Become an Adult Ally:

Empowering Youth in Vocational Rehabilitation

Acknowledgement & Disclaimer

Presenters

Linda Hedenblad, MSE, CRC
(She/Her)
Bruce Springsteen's biggest ~~stalker~~ fan. Boomer who was *Born to Run*, but now merely walks briskly

DJ Ralston, M.A. Doctoral Candidate
(They/Them)
Geriatric Millennial, & Muppet Enthusiast

Sandi Miller, M.S.
(She/Her)
Strength Training Junkie, Outdoor Enthusiast, Lover of All Things Ted Lasso

John Walsh, M.Ed., CRC
(He/Him)
Boomer (but not that kind…), Aspiring Pickleball Champion, National Parks Enthusiast, & Leadership Geek

Learning Objectives

✓ Explore the inherent power differential that exists within the Youth-Transition Relationship.

✓ Explain why shifting the power differential in the transition-relationship to being an "Adult Ally" empowers youth to be active leaders in their own career development.

✓ Provide strategies to support continuous engagement of students and youth
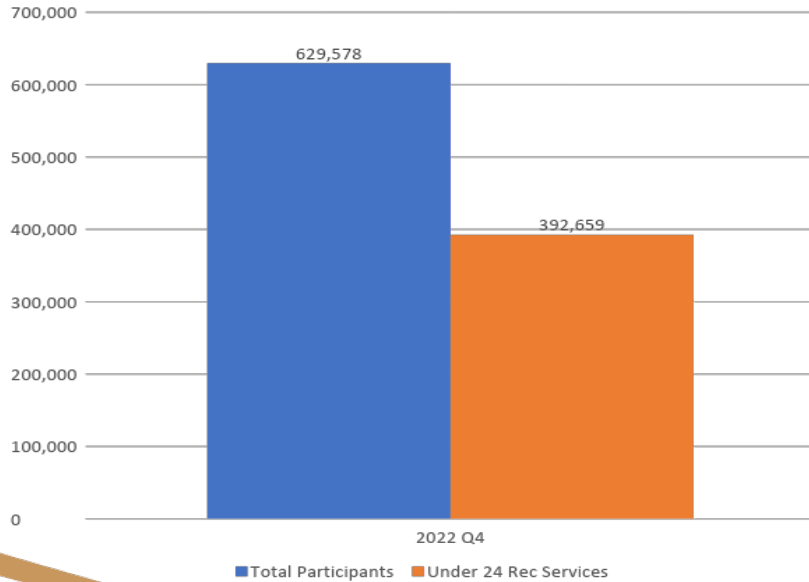
Participant Demographics
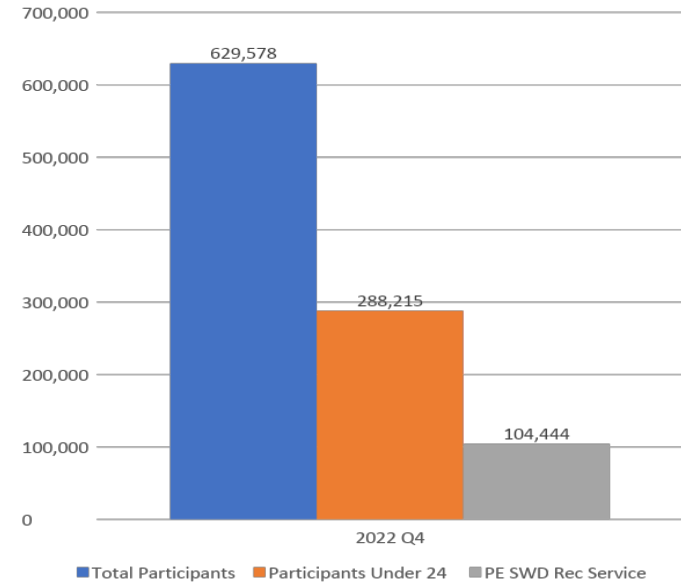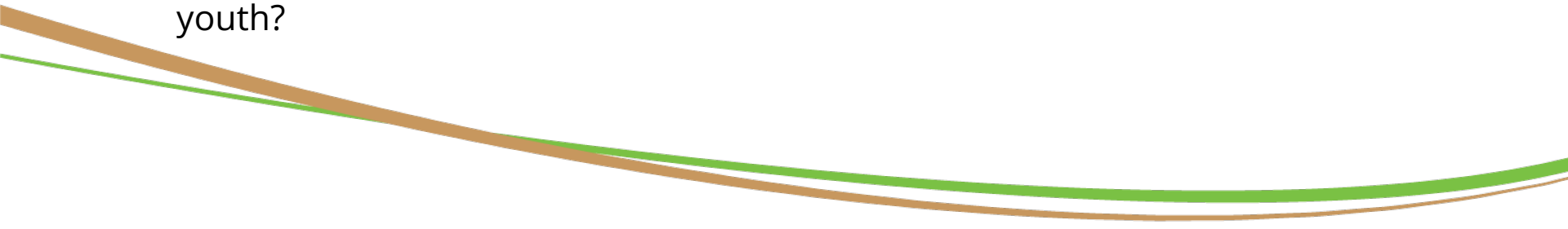
Table 1

Table 2

Let's Play a Game...

- "Because I said so."

- "As long you're living under my roof, you will live by my rules."

- "I'm not asking you to, I'm telling you to."

- "When you pay the bills, you can do whatever you want."

- "They don't know what they want or what they actually need"

- "Children are meant to be seen not heard"

Surfacing Assumptions through Critical Self-Reflection

Reflect on your own experience of adolescence and young adulthood.

- Think about the statements we just walked through – how many of those statements did you hear while you were a teenager (how many fingers could you put down)?

- How many of you were raised in an era where social norms dictated that the adult(s) were always correct (i.e., respect your elders) even when or if the adult(s) were not correct?

- Think about our major American institutions and their cultures (i.e., Schools, Social Services etc.), what are the underlying assumptions about adults and youth?

The Human Brain & Mental Models
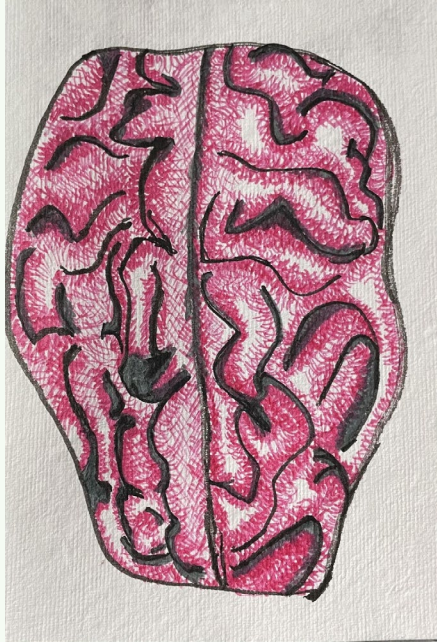
Information Processing

Consciously aware of only a very small portion of the millions of bits of data we process every second, so our brain creates cognitive shortcuts to help us process.

Subconscious Mind

- Categorizes
- Creates Associations
- Fills in the Gaps

Source: Institute for New Economic Thinking; HAAS Institute for a Fair and Inclusive Society; and Powell, J. (2016). Healing Otherness: Neuroscience Bias and Messaging (see Other & Belonging Institute)

Recognizing and Unpacking Our Mental Models (Underlying Assumptions)

Mental Models are the frames we employ to help us make sense of and navigate the world. Largely based on our cultural and social experiences and interactions, they shape our:

- reasoning

- what we think

- how we understand

- how we simplify complexity

In essence, **mental models**, often play a big role in **what and how we "know"** something, however, mental models can also mistake experience for objective fact. In other words, mental models also contribute to underlying assumptions.

Source: Institute for New Economic Thinking; HAAS Institute for a Fair and Inclusive Society; and Powell, J. (2016). Healing Otherness: Neuroscience Bias and Messaging (see Other & Belonging Institute)

Implicit Bias

Implicit bias, like other forms of bias, is an inclination or preference towards or away from someone/something but it occurs automatically and unintentionally and is often shaped by experiences and learned associations

- Unconscious Bias is the result of our limited cognitive capacity

- It is our unintentional preferences formed by our socialization and experiences, including exposure to (social) media

- There are an overwhelming number of studies that have shown the significant impact unconscious bias can have on human cognitive processes

Harvard Project: Implicit Association Test(s)

- An invitation for you to try one (or as many as you'd like)

- Harvard Project Implicit

- Disability IAT

- Race IAT

- Sexuality IAT

- Age IAT

- Religion IAT
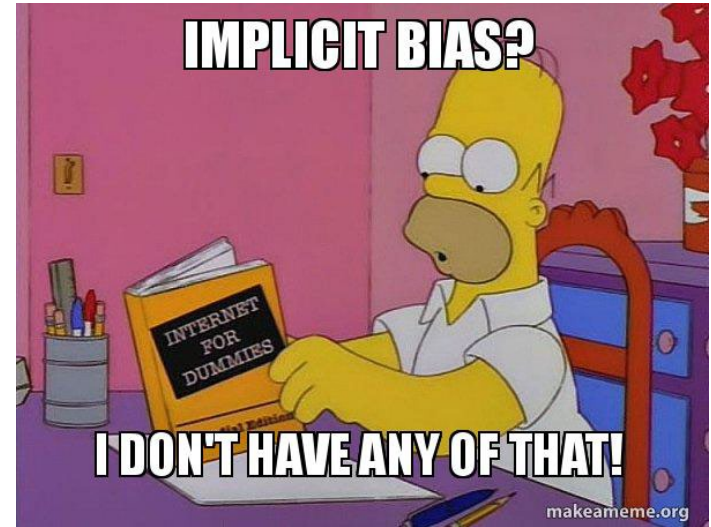
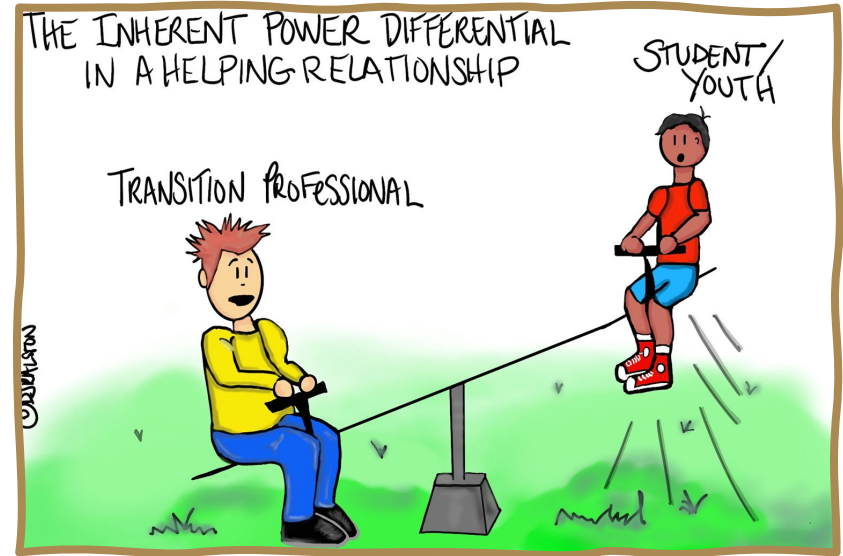# Why are we talking about becoming an Adult Ally?
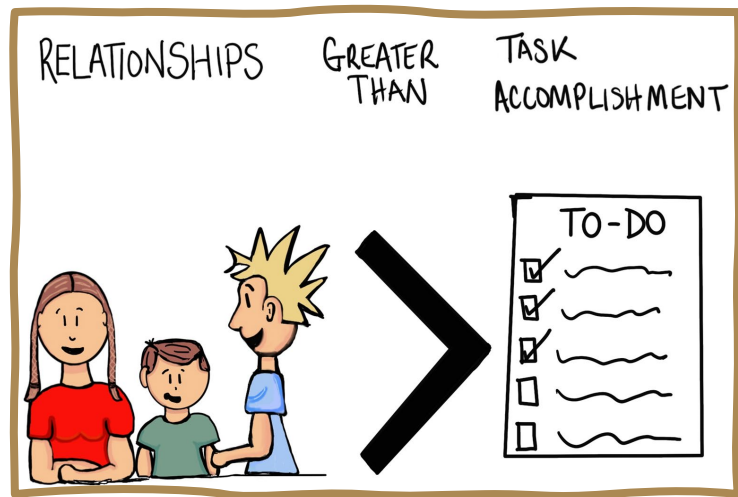
How do we become an Adult Ally?

Adult Allyship Starts with Awareness and Acknowledgement

- Power Dynamics in Helping Relationships

- Power Dynamics in Transition-Helping Relationships

- The Righting Reflex

# Adult Allyship Actively Addresses the Needs of Students and Youth

- Move from power over to power with

- Humble Inquiry - Asking instead of Telling

- Authenticity

- Motivational Interviewing - An empowering style of conversation

Action: Engage in Critical Reflection – 1

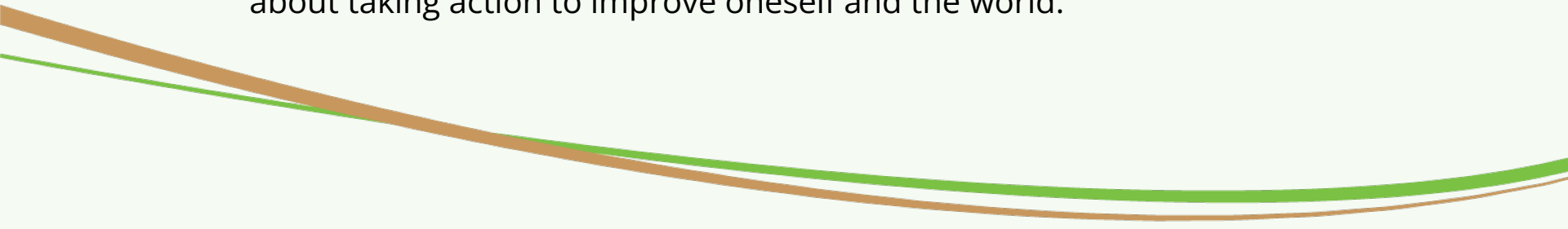**What does this mean?**

- Critical self-reflection is the process of analyzing and evaluating one's experiences, beliefs, and actions to develop a deeper understanding of oneself and the world.

- I'm not ableist/racist/homophobic etc. why do I need this?

- Everyone has implicit biases, engaging in critical self-reflection helps mitigate bias, promote, learning, growth and professional development.
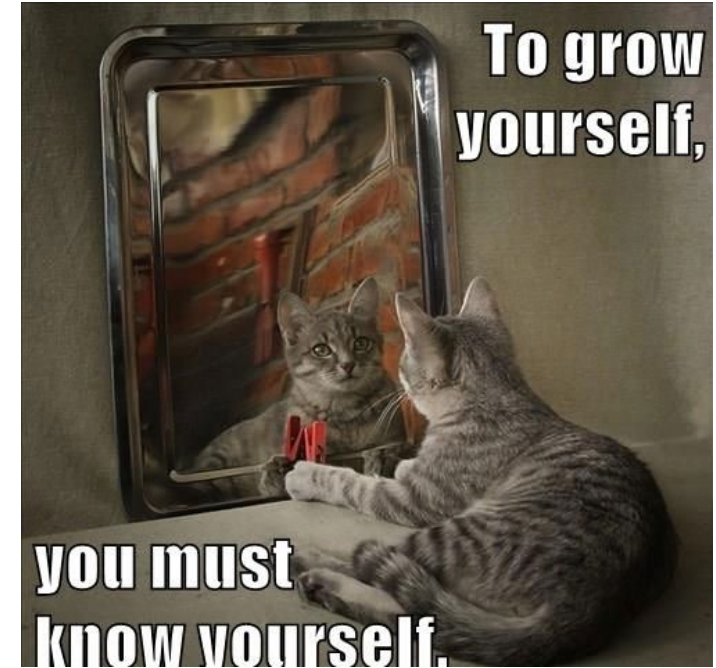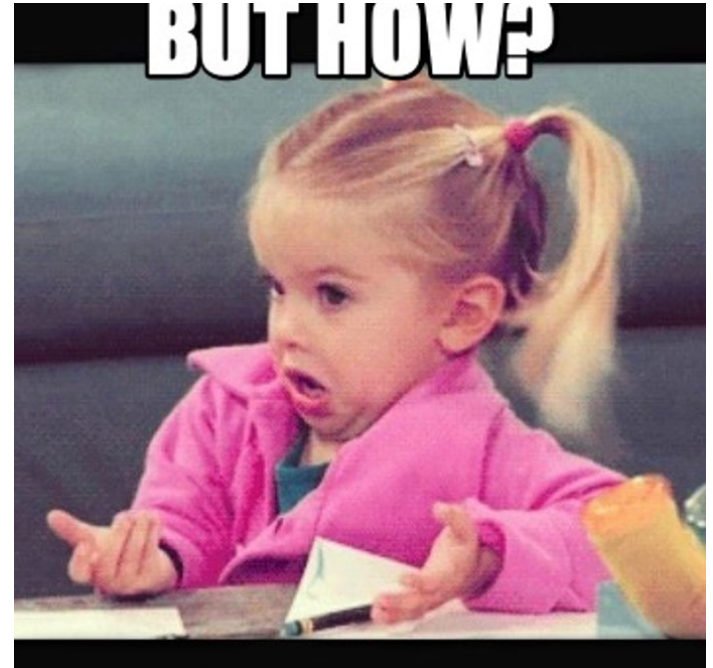
Action: Engage in Critical Reflection – 2

Critical Reflection Key Characteristics:

❑ **Self-awareness:** Critical reflection involves a high level of self-awareness, as individuals examine their own thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.

❑ **Openness to feedback:** Critical reflection requires individuals to be open to feedback from others and willing to consider alternative viewpoints.

❑ **Analytical thinking:** Critical reflection involves a process of analyzing and evaluating one's own experiences, beliefs, and actions.

❑ **Action-oriented:** Critical reflection is not just about thinking, but also about taking action to improve oneself and the world.

# Action: Engage in Critical Reflection – 3

- ❑ Create a reflective space
- ❑ Set aside time
- ❑ Review your experiences
- ❑ Identify patterns
- ❑ Consider alternative perspectives
- ❑ Set goals for growth
- ❑ Seek support
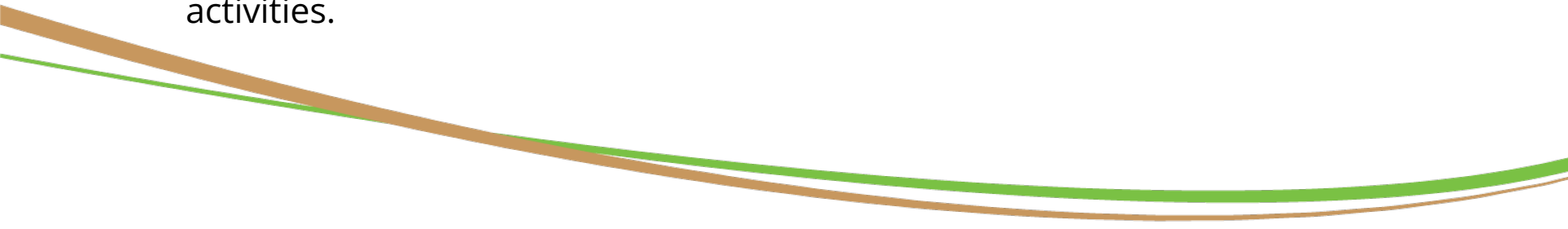
Action: Engage in Critical Reflection – 4

Consciously engage in critical self-reflection when working with a student/youth – Ask Yourself:

- ❑ What and who are controlling the narrative in this situation?

- ❑ What do you know about the student/youth you are working with? How do you know that? Why is that knowledge valid? Are there other sources of knowledge that should be considered?

- ❑ How is success being defined? Who is defining it?

- ❑ Why is one course of action recommended and not another? Who benefits most from the course of action recommended?
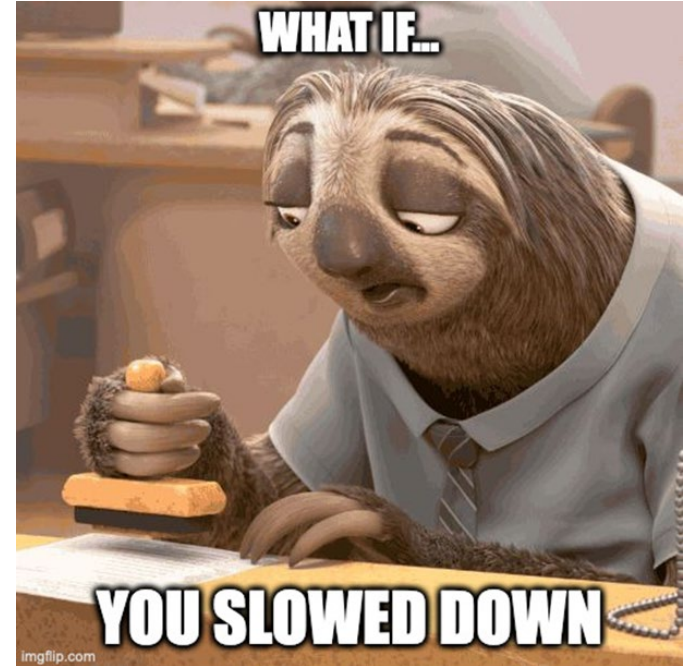
Action: From Power Over to Power With - 1

According to our partners at the **RAISE** Center:

- One of the key elements of youth engagement and creating conditions to foster inclusion is creating a space where youth feel their actions and voice have value.

- Part of creating that environment is making sure the adults supporting those youth change their mindset from being the adult "in charge" to being an adult ally that works in partnership with the youth to achieve group goals or activities.

Action: From Power Over to Power With – 2

According to the [RAISE](#) Center:

- Authentic youth engagement is present when young adults are provided opportunities to consistently participate in decision making, take ownership of work, initiate conversations and plans, and able to give feedback that impacts programs, services, and/or systems that serve them.
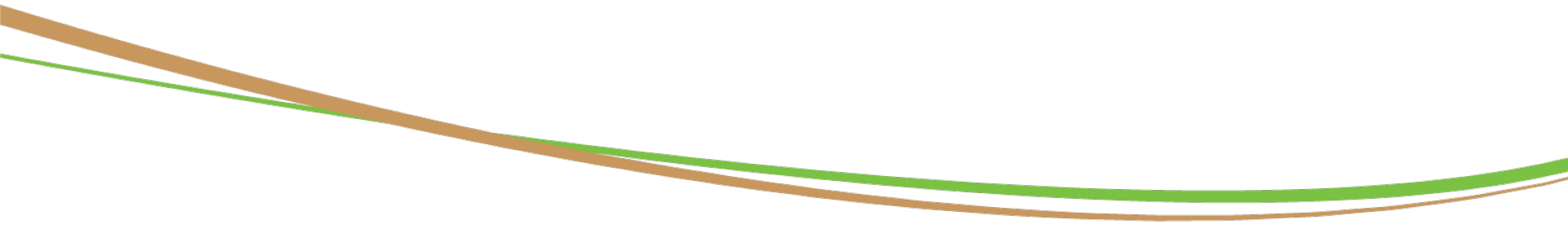
Action: Suggestions from the RAISE Center: - 1

Develop a Youth Friendly Culture
- be flexible and creative in finding ways for youth to engage in services

Provide Information in Youth Friendly Ways
- have meetings in accessible locations, both virtually and in person
- ensure information is easy to read and understand
- use appropriate language, don't talk down to youth or use unfamiliar acronyms or complex jargon

Include Youth Voice at Every Level
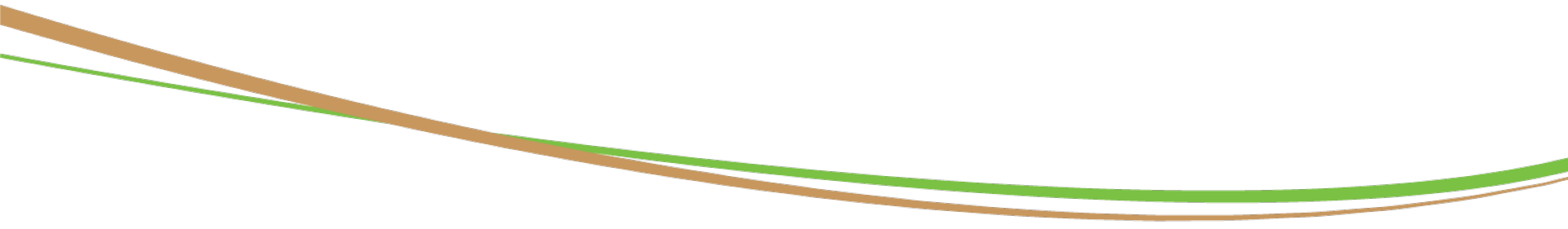- get youth involved in making decisions and supporting their thoughts/ideas

Partner with Youth-Serving Organizations
- Ask yourself questions such as: Where do youth in our community spend time, Who are the local experts we can learn from, What programs already exist that we can support, etc., and connect youth to these entities.
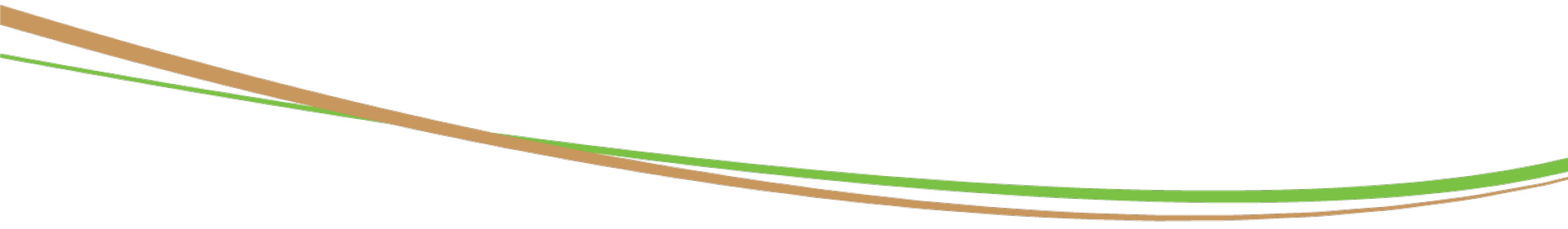
Build Relationships with Youth

Action: Suggestions from the **RAISE** Center: - 2

- ❑ Have meetings outside of school hours.
- ❑ Provide a webinar or call-in option with an adequate sound system.
- ❑ Send meeting reminders in a preferred, accessible form of communication.
- ❑ Have meetings in an accessible location: ADA compliant, with parking or near public transport.

Action: What you need to know about working with students and youth – according to YETI

- ❑ Build in time to recognize understand, and use, the student/youth perspective.

- ❑ Be open to student/youth's ideas and feedback even if it is difficult to hear

- ❑ Give students/youth tangible things to work on

- ❑ Take a young person at their word

- ❑ Respect boundaries set by young folks

Action: What you need to know about working with students and youth – according to YETI – 2

- ❑ Take time to teach students/youth the system(s) including providing lists of typical acronyms.

- ❑ Youth are EXPERTS on their own experiences

- ❑ Take time to learn about what the young folks who are being invited in teams/spaces with adults are passionate about

- ❑ Listen to and honor accommodation requests

- ❑ Social interactions and discussions are important

Can you share examples or best practices of what your agency is doing to support

Center for Innovative Training in Vocational Rehabilitation (CIT-VR)

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- On-demand Webinars
- Learning Pathways
- Training Resources
- Training Needs Surveys

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Contact Information

Linda Hedenblad
linda2u@gwu.edu

DJ Ralston
djralston@gwu.edu

Sandi Miller, M.S.
sjmiller11@gwu.edu

John Walsh, M.Ed., CRC
jcwalsh@gwu.edu