



FEDERATION FOR CHILDREN  
WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

# BUILDING BRIDGES

Engaging Youth and Empowering Youth  
Voice and Leadership Through State,  
Regional, and National Partnerships

---

---

**Welcome  
to our  
Session!**

Empowering Youth Voices

Involving Youth

Community Collaboration

Activity

Resources

---



---

## About Ryan DeCosta

---



**Connecticut Parent Advocacy Center**

**Youth Engagement Coordinator**



---

## About Danielle Daughtry

---



FEDERATION FOR CHILDREN  
WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

**Transition Coordinator**  
**Federation for Children with Special Needs**

---



~~DISABILITY~~



---

# Self-Advocacy

Self-advocacy is the ability to understand your needs and to be able to get those needs met by assertively communicating to others not only what your needs are but what you need to get your needs met.

## 3 recommended steps to build self-advocacy

- Understanding yourself and your disability.
  - Know your strengths, weaknesses, and needs.
  - Learn how to ask for what you need
-

---

# BENEFITS OF SELF-ADVOCACY

Increased Self-Advocacy

=

Increased Determination

Learn how to speak and act for your  
themselves

Decide what is best for them and  
taking-action

Making their own decisions about  
their life

Standing up for their rights as a  
person

Teaching others about their rights and  
responsibilities

---

---

Young people are the experts in their own lives



Engaging and listening to youth ensures a productive transition to adulthood



As Youth develop and form their view, they become more involved in decision-making.

---

WHY IS YOUTH  
VOICE  
IMPORTANT?



---

# WHY IS YOUTH VOICE IMPORTANT?

Understand their Disability

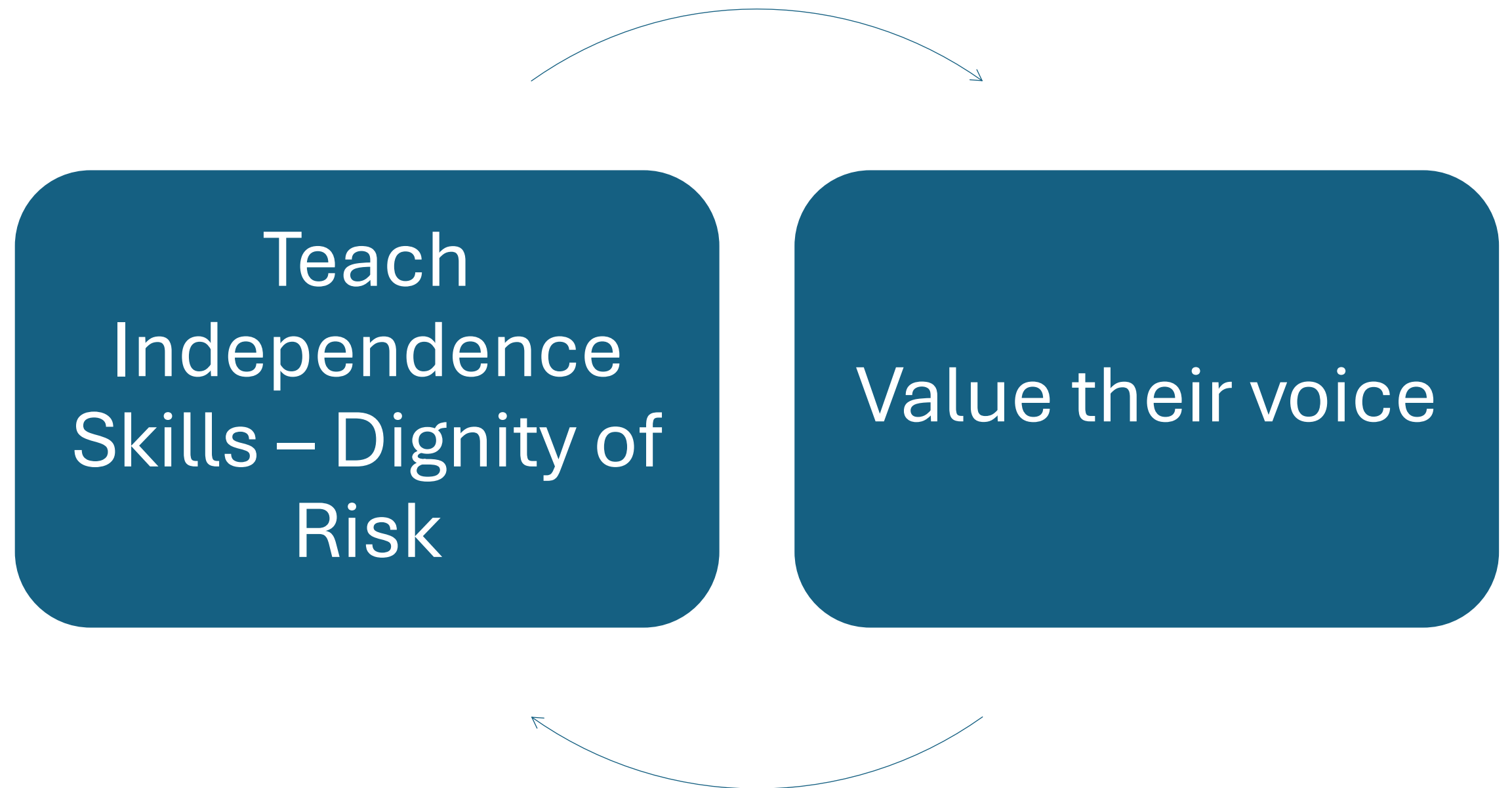
Understand Self-Disclosure

Understand the Power of  
Their Voice

---

---

# A PARENT'S ROLE IN SELF- ADVOCACY



---

# Adults May Hinder Self-Advocacy

If we don't discuss the student's disability with them; we limit open conversations about both the student's strengths as well as his/her weaknesses

If adults handle the student's problem for them; the student does not need to accept responsibility or take ownership

If we make most decisions for them; the student isn't allowed to think critically and take risks

---



---

# YOUTH-LED

- We can't create youth programs, without youth involvement.
- How can we involve youth in different ways?



---

# WAYS TO INVOLVE YOUTH

---

Traditional Employee

---

1099- NEC – Contracted Youth Services

---

Gift Cards & Stipends

---

Hybrid position/ Collaborations with other  
Organizations

---

Pros:

Stability and benefits (e.g., consistent income, potential access to healthcare, retirement plans).

Youth can build long-term skills, establish a work history, and feel more integrated into the organization.

Increased accountability and alignment with organizational goals.

Cons:

Time commitment may conflict with school or other responsibilities.

Can be intimidating or overwhelming for young people new to the workforce.

Limited flexibility in scheduling compared to other methods.

# TRADITIONAL EMPLOYEE



Pros:

Flexibility in hours and deliverables; allows youth to balance multiple commitments.

Encourages entrepreneurial skills like invoicing and self-management.

Specific projects or roles can align directly with youth expertise.

Cons:

Fewer protections compared to traditional employment (e.g., no unemployment benefits).

Requires knowledge of self-employment tax implications.

May feel less connected to the organization's culture.

# 1099-NEC CONTRACTED YOUTH SERVICES

**Pros:**

Simple and straightforward, especially for one-off or short-term engagements.

Reduces administrative burden.

Can be an immediate and tangible way to reward participation.

**Cons:**

May feel transactional rather than valuing their contributions as professional.

Lack of long-term investment in youth development.

Limited earning potential compared to employment or contracts.

## **GIFT CARDS AND STIPENDS**

---

# Overcoming Challenges in Youth Engagement

Engage	Engage youth in the design and planning stages
Provide	Provide opportunities for youth to take the lead
Address	Address barriers such as time, transportation, and financial constraints
Create	Create a safe and welcoming environment for all youth

---



---

# The Impact of Youth Engagement



Youth engagement strengthens communities



Promotes social change and innovation



Prepares youth for future leadership roles



Encourages lifelong active citizenship

---

---

**WHAT ARE  
WE DOING  
AT OUR  
CENTERS?**

---



**What is the CT Secondary Transition Youth Advisory Board (YAB)?**



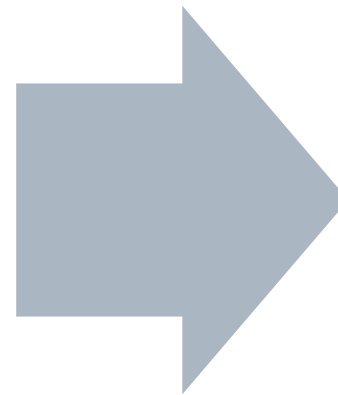
**As an initiative within the CT Secondary Transition Community of Practice (CoP), a Secondary Transition Youth Advisory Board (YAB) was created to provide a place for students and youth with disabilities, ages 14 to 26, to have their voices heard by the people who plan for students and support them.**

---





**What is the purpose of the YAB?**



**The YAB serves as a resource to any school district, agency, organization, or provider that serves young people with disabilities. YAB works to improve services and ensure that services and support provided truly meet the needs of youth with disabilities as they transition from district services to adult life. Participation in YAB activities builds personal advocacy and leadership skills, provides a forum for students to network with each other and professionals in the field, and is a great activity for resumes and portfolios.**

---

## Building Ecosystems Statewide for Thriving (BEST)

### Youth Initiative

- 5 states: Maine, Colorado, New York, Indiana, and Connecticut
- CT team is working on identifying barriers and creating solutions for high unemployment and underemployment rates for people with disabilities within our state
- The partnership between those with lived experience is valued above all else at the planning table

**Opportunities are ALWAYS coming up for Youth Advisory Board (YAB) members.**



## **Who are the members of the YAB?**

YAB members include Connecticut students and youth with disabilities ages 14 to 26 years old who have an interest in learning leadership skills and taking on leadership roles throughout the state. The YAB is facilitated and coordinated by the Connecticut Parent Advocacy Center (CPAC) Youth Team. There are many ways an interested youth can participate.

---



## When and where does the YAB meet?

The YAB meetings are held monthly over Zoom, with potential opportunities in person down the road for social events and advocacy presentations. We also understand that some youth and young adults may not have time to attend live, however members can participate in a variety of ways including review of documents, offering opinions via email or social media, and informing policy and projects as needed. The YAB members have participated through monthly YAB meetings, trainings, panel, and workshops, participation on youth panels at the district, State, and National levels, and working with the CPAC Youth Team. Anyone can refer a student or youth/young adult to the YAB. To visit us on social media, sign up for our mailing list, request to join and visit our webpage scan the QR code.

---



**SCAN HERE**





---

# YOUTH ACTIVITIES

- I am the Transition Coordinator
  - Been at FCSN for almost 2 years
  - 5 years of experience working in Special Education
- The transition team provides direct technical assistance to both youth and families to help support their needs
  - This can be in the form of email, phone calls, providing resources and connecting them to similar agencies.
  - Engaging youth with our virtual monthly Youth Chat (Connecting YOUth) and our newly developed Youth Advisory Board



FEDERATION FOR CHILDREN  
WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

# HOW HAS THE YLC SUPPORTED THE WORK AT FCSN?

- Working with YLC has greatly impacted the way we find, connect with, and engage our youth at FCSN.
  - We have increased our social media presence on instagram, facebook, and tik tok to market events and programs to youth directly
  - The use of YEN toolkit helped/guided us on ways to put together a successful Youth Advisory Board
- Major benefits of being a part of the YLC
  - Utilizing the monthly meetings to troubleshoot issues we may run in to and to get advice/feedback from others doing the same work
  - Resource sharing and being able to broaden the scope of people that have access to our events, services, and programs
  - Increasing our connection to other parent centers
  - Creating a safe space for us to be heard



FEDERATION FOR CHILDREN  
WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

---

# Youth Leadership Council

The Youth Leadership Council is a partnership among Region-A Parent Center youth programs aimed at sharing resources, fostering connections, and pinpointing barriers and opportunities for professional growth.

The YLC was the plenary session at the 2023 OSEP Conference in Washington D.C.

---



---

# Group Activity

In your groups identify who will be a:

- **Note taker**
- **Reporter**
- **Timekeeper**





---

# Group Activity

Within your assigned  
groups please discuss:

**What are you doing at your  
center to engage youth and  
young adults?**

---





---

# Group Activity

Within your assigned groups please discuss:

**What strategies could be implemented to better support youth engagement?**



---

# Take Home

- We can't create Youth Programs, without Youth.
- Be creative when involving youth
- Look for youth from families connected with your parent centers
- Collaborate with other youth serving organizations
- Recognize that youth programs are a continuous journey; as young people grow, new members will need to be brought in, creating a cycle

**As Parent Centers, we need to be the MODEL employers for our youth and young adults.**

---

---

# Resources

**YEN Youth Engagement Now**

<https://yen.transitionta.org/>

**RAISE Center**

<https://raisecenter.org/>

**Youth Move National**

<https://youthmovenational.org/>

**Forum for Youth Investment**

<https://forumfyi.org/>

**NTACT**

<https://transitionta.org/>

---



CT SECONDARY TRANSITION  
**YOUTH ADVISORY BOARD**

Contact Us

Ryan DeCosta

[rdecosta@cpacinc.org](mailto:rdecosta@cpacinc.org)



FEDERATION FOR CHILDREN  
WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Contact Us

Danielle Daughtry

[ddaughtry@fscn.org](mailto:ddaughtry@fscn.org)

---