young people are. Are there any recommendations of places where our listeners should go to make sure that we are being supportive [00:36:30] and being able to connect with young people?

Martine Jones: [36:32](#) Absolutely. This is going to look different for everybody, but based on weather. These libraries that have that AC, you know what I mean? Or some of these gyms that might be warmer depending on the weather, wherever is a free space to be and the weather's a little bit more controlled and safer. Those the areas that you need to be checking for. It's not always going to be school. And I was in a workshop one time and the facilitator was talking [00:37:00] about college and he said, "College is a funny way to spell food." And it just really spoke to me like, oh my goodness. Attending the places where food is available, where weather is controlled and the climate is safer, it's like going to the places that are free for one and a little bit more accessible for youth to be because it's not always going to be people aren't always going to school and all these other places because there are safe haven for a reason because we're getting meals here because [00:37:30] we're getting support services here.

[37:32](#) Going to other places that have, they give out lower memberships. Planet Fitness, I know that's somewhere that I used to be, Starbucks, certain cafes that aren't like you have to pay to get anything here don't have as many limitations. And also they have restrooms. Those are the places that I would tell them to look. But also when you're creating these relationships, the youth are also going to tell you, "I visit this place, I do this." All that comes with trust. And [00:38:00] I know that Maria mentioned curiosity, which is so important, but also consistency

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because the moment you become inconsistent or the moment they feel like you can't be relied on, they can go left really, really quickly. That's one of the things I look for is like are they consistent? Are you going to get a warm handoff? Are these folks really in it for the long haul and not just to show face? That's something that I really look for when exchanging information and putting in a good word.

Dr. Kineka Hull:

[38:29](#)

Perfect, thank you. I [00:38:30] also want to piggyback off of something that Maria said when she said that she still keeps in touch with individuals who were trusted adults and created a safe space. What recommendations would you give to our listeners to become that trusted adult in that safe space?

Maria Kelly:

[38:50](#)

[inaudible 00:38:50] real recognizes real. That's very much how I felt with those people is like, "Okay, wait, I can trust you because you're authentic." And I know [00:39:00] authenticity is sometimes easier said than done, and certain organizations don't allow for that. And so I don't always say it's like it's on the individual. A lot of times, like Martine said, it is the environment and what it allows. But I think those first initial connections, the first time I met with my social worker, I was like, "Oh wait, you're real." And not feeling as though you need to be robotic or subscribe to whatever the system is really potentially indoctrinating you to believe and to practice. But [00:39:30] I think another really seminal part of creating that safe and trusting environment, and I know this is so not policy, and so a lot of policies and organizations are like, you don't want to get too close to youth.

[39:43](#)

There's certain boundaries. Right? When I first went into the system, a lot of the case workers, people in my life were very much like, "I don't talk about my family, but you tell me all about your family. I don't talk about my personal life, but you have to tell me everything you went through and the trauma you went through for 10 years of your life." And [00:40:00] a lot of times it's like, okay, I inherently can't trust this person because I'm giving all of myself to get nothing in return. And so with that consistency piece, I think is being increasingly more open to exposing and being vulnerable. And so I think vulnerability is key in these situations. And sometimes vulnerability means having to break certain norms, certain expectations. And so really my social worker now I'm exited most services, I'm just in the post-secondary education service now, [00:40:30] but she's like family and that's because she broke some norms. It's those moments that over time, incrementally and compoundedly, I really think cultivated such a

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safe and sustainable environment that again, like I said, I still feel the effects of today.

Dr. Kineka Hull: [40:46](#) Thank you both. This has been such excellent information. As we wrap up, what is one key takeaway that you would like to each leave for our listeners?

Martine Jones: [40:58](#) I would like to leave with [00:41:00] when talking about leadership, even the last question you were saying, what can we do? And sometimes it's also just that internal reflection, not even what can we do, but what are we doing? What are we currently doing? Doing like personal inventory and knowing yourself as a leader before you want to take that initiative just to lead. I think that that is kind of imperative when working with youth is exercising those [00:41:30] critical reflections of what are we doing and what are we not doing? And I recently learned at Youth Collaboratory with some of the internal work we do is with every strength there's a shadow side. Just looking into that shadow side that you have with every strength, there's a shadow. And so just kind of knowing yourself doing those exercises will be so helpful.

Maria Kelly: [41:50](#) Yeah, it's so interesting, Martine, because I literally had this written down and it's very similar kind of segueing, but into why are we doing it? Just starting from the beginning of this conversation [00:42:00] when we were talking about the systemic and structural aspect to it, our why sometimes is rooted in that shadow. Sometimes our why is so far away from what we actually think the why is. And so I think sometimes it takes being continuously curious so that we can be aware of that. Why be conscious of the real whys behind our why. But I also think when we get to the nitty gritty of the why behind the work, the why behind we're here, I think we can start breaking the status quo.

[42:28](#) And I really think that's what we [00:42:30] need because what I've tried to underscore throughout this conversation is just that it is a system nonetheless, and I don't think we speak enough about how sometimes, whether it's the best intention, we're inherently going to be perpetuators of this system. In what ways do we really try to name that, call out that as part of our why and move forward in a way that is more liberatory, decolonial and equitable.

Dr. Kineka Hull: [42:52](#) Thank you both. Listeners, self-reflect, know yourself and understand your why, so you can show up [00:43:00] and be authentic, collaborative, and even vulnerable when you're able to put your time and your money where your mouth is because

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real recognizes real. Thank you for joining us, Maria and Martine. We've enjoyed having you on the episode. This has been another episode of Elevate Youth Programming. Thank you for listening. If you enjoyed today's conversation, be sure to like and follow Elevate Youth Programming on your podcast platform of choice. [00:43:30] For information on today's topic and resources in adolescent pregnancy prevention, visit the Exchange@teenpregnancy.acf.hhs.gov. The Elevate Youth Programming Podcast is funded by the Family and Youth Services Bureau. The content in each episode is not the opinion of FYSB, nor is training and technical assistance contractors. I'm Kineka Hull, and this has been another episode of Elevate Youth Programming.