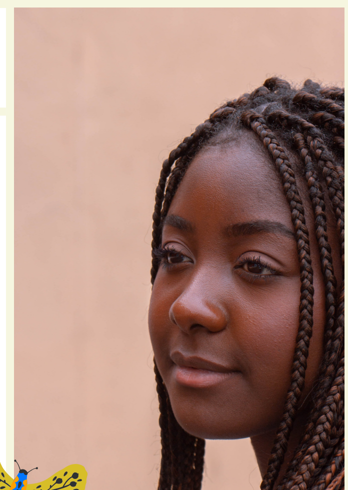
Conducting Check-Ins with Youth Members

Conducting regular check-ins with your program members is a crucial aspect of any youth-led program to ensure that each youth receives the support needed to participate in their advocacy work. Check-ins do not have to be considered case management. The purpose of ongoing check-ins can be just "to check in" and stay connected with youth in your program, or advocacy group, and outside of any regularly scheduled meetings. Often this builds relationships and can support participant retention. Check-ins can be an opportunity for staff to learn more about a young person, their goals, challenges, and ways staff can support their growth and connections to outside resources and professional opportunities. It can also be an opportunity for staff to receive constructive feedback from youth.

Organizations should create their own parameters around frequency and context for regular youth check-ins. If organizations are interested in learning more about Juvenile Law Center's youth scheduled check-ins and learning lessons from staff and youth, go to our publication, Building the Field of Ethical, Authentic, and Youth-led Advocacy: Key Components of a Youth Advocacy Program and review key components 4 and 6. Here are some additional reflections and tips if organizations are interested in setting up check-ins with their youth.

Frequency

Set youth check-ins frequently throughout the year. In Juvenile Law Center's Youth Advocacy Program, youth have a minimum of 3 check-ins throughout the programmatic year. These include the initial on-boarding or orientation check-in, a mid-year program check-in, and an end-of-year check-out. At minimum setting up check-ins with youth at the beginning, mid and end of the year allow for youth and program staff to reflect on progress, challenges, and successes throughout the duration of the year. If programs operate on a different cycle, consider using a similar method that reflect your own program timeframe. Juvenile Law Center also supports program members who want or need more regular check-ins with staff as often as once per week. Consider if ongoing additional check-ins are another option for your program.



Communication

To schedule check-ins, staff should contact program members via their preferred method of contact. If staff is unable to reach the program member this way, they should reach out to fellow program members who may know the person and know of alternate ways to get in touch. Staff can also gather emergency contact information that can be utilized if staff lose contact with a program member. Often having a cell phone or activated device can be a challenge for youth who may not be connected to families, and or not connected to resources. Be patient and let youth know there are multiple ways to communicate. Each youth might have their own preferred method of communication which should be respected. At Juvenile Law Center some common methods of how we communicate with youth are: email, calling, texting, messaging on Facebook or Instagram, Google messaging, or calling through a friend or family member.

Discussion Topics for Consideration

Depending on what resources organizations or groups provide to youth the topics discussed will vary in your scheduled check-ins and meetings with you. Some groups, board, or organizations only engage in advocacy with young people and do not connect them to outside support. Staff and youth should discuss what are some topics and questions that feel comfortable to discuss, and which staff to discuss them with. Develop forms that help guide staff and youth with questions that keep the conversation flowing and should ensure staff address major topics of support with program members. Not every youth will feel comfortable talking to every staff. That is okay. Staff should develop plans to ensure there is flexibility in who you can talk with. If this is not possible, be transparent with youth and them to decide if and what they want to share with staff.

Allow youth to lead the discussion on what they want to share. Some topics that Juvenile Law Center's Program discussed with program members are whether youth need any assistance obtaining things like housing, food, clothing or clothing to ensure they basic needs are met., Additionally, because we are a law firm for children and work on issues related to records, vital documents, education, and re-entry, staff can ask questions and offer youth support with these issues. In our Youth Advocacy Program, if youth identify other needs and challenges during a check-in, they can be addressed during the check-in time whether related to a youth's advocacy work or administrative need like finishing a work assignment, printing resumes, or an completing an employment application, staff may work during the check-in to complete that task or schedule a new time to complete.

Information Sharing

Always follow up with youth after a check-in to reiterate the tasks, and if there are things that the youth or staff identified that require additional support to be completed. This is important to hold everyone accountable, and ensure it is clear for staff and youth what the agency or group can provide and how they will provide it. Always ask youth permission to share any details with other staff. Any confidential information should be kept confidential. At Juvenile Law Center, after checking-in with youth, program staff share information amongst their team to identify that the youth is receiving support, and to notify each other when it’s completed. To keep information confidential and in a safe place, program staff at Juvenile Law Center utilize an information sharing and saving platform with a secure password for program staff only.