BELONGING AS AGENCY:

SUPPORTING TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING & DEVELOPMENT FOR YOUTH & YOUNG ADULTS

Ready by 21 National Meeting ▪ May 19, 2021

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We examined belonging from multiple perspectives, multiple ways of knowing

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We Asked Individuals to Grapple with a Big Idea

Othering

A generalized set of common processes that deny someone full humanity based on them being less than and/or a threat to the favorite group.

Belonging

Belonging is not just how we treat each other, belonging is how we actually organize our economy, our structures, our schools, our faiths so that everyone belongs, and recognizing we still have differences.

– john a. powell

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The view of the entire ecosystem means that belonging isn't rocket science…

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The view of the entire ecosystem means that belonging isn't rocket science…

It's more complex!

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Mentimeter - Interactive Presentations

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As a young person, what is one place you experienced a strong sense of belonging?

Mentimeter

Voting is closed

Press ENTER to pause scroll

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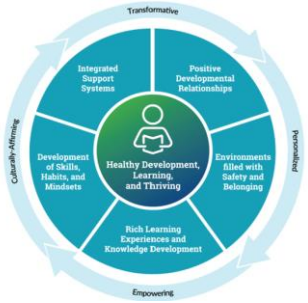
We looked at the following:



SoLD Framework

- Positive Developmental Relationships
- Environments Filled with Safety & Belonging
- Skills, Mindsets and Habits
- Rich Learning Experiences
- Integrated Supports

Ongoing exploration of belonging

Belonging and agency are linked… the presence of one makes the other stick.

Patterns

- Conditions that Support Belonging
- Transformative Practices
- System/Ecosystem Targets

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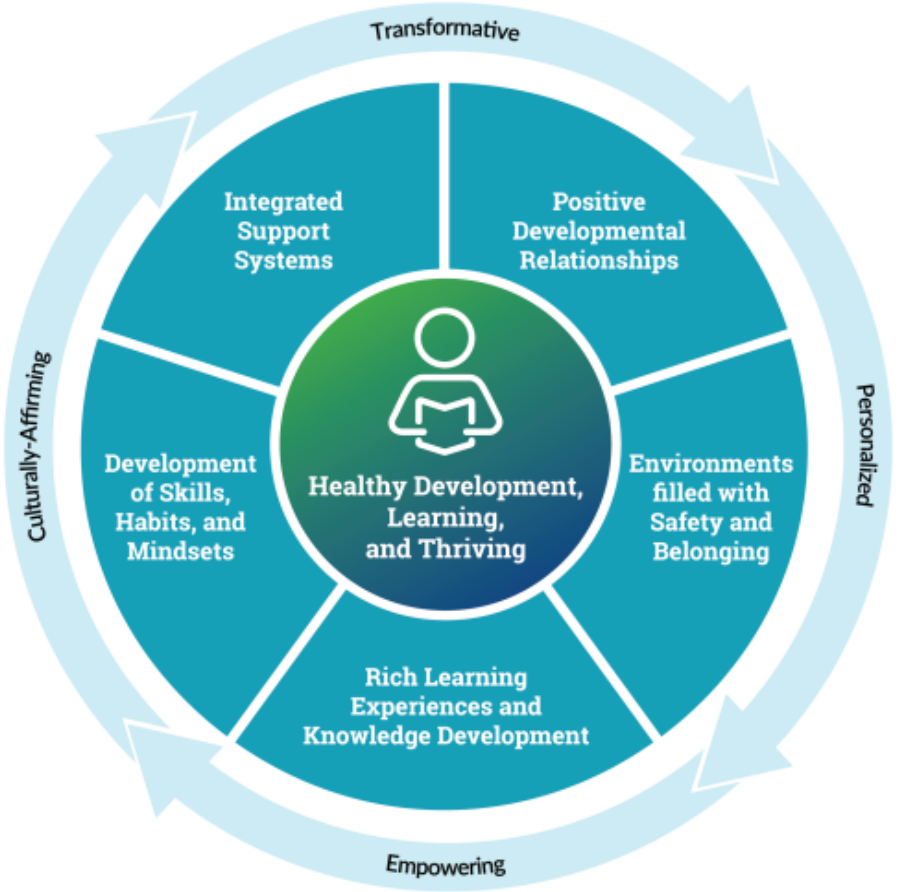
Equitable Ecosystems for Young People & Young Adults

What are the practices that are essential to positive, transformative development for young people and young adults?

What experiences strengthen a sense of belonging and support a sense of agency?

Essential Guiding Principles for Equitable Whole-Child Design



Derived from SoLD Practice Principles: Darling-Hammond, L., Flook, L., Cook-Harvey, C., Barron, B., and Osher, D. (2019). Implications for educational practice of the science of learning and development. Applied Developmental Science. 2.

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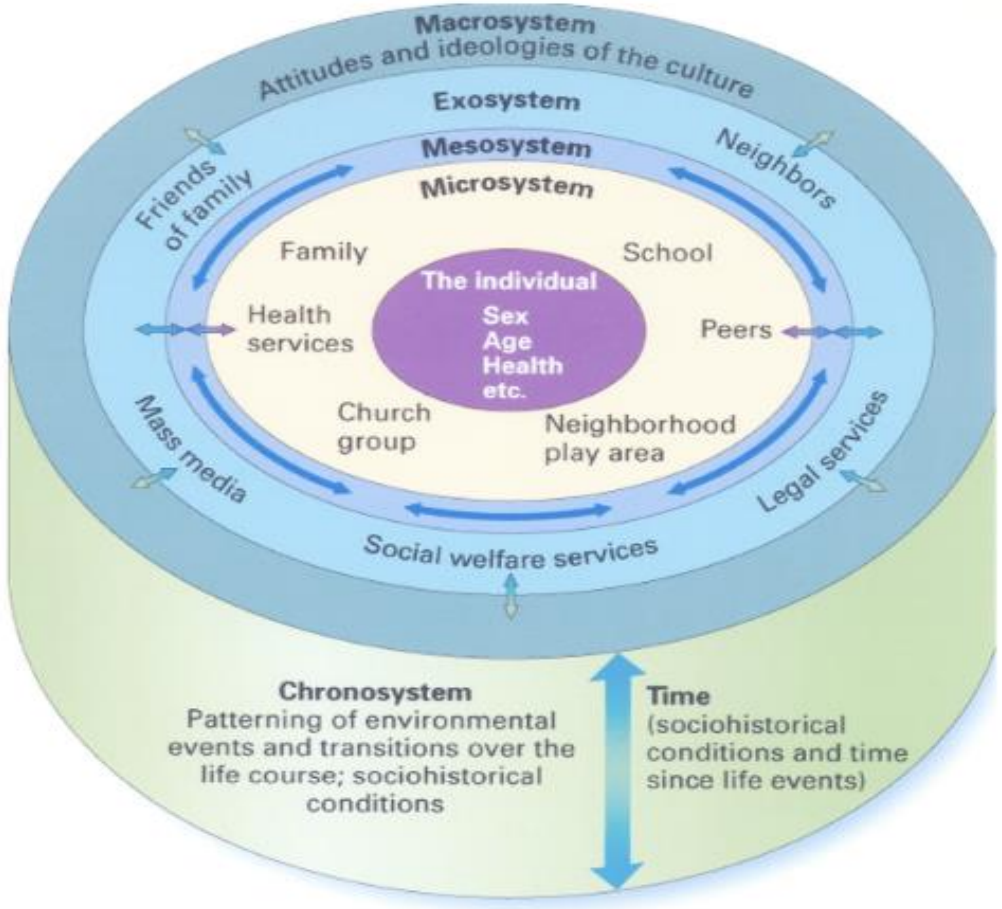
Equitable Ecosystems for Young People & Young Adults

What enhances or complicates development across a young person's entire ecosystem?

What are the challenges in navigating the ecosystem? What practices, supports help with navigation, self-advocacy, and agency to affect change?



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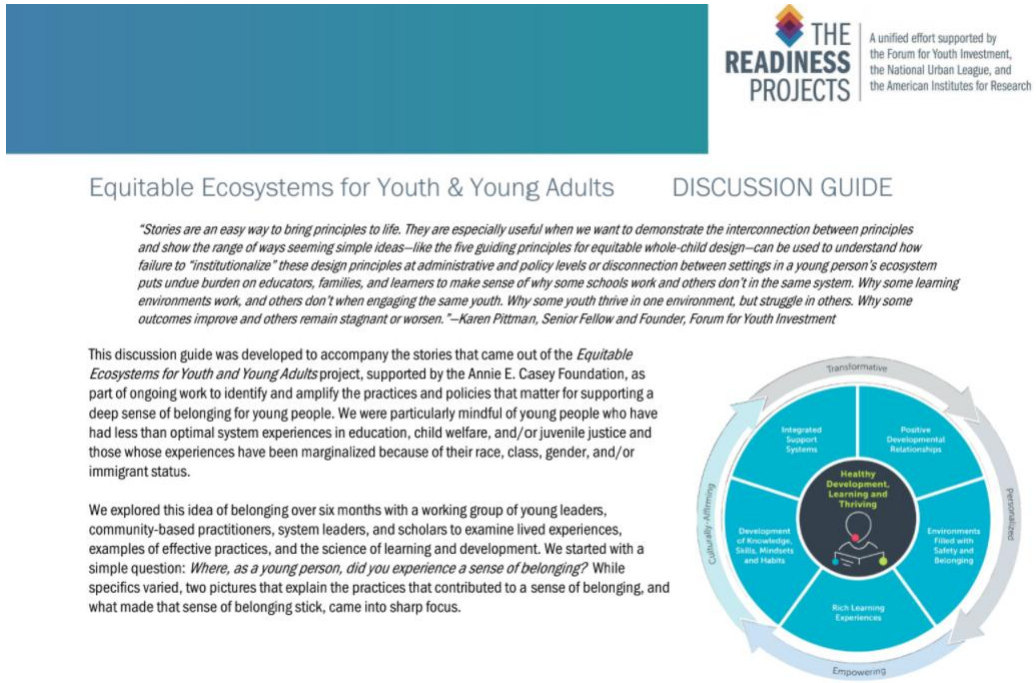
Discussion Guide

What are the practices that are essential to positive, transformative development for young people and young adults?

What enhances or complicates development across a young person's entire ecosystem?



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Equitable Ecosystems for Youth & Young Adults DISCUSSION GUIDE

"Stories are an easy way to bring principles to life. They are especially useful when we want to demonstrate the interconnection between principles and show the range of ways seeming simple ideas—like the five guiding principles for equitable whole-child design—can be used to understand how failure to "institutionalize" these design principles at administrative and policy levels or disconnection between settings in a young person's ecosystem puts undue burden on educators, families, and learners to make sense of why some schools work and others don't in the same system. Why some learning environments work, and others don't when engaging the same youth. Why some youth thrive in one environment, but struggle in others. Why some outcomes improve and others remain stagnant or worsen."—Karen Pittman, Senior Fellow and Founder, Forum for Youth Investment

This discussion guide was developed to accompany the stories that came out of the *Equitable Ecosystems for Youth and Young Adults* project, supported by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, as part of ongoing work to identify and amplify the practices and policies that matter for supporting a deep sense of belonging for young people. We were particularly mindful of young people who have had less than optimal system experiences in education, child welfare, and/or juvenile justice and those whose experiences have been marginalized because of their race, class, gender, and/or immigrant status.

We explored this idea of belonging over six months with a working group of young leaders, community-based practitioners, system leaders, and scholars to examine lived experiences, examples of effective practices, and the science of learning and development. We started with a simple question: *Where, as a young person, did you experience a sense of belonging?* While specifics varied, two pictures that explain the practices that contributed to a sense of belonging, and what made that sense of belonging stick, came into sharp focus.

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The discussion questions below are intended to spark discussion to help you reflect on your own setting/system. We encourage you to start with a story that has similarities to your own setting/system. Start with the provided narrative, then turn to a discussion of what your own setting does to support belonging and agency, within your setting and to equip young people to navigate and affect change outside of your setting—and where you would want to dig in further with your own staff/team. The goal isn't *perfect* practice, but to support *reflective* practice that supports all youth.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Developmental Practices: *What do you think were the most important staff or organizational practices that made a difference in Leo's story and changed his trajectory at school? What else would you want to know to unpack how effectively practices depicted in the story reflected the principles of whole-youth design?*

2. Whole-Youth Design Principles: *From the narrative provided, what is your gut assessment of how well the principles of whole-youth design were reflected in the Glencliff Peace Team setting? What assumptions could you make between setting features in Leo's larger school experience before participating with the Peace Team and his experiences at "Our Town" and with the Peace Team? What "design elements" made a difference between the two settings? What could one setting learn from the other?*

1 ⟷ 5 **Positive Developmental Relationships. Rating (1–5) ____** The story suggests that in his prior school experiences Leo may not have formed many deep positive developmental relationships with adults in the school and juvenile justice systems. The story begins with a family resource coordinator noticing his leadership potential and his experiences with the Peace Team providing different, informal opportunities to build positive relationships. Later, Leo develops an unlikely mentoring relationship with the Juvenile Court Clerk. *Add other reflections here.*

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Take 3 minutes to look over the discussion guide. Starting with Q2, where did you see the principles of whole-youth design? What's your initial rating of each element?

After that time, we will go into breakout groups.

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The Power of Stories:
The Equitable Ecosystems Story Deck

YouthBuild: Building a (Culture) War-Free Zone

YouthBuild of McLean County builds an intentional learning community where challenge is accepted and personal integrity scaffolded. Explore how YouthBuild helps students navigate rias and a "culture war" symbol that disrupts the community environment through building the kind of trust and relationships that allow students "to grant us permission to teach them."

"We have to ask students for their permission to teach them."

Loud, Outspoken, & Connected: The Transformative Power of Student Voice for Students and Schools

Youth voice holds power to shift narratives. Examine how the Glencliff High School Peace Team, in partnership with the Oasis Center, helps an unlikely student leader change narratives through promoting student voice and helps a school district better connect and serve its own students.

"Students have a voice, they just need to be passed the mic."

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What a System Can Do for Me Is... Get Out of the Way

"Systems aren't really good at building community – communities are." Systems are hard places in which to experience belonging. So, what can a system do? Systems can play a pivotal role in making a sense of belonging stick – mostly by getting out of the way. Read the advice of former foster youth: Get out of the way, recognize my attempts at self-advocacy and build them, and help me to gain skills to cultivate community and belonging for myself.

"The system can't be community for me – truly give me that sense of belonging. But it can get out of the way so I can hang onto bit of belonging I have."

I'd Be a Sure Bet, If I Weren't Locked Out of Every Opportunity

The transition to young adulthood is difficult enough. The transition from honor student with multiple community service commendations to promising new employee shouldn't be a rocky one. For Jaleel, a rockstar college student – and a young adult with a criminal record – it was much harder than expected. Read how instrumental supports to navigate the justice system and a push for policy change on record expungement were essential to connecting a rising community leader to employment opportunity in his own community.

"It seemed I was a sure bet, but I kept getting locked out of opportunities."

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What could you explore through storytelling in your own setting?

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milestones

warm handoffs

equity

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