



Youth Advisory Committee for the National Council on Disability *Self-Empowerment for Young People*

FACT SHEET

By Youth for Youth

Self-empowerment means speaking up for yourself and being involved in planning your future. Don't just wait for change, take the lead on your life. It is important that you have thought out what you want in life. And it's important to know that you can reach those goals. Many youth have to attend meetings that affect their lives. This fact sheet is designed by young people with disabilities to give you some tools that can help you be successful in those meetings.

Before you present an idea at a meeting you should:

- ☑ **Prepare:** Gather all of your information that may be needed at the meeting. Some questions you might ask yourself are:
 - ★ What are my goals?
 - ★ What are my strengths?
 - ★ What are my needs?
 - ★ What is working or has worked for me in the past?
 - ★ What is *not* working or has *not* worked for me in the past?
 - ★ What is being suggested by others and do I agree?
 - ★ What are my rights?
 - ★ Who are the people that can help me?
 - ★ What supports do I have in the community?
- ☑ **Come up with a few options:** When you enter a meeting with a few ways to reach a goal chances are there will be at least one that can be used.
- ☑ **Ask an ally to attend the meeting with you:** An ally is a person who can support you through a process. An ally can be a professional, family member or peer advocate. Allies bring respect, resources and knowledge.

When you are in a meeting you should:

- ☑ **Show up a few minutes early:** Not only do you show that you are responsible but you can hear the conversations that go on before the meeting. You can find out the mood and build a more personal connection with the other people at the meeting.
- ☑ **Advocate for not against:** Focus on what you want and need, not what you do not want. People are more helpful when you are positive and have solutions.
- ☑ **Be a good listener and ask questions when you have them:** If you don't understand something don't be afraid to speak up and ask questions.
- ☑ **Keep notes or ask someone you trust to take notes for you:** It is important to keep track of what is being talked about and decided in the meeting.

After the meeting:

- ☑ Be sure to follow up and complete any tasks you agreed to take on.
- ☑ As time goes on, ask yourself if the plan is working and if it still meets your needs. If it is not meeting your needs, ask for another meeting to be set up.



Youth Advisory Committee for the National Council on Disability *Empowering Youth Involvement*

FACT SHEET

For Partners

Young people have a greater opportunity to grow and develop into independent adults when they are empowered to make decisions and set goals for themselves. Youth must be empowered to take the lead in planning for their futures. This fact sheet will give you some helpful guidelines in engaging youth:

Core values of working with young people

- ☑ **Youth Driven** – Youth are the driving force behind all planning. The young person and their family are present at all meetings and are empowered to be equal partners at the table. They are full participants in discussions.
- ☑ **Strength-Based** – An emphasis placed on what the young person can do verses what they can not do. When a young person sets goals, one is encouraged and not persuaded to lower expectations.
- ☑ **Empowering** – Encourage young people to be independent and shape their own futures. Let them know that if they speak up they will be heard. Help them to make informed choices and support the choices they make. Give them the freedom to make their own mistakes. By doing so, you encourage growth and give them the chance to gain life experience.
- ☑ **Culturally Sensitive** – Recognize and respect the behavior, ideas, attitudes, beliefs, values, customs, languages, rituals, ceremonies and practices characteristic of the youth's background and heritage.

Key areas for youth involvement

- ☑ **Education** – All students with disabilities have the right to a free public education. If the young person would like to go on to higher education, support him/her and look into resources so that there is a smooth transition from high school to post-secondary education.
- ☑ **Employment** – Look at a person's qualifications for a job and not their disability. When assisting a youth in developing a career plan do not limit their scope. Build upon their strengths and interests. Do not make assumptions about a young person's ability based solely on your view of their disability.
- ☑ **Independent Living** – Foster a young person's independence and decision making ability. Being independent is about knowing ones own limitations yet still finding ways to have needs met. Young adults must have the tools to make their own informed decisions.
- ☑ **Community Participation** - Fulfilling the need to form social bonds and be accepted as part of the community is essential in youth's positive development. Young people with disabilities must be accepted and accommodated in their communities. Youth can build experience and explore interests, strengths and weaknesses by being involved in the community.
- ☑ **Adult Services** – The transition to adult services can be a difficult one. It is important that adult services realize that young people are resilient and have a desire to be independent. Adult services should foster growth and empower young people.

This fact sheet was developed by the Youth Advisory Committee for the National Council on Disability (2006) - email us at youth@ncd.gov