

Advocacy for Committed Youth Without a Forever Family December 10, 2014

- More In-depth discussion – stories from the field:
good & not-so-good
 - Emerging Research: Adolescent Development, Trauma & Resilience
 - Authentic Youth Engagement in Court Advocacy **CAN**
Improve Outcomes and Build Needed Social Capital
 - Youth Voice Imperative

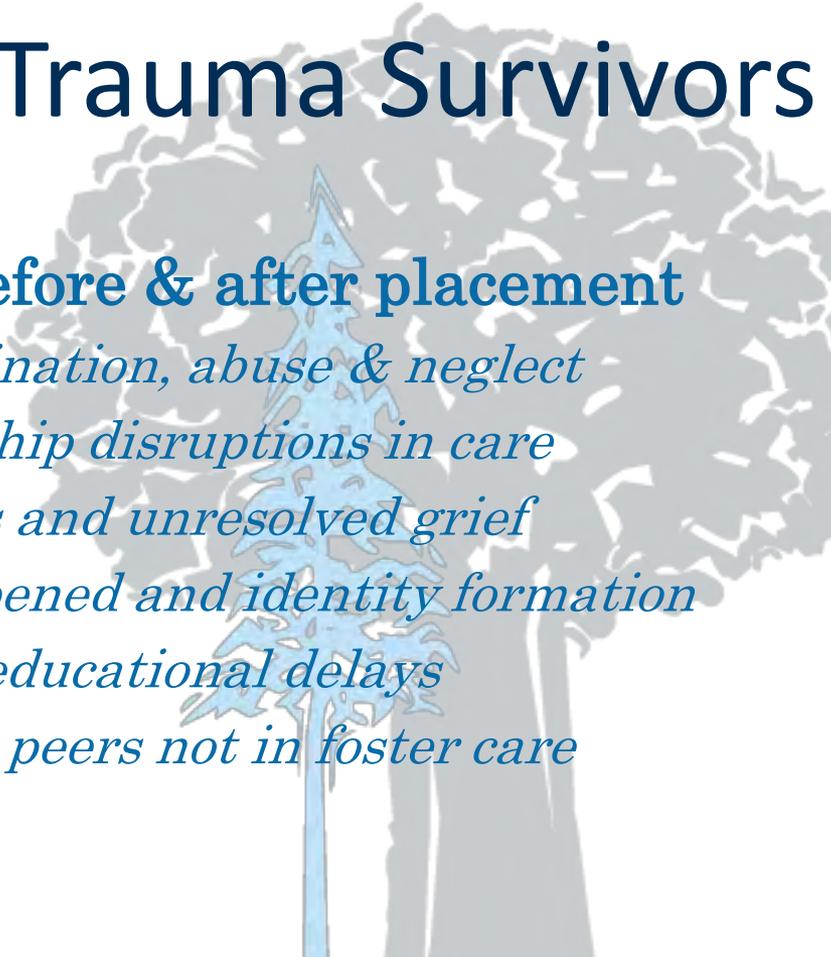
What We Know About ...

Adolescents in Foster Care Today

- Almost $\frac{1}{2}$ of close to 400,000 children in care
- Most enter as teens and stay
- Disproportionately of color and poor
- Nationally, close to 25,000 a year emancipate alone...with limited supports they can count on

What we Also Know About Adolescents in Foster Care Today...

Trauma Survivors



Have experienced trauma before & after placement

- *Persistent poverty, discrimination, abuse & neglect*
- *Multiple moves & relationship disruptions in care*
- *Resulting ambiguous losses and unresolved grief*
- *Confusion about what happened and identity formation*
- *Multiple developmental & educational delays*
- *Poor outcomes compared to peers not in foster care*

Brain Development Research

Hypothesis About What it Takes Change Outcomes for Youth in Foster Care

- Emerging research on trauma and its impact on adolescent brain development indicates that youth in foster care CAN benefit from authentic engagement in case planning and legal advocacy that prepares and supports them while providing opportunities to build social capital as they transition to adulthood – and beyond!
- Building Social Capital through authentic youth engagement in case planning and legal advocacy is likely to prevent the poor outcomes experienced by youth who emancipate on their own at 18 ... or even 21.
- This work takes skilled professionals with a clear understanding of adolescent and young adult development, knowledge of the processes of major life transitions, and the ability to work in a multi-disciplinary team with cultural competence and awareness.

**Jim Casey Initiative: Building Social
Capital Through Authentic Youth
Engagement in Case Planning & Legal
Advocacy**

Policy and Practice Changes...

Statewide policy and practice fully promotes authentic youth engagement in case planning by requiring a team planning approach with all young people in foster care age 14 and older

Nothing About Us Without Us!

Improved Youth Outcomes

Improved Policies and Practices

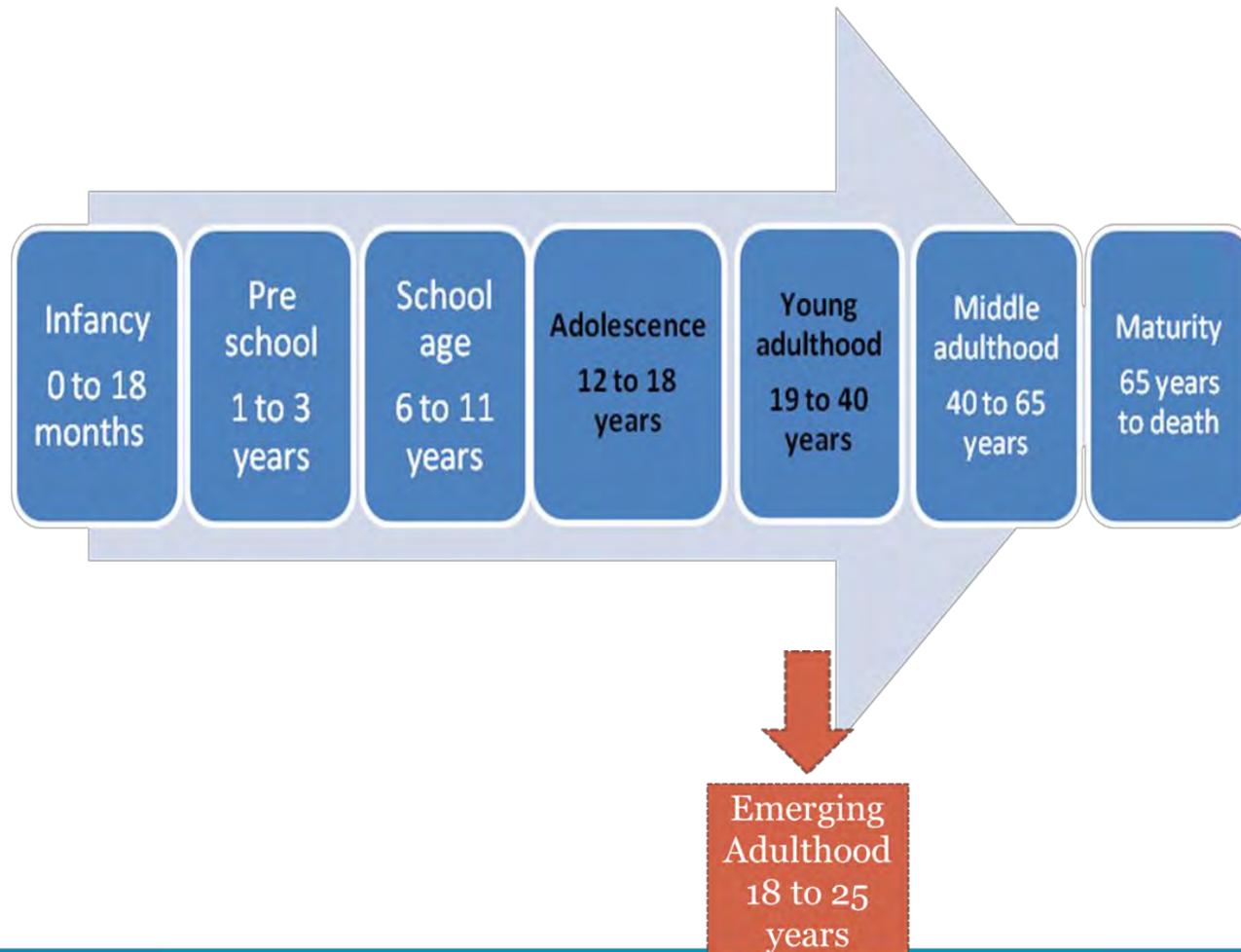
Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative

- Permanency: Connections to Supportive Life-Long Family Relationships
- Access to Racially Equitable Services & Supports
- Stable Secondary and Post-Secondary Education
- Opportunities to Achieve Employment, Economic Success & Financial Capability
- Safe, Stable, Affordable Place to Live
- Access to Quality Physical and Mental Health Care
- Opportunities to Shape Their Own Future using the supports of Social Capital

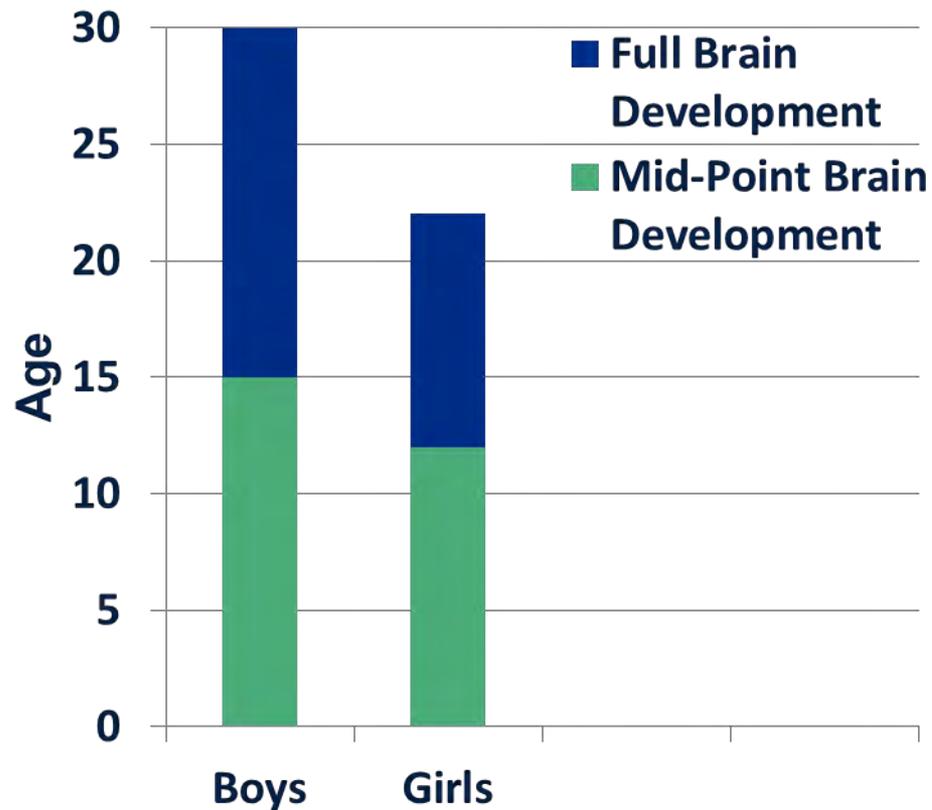
**Authentic Youth Engagement in Case
Planning and Legal Advocacy to Improve
Outcomes for Youth In Foster Care**

**Relies on an Understanding of
Adolescent Development,
the Impact of Trauma, and the Potential
of Positive Youth Development**

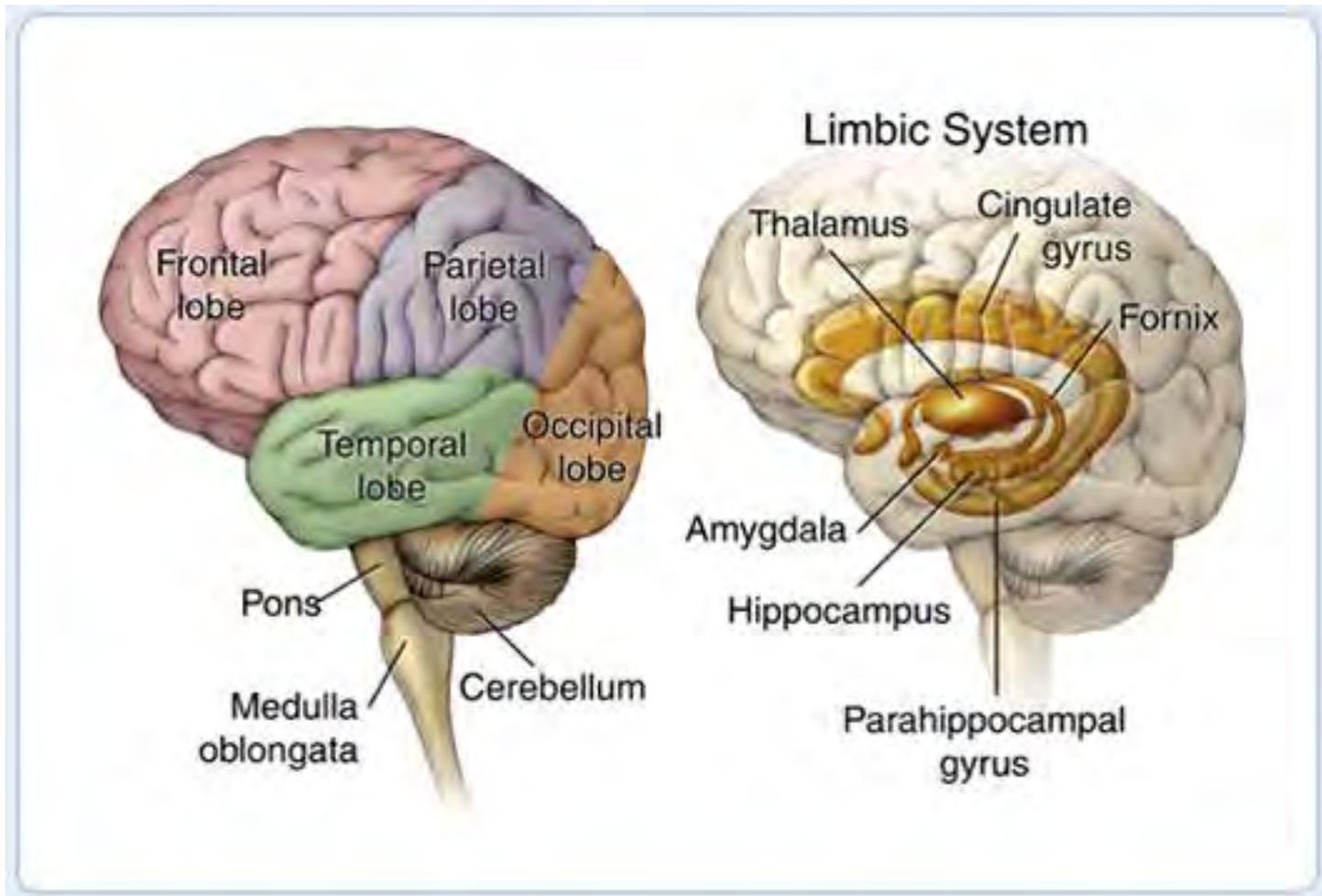
What We Know About Research on Emerging Adulthood



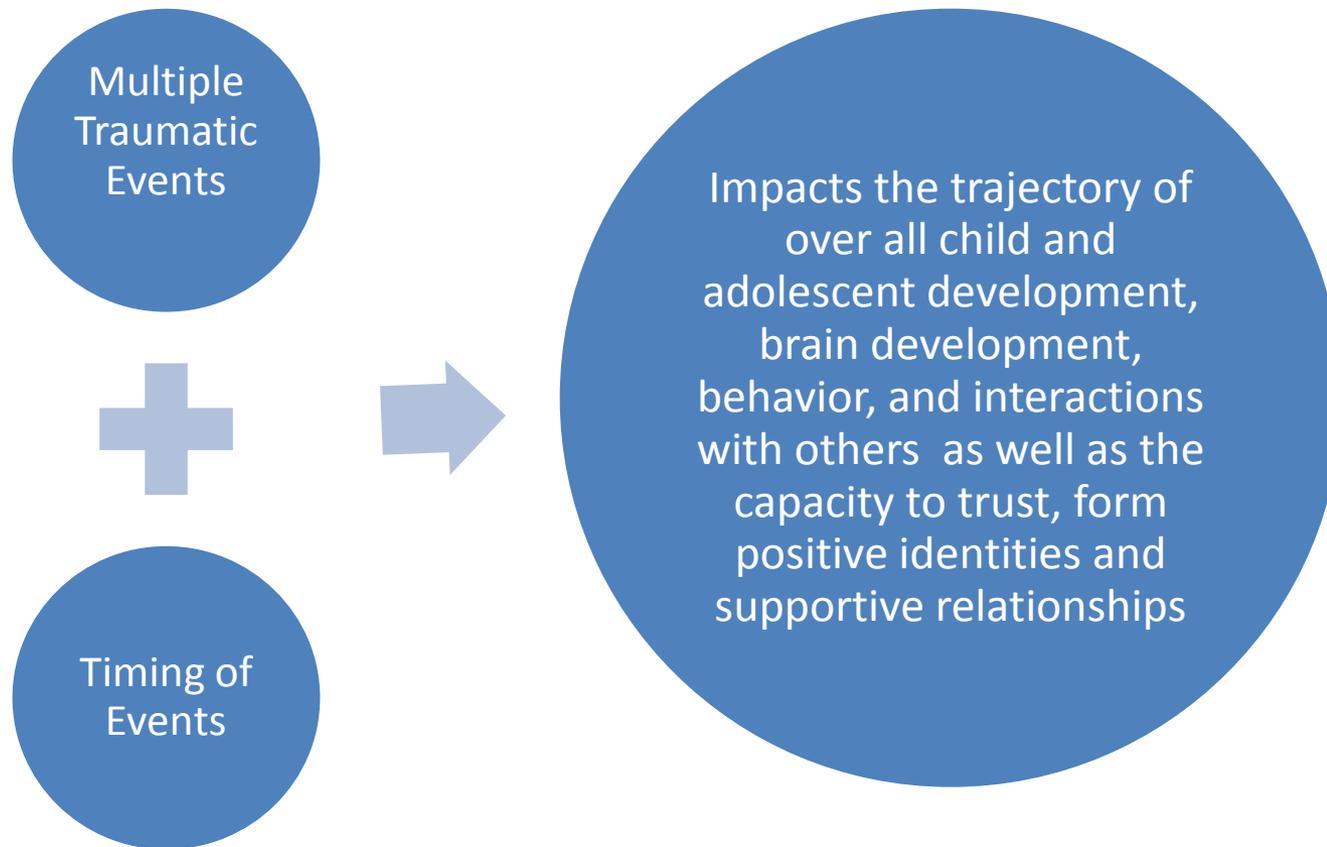
What We Know About Emerging Research on the Adolescent Brain: **IT IS NOT DONE YET!**



Gradual brain development in adolescence & emerging adulthood: multiple opportunities for growth & change



Understanding Toxic Stress & Complex Trauma in Childhood and Adolescence



Neuroplasticity

The impact of trauma is not permanent

- There is no “point of no return”
- Experiences positively or negatively influence transmission of brain cell messaging & development
- The brain through positive experiences can be re-wired to support the development of trust and resilience



Thus, Experiences Matter

The brain can be rewired to overcome impact of trauma and toxic stress

- **Neuroplasticity of the brain** allows new positive experiences and relationships to overcome negative influences of past experiences
- Positive relationships with caring adults can help youth heal from past hurts & build positive coping skills
- Authentic Youth Engagement in Case Planning and Legal Advocacy can be the bridge to healing and supportive relationships

Resilience and Positive Youth Development

Relationships and Experiences Matter

- Build strong relationships with caring adults – lawyers too!
- Enhance a sense of belonging & a positive identity
- Focus on youth's strengths, culture, interests & capabilities
- Support gradual learning of roles, responsibilities, & mastery of life skills
- Embrace opportunities to learn from mistakes
- Promote healthy social interaction and peer support



Without Positive Relationships & Experiences

Youth 'aging out' at 18 - or 21 are likely to experience poor outcomes

- *Limited family connections & support;*
- *Low high school graduation rates*
- *Low college attendance and completion*
- *Early unplanned pregnancies*
- *Limited access to quality health care*
- *Trauma-related mental health challenges*
- *Experience homelessness at least one night*
- *Involvement with the criminal justice system*

**Authentic Youth Engagement in
Case Planning and Legal Advocacy
CAN Build Positive Identity
AND Social Capital
Through a Culturally Aware &
Trauma-Informed Teaming Process**



Authentic Youth Engagement in Case Planning & Legal Advocacy to Build Social Capital

Definitions: Authentic Youth Engagement

- 1. The process of genuinely working with young people and empowering them to be the decision-makers in their own lives.*
- 2. A partnership between caring adults and young people empowering each young person to direct his or her own future*

Authentic Youth Engagement Promotes

- **Preparation** — young people are prepared and empowered to make informed decisions about matters that affect their lives
- **Support** — young people are provided with customized services and a network of supportive relationships that meet their needs and promote a healthy transition to adulthood
- **Opportunity** — young people are provided with an array of life opportunities that promote optimal growth and development; experiential learning; healthy risk taking and participation in normal everyday activities that contribute to social confidence and positive identity formation.

Case Planning & Legal Advocacy that Builds Social Capital



Networks of relationships for a reason, a season & a lifetime

- **Quantity**
- **Quality**
- **Reciprocity**
- **Value**

Young Adults' Vision Quality Case Planning & Case Advocacy

"Nothing about us without us"

- We have a team of people to help us, choosing some, if not most, of our team members – including our lawyers!
- We establish our own future goals.
- We state what we can do and ask the team for help with other things.
- Our teams meet regularly to review progress that has been made and next steps.
- We are supported in building and maintaining relationships and provided with opportunities to address the barriers we may face in doing so.
- We gradually experience increasing challenge and responsibility and decreasing protection as we practice adult roles and responsibilities.
- We have safe opportunities for self-exploration to understand our past experiences, our present needs, our connections within community, and we feel accepted for who we are even as we make mistakes

What belonging in a family means to young people and the adults who parent them ...

- physical safety (free from risk from abuse, neglect)
- psychological safety and emotional security (feels loved, wanted, and worthy of love; is confident in own value and capability; trusts self; trust others to be physically and psychologically safe; trusts that a supportive relationship will endure and that he or she will not be left behind again)
- unconditional love, support and acceptance (for who they are, what they've experienced in the past, and who they can become in the future)
- a message that this family will always be there no matter what (for celebrations or holidays; after mistakes to provide guidance and discipline; when ill, or unemployed, or evicted, or arrested)
- a sense of belonging with this family, and with safe connections to past meaningful relationships
- belief in youth, is committed to his or her success, and holds his or her best interest at heart
- grandparents for their children
- help with or access to current and future financial support such as paying for college, assisting with security deposits, rent, food, support for children, etc

**Authentic Youth Voice in Case Planning
and Advocacy to Build Social Capital**

Building on Transitions Framework

- Builds relationships and experiences youth need for a healthy transition to adulthood – and beyond
- Acknowledges multiple transitions youth in foster care have experienced
- Provides opportunity to use transition planning as an engaging & positive experience
- **Supports youth through a process of understanding the value of planned endings, stabilizing realignments, and new beginnings**

Bridges, W. (2009). Managing transitions: Making the most of change (3rd Edition). London: Nicolas Brealey.

Building Social Capital: Authentic Youth Engagement in Case Planning & Court Advocacy

Team Planning Approach

- Youth are viewed as partners in team planning
- Youth identify team members who know and care about them – from past and present formal and informal networks
- Youth are prepared to gradually guide team planning
- Team members are prepared and supported to work together to build youth's gradual autonomy and self-determination

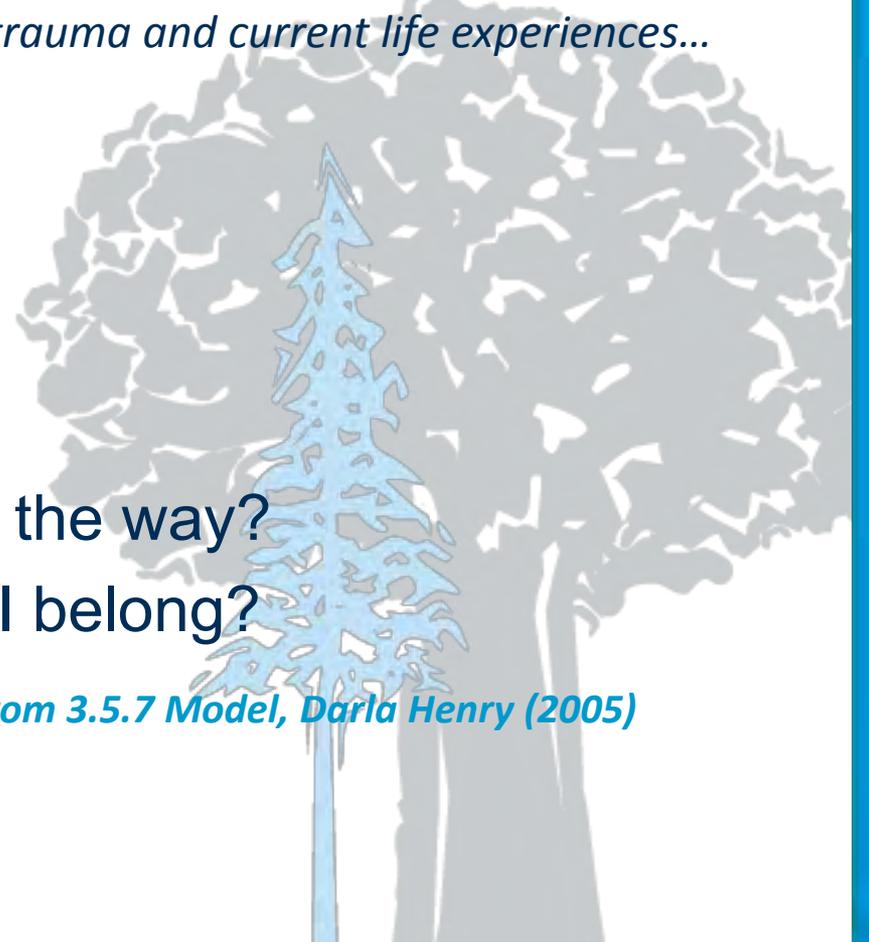
**Building Social Capital and Identity
Formation: Authentic Youth Engagement in
Case Planning & Legal Advocacy**

Help Youth Find Answers to 6 key questions:

To make new meaning of their trauma and current life experiences...

1. Who am I?
2. What happened to me?
3. Where am I going?
4. How will I get there?
5. Who will support me along the way?
6. How and when will I know I belong?

Adapted from 3.5.7 Model, Darla Henry (2005)



Building Social Capital: Authentic Youth Engagement in Case Planning & Court Advocacy

Team Planning Approach

- Team focuses on youth's strengths, needs and desires to build transition plans that work for them – doing with, not for them
- Youth are guided through a healing process of going back to move forward – building a healthy sense of identity and belonging
- Team members serve as a bridge to relationships for a ***reason, a season and a lifetime: a network of SOCIAL CAPITAL***

Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, Quality Casey Planning with Young Adults in Extended Care – DRAFT, 2014

**Authentic Youth Engagement in Case
Planning & Legal Advocacy to Form
Identity & to Build Social Capital**

Going Back to Move Forward

Confront the dark parts of yourself, and work to banish them with illuminations and forgiveness. Your willingness to wrestle with your demons will cause your angels to sing. Use the pain as fuel, as a reminder of your strength.

August Wilson

Building Social Capital: Authentic Youth Engagement in Case Planning & Legal Advocacy

Outcomes

- Young people safely make sense of their story, make peace with their past, and make realistic transitions plans for their future
- Young people are supported to gradually build the relationships, knowledge, skills and resources needed for a successful transition to adulthood – and beyond!
- Young people have social capital – a supportive network of relationships for a reason, a season and a lifetime...

Social Capital

Thank you!

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