

Embedding Family & Youth Voice



By Carol Cecil and Brandon Kelley

What does family and youth voice mean to you?



Family and youth are invited and expected to share their opinions about needed reforms. Actively engaged in working toward changing the systems that directly affect their lives, they need to speak to a group of practitioners or policy makers. Given the opportunity to create and to share meaning through implementing policies and practices, and put at the center of addressing problems and determining solutions ways to get these priorities addressed.

Families and youth are:

- Invited and expected to share their opinions about needed treatment,
- Authentically engaged in working toward changing the systems that directly affect their lives,
- Invited to speak to a group of practitioners or policy makers,
- Given the opportunity to create and facilitate meeting discussions for implementing policies and practices, and
- Put at the center of articulating priorities and determining the best ways to get those priorities addressed.

What does it mean to embed family and youth voice?



Embed means:

- **To infuse,**
- **To layer throughout, or**
- **To incapsulate.**

Embedding family and youth voice is to invite, encourage and expect family and youth voice at:

- **Their individual team level,**
- **Program committee level, and**
- **System level.**

Why is it important to embed family and youth voice at the individual team level?



- **Family and youth are experts on their own family: culture, history, traumas, etc.**
- **Family and youth can tell you what will work for them: strategies, supports, and services.**
- **Family and youth have the most at stake for their own successes or failures.**

Strategies for engaging families and youth at their own family team level:

~Use open-ended questions:

- *What is the one family tradition that you want your child(ren) to always remember?*
- *What would you like your family's life to look like 1 or 2 years from now?*
- *What is your child good at?*
- *Who is your child's favorite hero or shero and why do you think that is?*
- *What do people not get to see about your child that you wish they could?*

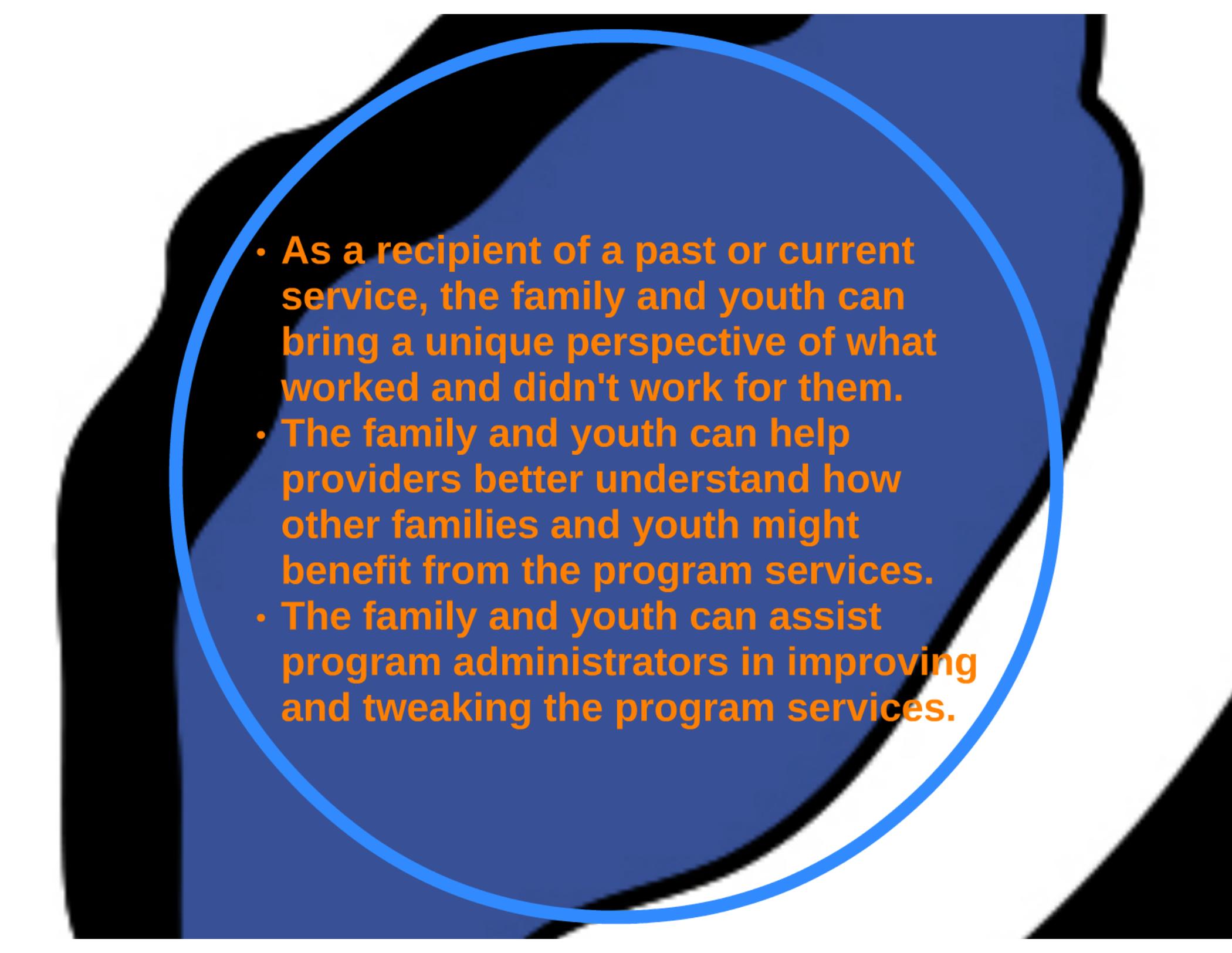
~Affirm their thoughts, wishes, needs, expectations, etc.

~Reflect for clarification and to ensure understanding.



Why is it important to embed family and youth voice at the program level?

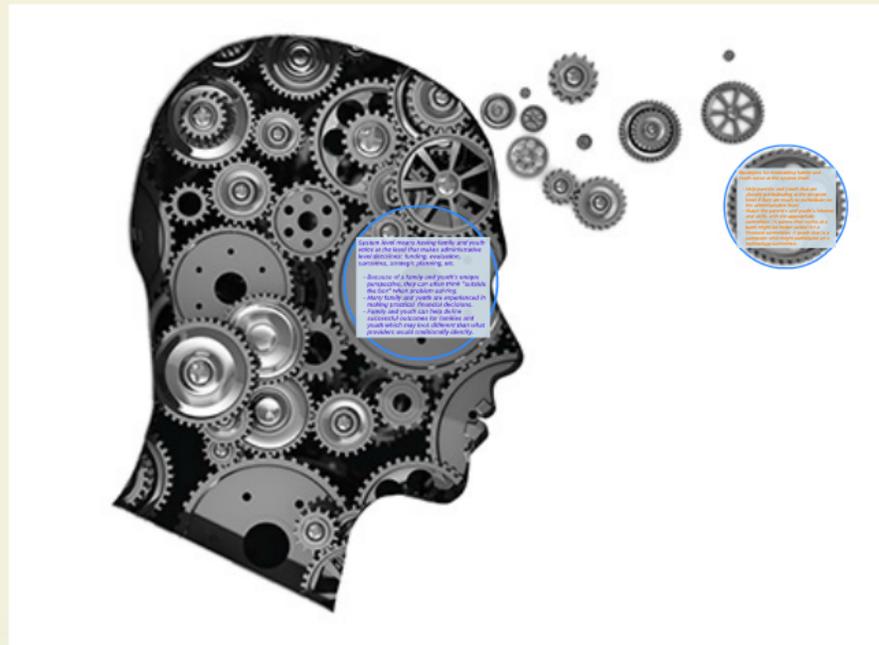


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- **As a recipient of a past or current service, the family and youth can bring a unique perspective of what worked and didn't work for them.**
 - **The family and youth can help providers better understand how other families and youth might benefit from the program services.**
 - **The family and youth can assist program administrators in improving and tweaking the program services.**

Strategies for embedding family and youth voice at the program level:

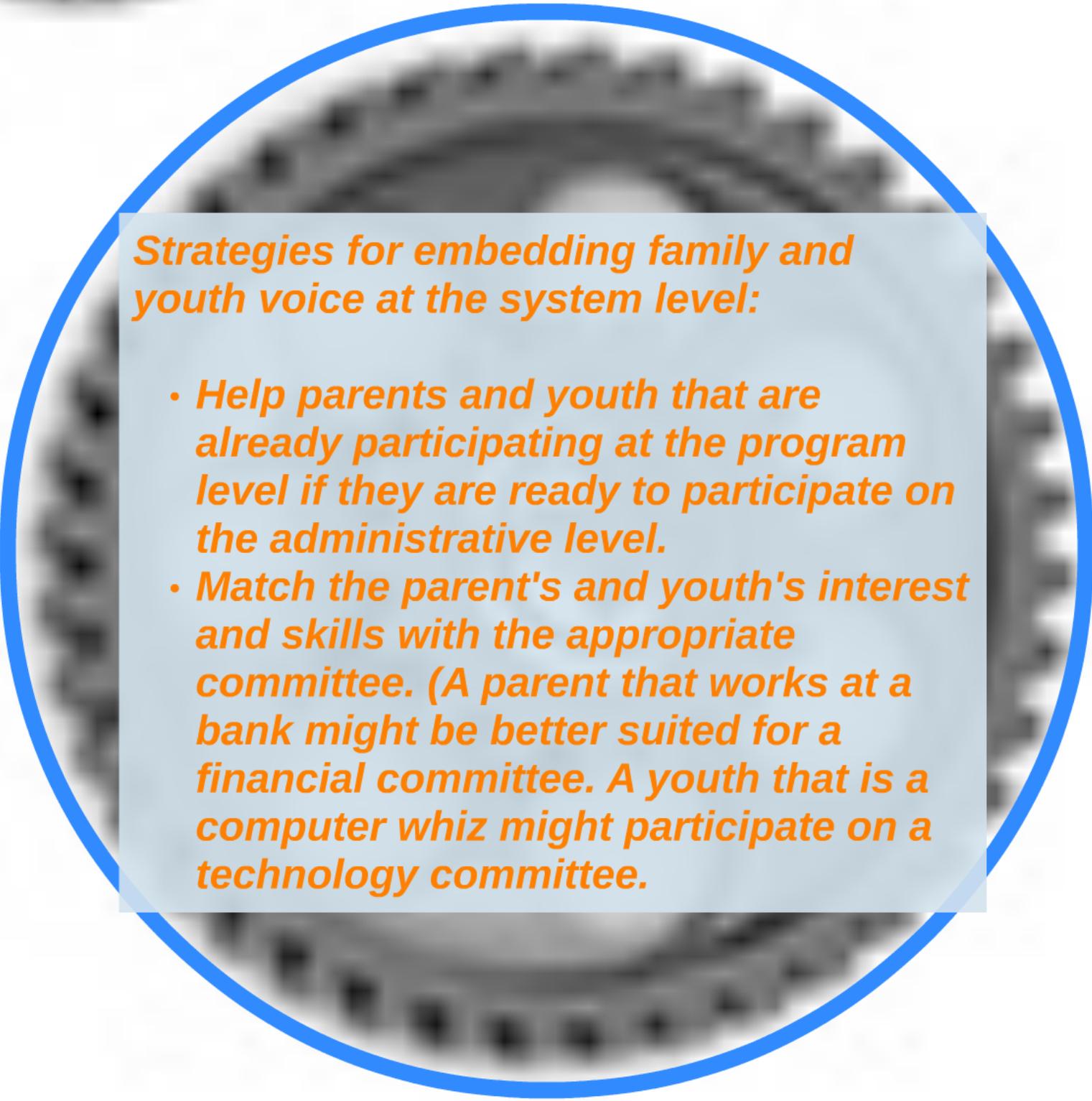
- *Identify parents and teens who are or have received your program services.*
- *Invite a parent and/or a youth to participate on the committee that oversees or reviews the program outcomes.*
- *Meet with parent and/or youth prior to each meeting to ensure they understand the meeting agenda.*
- *Ask them if they have any concerns prior to the meeting.*
- *Follow up with the parent or youth after meeting to see how you can assist them in completing their assigned tasks.*
- **REPEAT!**

Why is it important to embed family and youth voice at the system level?



System level means having family and youth voice at the level that makes administrative level decisions: funding, evaluation, outcomes, strategic planning, etc.

- Because of a family and youth's unique perspective, they can often think "outside the box" when problem solving.*
- Many family and youth are experienced in making practical financial decisions.*
- Family and youth can help define successful outcomes for families and youth which may look different than what providers would traditionally identify.*



Strategies for embedding family and youth voice at the system level:

- Help parents and youth that are already participating at the program level if they are ready to participate on the administrative level.***
- Match the parent's and youth's interest and skills with the appropriate committee. (A parent that works at a bank might be better suited for a financial committee. A youth that is a computer whiz might participate on a technology committee.)***

Putting all the pieces together!



**If possible, offer stipends,
gas reimbursement, and/
or childcare to support
parents and youth in
attending.**



Understand that this is a process that takes strategic planning and time. Put your strategic plan into writing as a guideline for reaching the goals set in the plan.



Plan times and meeting locations that are family and youth friendly:

- Meet in the community where the parent and youth live.
- Meet after school hours or work with the school for a teen to participate
- Invite a college-age youth to participate and work around his/her college class schedule.



Provide support, coaching and mentoring the parents and youth. This takes time and dedicated staff people who enjoy collaborating with parents and youth.



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