Youth Sector

Who is the Youth Sector?

The Youth Sector includes children, adolescents, and young adults, along with the families, schools, and youth-serving organizations that support their healthy development. It includes the young leaders, students, and peers who navigate the academic and social environments where growth occurs.

Youth are uniquely positioned to identify needs early, address stigma at formative stages, and promote prevention and resilience. ROSCs are key partners in elevating youth voice and ensuring seamless access to support, actively engaging the youth sector to build protective factors and establish the age-appropriate recovery pathways that support lifelong health.

How can the Youth Sector support recovery?

Youth can be a strong force for positive change when they are supported early in life. Because they are in schools, families, and community programs every day, they can help identify needs early and build healthy skills. When aligned with ROSC, the Youth Sector ensures that prevention and intervention are developmentally informed, culturally relevant, and stigma-free.

To make the biggest impact, the Youth Sector and ROSCs can:

- **Be a trusted place for early help:** Use schools and youth programs to notice problems early and connect people to support.
- **Build prevention and resilience:** Teach coping skills, healthy habits, and strong relationships.
- **Include youth voices:** Let young people help design programs and services that affect them.
- **Create clear paths to help:** Make it easy to move from schools and programs to support services.
- **Reduce stigma:** Create safe spaces where youth feel comfortable asking for help.
- **Work together for long-term impact:** Partner with others to improve services and support youth well-being.

How can ROSCs work with the Youth Sector?

- Make youth support part of overall recovery planning.
- Connect schools, families, healthcare, and community programs.
- Include youth and families in planning and decision-making.
- Use respectful and trauma-informed approaches in all programs.
- Build skills and supports that help prevent future problems.
- Strengthen long-term health and well-being for young people and communities.

Common Barriers:

- Adult-designed systems and processes
- Time constraints and competing priorities
- Unclear expectations and boundaries
- Limited resources and budget constraints

Levels of Youth Participation	
	**Youth-Initiated, Shared Decisions** Youth lead with adult support.
	**Adult-Initiated, Shared Decisions** True partnership in planning and implementation.
	**Youth-Consulted** Youth provide input on adult-designed programs.
	**Tokenism** Youth appear involved but have no real influence.

Creating Youth-Friendly Environments		
 **Physical & Emotional Safety** Accessible locations, transportation options, trauma-informed practices, and clear boundaries.	 **Authentic Communication** Age-appropriate language, active listening, and transparent decision-making process.	 **Youth-Friendly Scheduling** Considerate of school hours, part-time jobs, family responsibilities, and transit schedules.

Youth Leadership Development Pathways

- **Entry Points:** Low-barrier ways for youth to get involved initially (volunteering, attending events, providing feedback).
- **Skill Building:** Targeted workshops, mentoring relationships, and structured learning opportunities that develop specific competencies.
- **Meaningful Responsibility:** Increasing decision-making authority, budget control, and project management with appropriate adult support.
- **Leadership Positions:** Formal roles on advisory boards, youth councils, or organizational governance with real influence.

Sustaining Youth Engagement

- **Recognition:** Acknowledge contributions through celebrations, credentials, reference letters, and public appreciation.
- **Growth:** Provide clear pathways for increasing responsibility and leadership development.
- **Relationships:** Foster peer connections and supportive adult mentorships to create belonging.
- **Relevance:** Connect activities to youth interests, college applications, career exploration, and real community impact.

Measuring Success: Beyond Numbers

Quantitative Measures	Qualitative Measures
Attendance and retention rates	Youth-led evaluation methods
Demographic representation	Testimonials and journey mapping
Progression through leadership pathways	Changes in organizational practices

Your 90-Day Action Plan

Step 1 Assess (Week 1)

- Where are you on the participation ladder? What barriers exist in your current programs?

Step 2 Design (Weeks 2-3)

- Create one youth-friendly environment change and one leadership development oppurtunity.

Step 3 Implement (Weeks 4-12)

- Start small, gather feedback, and adjust based on youth input.