

SCOPE OF WORK

Diversity Rocks! is an organization of about 150 youth and young adults living in Chittenden County, particularly in Burlington and its surrounding metropolitan area of 5 towns. Each Friday evening 30-40 of these members come together. Most are immigrants or refugees from other countries – Congo, Kenya, Somalia, Burundi, Ivory Coast, Vietnam, Burma, Thailand, Tanzania, Nepal, etc. Since the winter of 2011 they have organized to have fun, learn, and offer the strength of youth to help the broader community. Diversity Rocks! adopted this mission statement:

We seek to support the well-being of youth and young adult New Americans while expanding awareness, understanding and celebration of ethnic diversity in the Vermont community. We will explore, learn about and connect with Vermont and the United States and make Vermont a better place for everyone to live in.

The Youth in Transition (YIT) Grant for the State of Vermont is awarding this sub-grant to Diversity Rocks! because it contributes to the following YIT goals for strengthening the systems of care for transition-aged youth (*see the Logic Model for the Grant in Attachment A*):

- A. Young adult (YA) leadership is developed in Vermont (*see information about Youth and Young Adult Voice and Choice in Attachment B*);
- B. Family/adult allies support young adults;
- C. System of Care (SOC) partners gain cultural and linguistic competence (CLC); and
- D. Local communities (including young adults) change their perceptions of young adults and of mental health issues, reducing stigma.

A. Young adult (YA) leadership is developed in Vermont [Required activity: Operate in accordance with continuing input from key stakeholders (including youth and family members) within the regional systems of care]:

Diversity Rocks! is led by youth and young adults aged 14-21 with the help of adult volunteers. In order to gain leadership experience, the young adults do most of the work. They define goals for themselves and make plans so those goals happen. For the 18 months of this sub-grant (April 1, 2013-September 30, 2014), the Diversity Rocks! goals are to:

1. Establish and maintain a young adult council to address the needs of New American youth and young adults.
2. Establish and sustain an advisory group of adult allies to provide guidance for the Diversity Rocks! young adult councilors and the group as a whole.
3. Provide leadership and empowerment training opportunities for youth and young adults.
4. Provide a safe space where youth and young adults can share their stories and talents and can be supported in their goals and interests.
5. Establish and maintain a process to “give back” to the community and do community work.
6. Provide youth and young adult members with educational opportunities to learn about the performing arts, history and science.

Diversity Rocks! has adopted a structure with rotating young adult leadership (elected for 3 -6 months at a time) for each of ten ongoing interest areas or functions:

- Calendar of Activities
- College and Careers

- Community Outreach
- Field Trips
- Performing Arts
- Meetings and Transport
- Sports
- Visual Arts
- Website
- Treasurer.

The young adult leaders (councilors) for these interest areas/functions each have a team of 1-3 adult volunteers to assist them with decision-making and activities.

B. Family/adult allies support young adults:

The adult volunteers (family members and other allies) give advice and help the youth and young adults with transportation, cooking, and other matters. These advisers coordinate with the young adults to reach safe and sustainable decisions for Diversity Rocks! The adult volunteers support participants in making decisions about choices for work, education, and identifying healthy relationships. We as adult advisors work to guide students to become more self-aware and self-determined. This is done through encouraging students to set long-term goals and then supporting them in achieving the steps that build to that goal....None of this [is possible] if we do not insure that the group remains safe – this is the most important role of the adult advisors. Because we have consistent volunteer adult advisors and youth leaders we are able to address and resolve conflict in a way that promotes truly understanding each other, our cultures and our behaviors. This type of conflict resolution is an ongoing part of the work that Diversity Rocks! does.

C. System of Care (SOC) partners gain cultural and linguistic competence (CLC):

The Community Outreach , Performing Arts, and Visual Arts activities planned for delivery by Diversity Rocks! promote cultural diversity and competence by explaining and demonstrating to the community who these young immigrants and refugees are and what they (can) do. Creating a Diversity Rocks! website will also help to “spread our talent and diversity all over the United States or maybe all over the world.”

D. Local communities (including young adults) change their perceptions of young adults and of mental health issues, reducing stigma:

Some of the community outreach plans include having a group of the New American youth and young adults go to homeless shelters, nursing homes, and other places like preschools or day care centers to “give back” and “thank the community in an active way” for having “given us so much support and courage, and the ability to do things we couldn’t do.”

ATTACHMENT A

Vermont Youth in Transition Grant

Bridging the gaps for young adults in Vermont

Logic Model Summary



ATTACHMENT B

Youth and Young Adult Voice and Choice

The Youth in Transition (YIT) Grant aims to strengthen the existing system of care for transition-aged youth. The key decision-makers for the Grant believe that the most important strategy for doing so is to build the influence of youth voice and choice within that system of care. Thus, the YIT Grant's first goal for strengthening the system of care is "Young Adult (YA) leadership is developed in Vermont." Every program which receives funding through YIT contributes to the accomplishment of this goal through the following required activity: Operate in accordance with continuing input from key stakeholders (including youth and family members) within the regional systems of care.

There are many ways to obtain continuing input from key stakeholders (including youth and family members); some are more effective than others. Research about best practices for building the influence of youth voice and choice indicates that, with adult support (rather than manipulation or tokenism), young people can achieve equity with adults in their contributions to decisions and actions (refer to the Ladder of Youth Voice via the hotlink in this footnote)¹.

Providing this kind of adult support is not easy. According to the 2011 *Integrating "Youth Guided" and "Cultural and Linguistic Competence" Values Into Systems of Care*², the work is likely to involve changes in governance and organizational infrastructure, services and supports, planning and continuous quality improvement, collaboration, communication, and workforce development, at least.

However, for their positive development, young people must have access to young adult-empowering environments³. These environments enable young adults to:

- Feel a sense of belonging in a community
- Learn and master skills and tasks
- Feel invested in the outcomes of their lives
- Give back to the community

¹ <http://www.freechild.org/ladder.htm>

² Reid, R. (2011). *Integrating "Youth Guided" and "Cultural and Linguistic Competence" Values Into Systems of Care*. Washington, DC: Technical Assistance Partnership for Child and Family Mental Health. Available at <http://www.tapartnership.org>

³ Matarese, M., McGinnis, L., & Mora, M. (2006). Youth involvement in systems of care: A guide to empowerment. Retrieved from http://www.tapartnership.org/docs/Youth_Involvement.pdf

- Utilize their expertise from their personal experiences to create change
- Have a voice and choice in their life planning
- Feel empowered to be involved in creating system-wide change
- Build relationships and partnerships
- Encourage and cultivate young adult voice, ownership, and access
- Focus on their needs, including culture-specific needs.

Young people experience benefits⁴ from these kinds of environments:

- Understand the community in a different way
- Make friends
- Have a support group of people who “get them”
- Create a positive change in their community
- Develop new skills and knowledge
- Reframe their personal identities as leaders and change agents
- See themselves reflected from peers and family members in a positive light
- Develop confidence and strengthen their sense of pride, identity, and self-esteem
- Create a better system that will help themselves and others
- Have their voice heard and utilized.

⁴ Matarese, M., McGinnis, L., & Mora, M. (2006). Youth involvement in systems of care: A guide to empowerment. Retrieved from http://www.tapartnership.org/docs/Youth_Involvement.pdf