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Plenary Session: Being Our Own Advocates: Youth and Young Adults as Partners in Planning, Evaluation, and Policy Making

Juliet LaMonaca: Welcome to our presentation on youth and young adults getting involved in systems of care. We are going to share with you some of the different ways that youth are getting involved on a local, state, and national level. First, I would like you to look on your table. There is a pamphlet on there that asks you to list some of the pros and cons of working with young people. What are some of the barriers that you see with working with young people? If you would like to take a minute and fill out some of the concerns that you have, or also if you have any questions, go ahead and fill those out. Janet will be walking around during the presentation and collecting your responses. Then we will discuss those at the end.

There are many different areas for youth to be involved in systems of care, starting in their local communities. Most of the people here today are going to talk about what they do locally. From the Devereux Children's Treatment Network, we have Antonio Chambers, LeRoy McLeod, and Cheri Villines, and from Teens with Choices in Milwaukee, we have Shante Packer and Verneesha Banks. And also from the Parent Support Network in Rhode Island, we have Jessika Glick.

I'll just tell you a little bit about what I do. I work more on the national level. I first got involved years ago. I presented at a conference at Georgetown University, at one of their training institutions. From there I knew somebody on the Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health board, and I got nominated to serve there. So I have been on their board for about three years. I have had an opportunity to go around and present at a lot of national conferences, basically talking about how youth should be involved in advocating for themselves and really getting involved in the system.

One of the things that we have done with the Federation of Families—on the board we have four youth representatives who help advise the board on youth issues. We also started a youth committee so that we could recruit other youth around the country who were doing different things in their community to get involved. Then they can also help advise with national policy. Some of the functions of the youth committee are advising the board. We also have a newsletter where we have a whole page dedicated to youth. We can write about whatever we want. Youth can submit artwork and drawings. I know a lot of other national newsletters are starting to do that, too. We also plan activities. We are trying to plan different activities for youth that come to national conferences, so that they can get involved while they are there and have more fun in the conferences instead of just sitting in presentations all day. We also try to do some fund raising, because, as with any organization, you need to do fund raising to be able to do your activities. We also try to go around and present at as many conferences as possible. We are trying to set up a system where we can also advocate for youth on a national level and get more involved with that.

There are a number of other national organizations that do involve youth in their planning. I know Georgetown University has youth advisors on their board, and they also have youth presenters at all of their conferences. The American Institute for Research has a youth coordinator position. They have a youth full-time on staff there that helps do things in the office. And also I recently heard that the federal government has a leadership conference for youth with disabilities. People can go and talk about job experiences and things.

With that, I think I will go ahead and get started. The people from Devereux are going to go first. We have Antonio, LeRoy, and Cheri.

Cheri Villines: Good morning. I am one of the staff liaisons to the Teen Advisory Board at the Devereux Georgia Treatment Network. I'll tell you a little bit more about our work, but I want to introduce some other key players who are here from Devereux. Amy Waltron, who is down here in front, is another staff liaison, a therapist at Devereux. And Adam Pomerenz is another staff person from Devereux. It took a lot of assistance from a lot of folks at Devereux to make it possible for us to be here today. I am going to let our panelists say more about themselves when they speak. I just wanted to give you first a brief overview of what our program is. And then in keeping with our philosophy that the Teen Board really belongs to the teens, I want our panelists to really tell you the majority of information we have to share this morning.

The Devereux Georgia Treatment Network began as a residential treatment facility. We continue to provide residential treatment for about 125 adolescents. It was in our residential component that we initially started the Teen Advisory Board. It grew out of a project we had. We do an annual client satisfaction survey, and I'm sure lots of people in this room have been involved in that whole process of client satisfaction. We decided that we wanted to ask the teens in the treatment program to help us develop the instrument that would be used for determining their level of satisfaction with services. We had a three month process of sitting down with a group of consulting teens to develop a survey instrument. For those of you who are researchers, I will tell you it was a very interesting process. We ended up with a 25-page instrument. These teens wanted to ask a lot of questions. They wanted an opportunity to talk about a lot of things in regards to the program.

That was the beginning point for our Teen Board. During the three months when that group was meeting, a lot of program issues came up, and administrators and campus folks would come and say, "Let's take this to the kids and see what the kids have to say about this idea, about this or not." We realized that we really needed to make the teen voice an institutional part of

what we are doing at Devereux. So that is how we began our Teen Advisory Board.

We are going to send around a sign-up sheet. We have information on the specifics about how we recruit the folks who are on the board, how we do elections, how our board operates, and we would be happy to send you information on that. We didn't want to spend all our time today talking about that, but we do have it, and we will send it around if you are interested in that kind of information. Right now what I would like to do, though, is introduce LeRoy, who is the current chairperson of our Teen Advisory Board at Devereux, and he is going to share with you some of the current activities and kinds of issues that the Teen Board is involved in currently.

LeRoy McLeod: Some of the ways that we've helped the program evolve and come into taking major steps in making everything better for everyone is through the client satisfaction survey and through the new point card systems that are set up to help benefit not only the staff, but the clients there, also. Some of the major issues we have been dealing with lately are religious issues, with people trying to participate in religions that not everyone knows about. Not everyone shares what is going on, so they are afraid of the religions and what not. We are working on creating a new student handbook that is more evolved and related to the students so they understand everything in the program.

Antonio Chambers: I was the past chairperson of the Devereux Teen Advisory Board before LeRoy. The training I received from Devereux helped me move on to two positions out in society—in the community, working with the community in my state, and with the Georgia Parent Support Network. I am a member of them. It helped me do more self-advocating, speaking out for what I need, also, what I am asking for in a program, what the program needs as a whole, what it might need. The training I received from Devereux and the Teen Advisory Board helped me out in the community because I was able to take it out with me and use it for me as far as advocating for myself and for my peers and the program. On the Georgia Parent Support Network, I was nominated last week to vice-president. On the Federation of Families, I serve on the Youth Committee along with Juliet and Jessika. I

haven't made a board position there yet, but it is still fun to be on the national board, and I feel comfortable doing it, because I was able, like I said, to get the training from Devereux. It doesn't happen overnight. Anything we do, anything that we accomplish, does not happen overnight. It usually takes a while to get things done.

Cheri Villines: I want to tell you a little about the guiding philosophy that we have in terms of the Teen Advisory Board at Devereux. The first thing I would say to those of you who have been attempting to create a teen board, a consumer board, is that if it is not working, you need to look at your staff. Typically, when the program isn't working, you need to look at the staff and the philosophy rather than saying the kids can't do it. We come from a position of assuming competence. It has been an interesting process as we have gone around the country and trained folks and talked with various people about the whole notion of empowering teen consumers, to listen to what people have to say about teens. And probably you will see some of those things on the overhead when we compile the barriers that you are all talking about. But we've heard people say things about teen consumers that would be politically incorrect to say about any other groups. Things like, "Well, they really wouldn't understand what goes on in these board meetings; it would be over their heads. They wouldn't be able to really take an active role. It would be overwhelming to them. They would be disruptive. They would be a disruptive influence."

So we have heard those kind of things, and we have come from the position of saying that we assume that the kids have the competency to really have input, valuable input, into shaping the programs that are going to serve them. We have moved from an assumption of competence to really an expectation of expertise. Not only do we think that the kids are competent to participate in developing programs and to provide us with the input we need, we assume that they are the experts, as far as what is the best way to solve program dilemmas.

A current issue that we are really struggling with, that LeRoy mentioned, is the opportunity for kids to practice their religious beliefs on a residential treatment campus when you have 125 kids with 125

different backgrounds. And we don't know how to solve this dilemma. So we are looking to the teens to help us figure out a way that all of the kids, from all of the different backgrounds that we have, are going to be able to practice their own spiritual practices within the context of a residential treatment center. I think that is an important thing to say to anyone who is interested in starting a group like this. You have to look at your philosophy, and you really do have to come with the sense that the folks that you are working with will be competent. Then you need to train them and give them the skills.

We do run our board like a board meeting. We say all the time, once you have learned to serve on the Teen Advisory Board, you can serve on the board of Coca Cola, because it is the same process. You have an agenda, you take minutes, you have officers that you elect. We follow the agenda. Unfortunately, we left behind LeRoy's gavel. He is a very skillful director of our board meetings. He is not at all hesitant to use the gavel on the table, or occasionally on other board members, if they are speaking out of turn. So we really have reinforced the notion that everyone participates and that everyone has something important to say, and that everyone gets an opportunity to say what they need to say. Again, I would say, look at your staff, think about your guiding philosophy, and then allow the teens themselves to move how things are going to go.

The final thing I wanted to talk about is the impact that we have seen. I think there has been a significant impact in terms of our own program. I wish we had been able to do research. If there are researchers out there who are looking for a project, we are a project looking for researchers. We saw anecdotally, and we have a lot of stories about the decreasing use of restrictive measures. You all know what the code word is for that in terms of a residential program. Once we began to empower the kids, to talk about the things that needed to be changed in the program, we began to see kids within the program buying into the treatment. Their own treatment began progressing much more rapidly. So we have seen significant impact on the program.

We have also seen the individuals, as Antonio said, leave our program, go back to their home communities, and make an impact. We are going to lose LeRoy

this week; he is going to be discharged. He is going back to Maine, and we would love to connect him with any of you all who are from Maine so he can continue to do some advocacy work in that state. That's where we anticipate that the kids are going to have a really significant impact, back in their own home communities talking about the array of services.

There has also been a significant impact on staff in terms of attitude. I will tell you there were barriers initially, and there continue to be. People thought it was a great idea to have a Teen Advisory Board until the executive director got the first letter saying, "We don't like something, and we want to know why it is this way." Then people began to say, "Who is on that board and how did they get there and who decided it?" And we said, "Well, the kids all decided it. That is how it happened." So we have encountered some of that, but we are also seeing the change in staff as they begin to look at the competency and expertise that our teens have developed.

I want to share one quick story just in terms of functioning, and then we will let the other folks talk. No one likes parliamentary procedures. Those of you all who have to deal with it in board meetings, no one likes it, least of all our teens. But they have learned parliamentary procedure, and they move their agenda, and they handle parliamentary procedures. But we never have a second for any motion that occurs.

LeRoy McLeod: Well, the second usually rolls on to four or five or six and then everyone saying, "Okay, let's do it."

Cheri Villines: What we end up with is, "I second it, I third it, I fourth it, I fifth it," and basically the vote is taken by the seconding of the motion. And it is clearly participatory. Everyone wants to be involved when there is a motion on the table. I think it might be something for us to look at it for our own grown-up advisory board, because it does encourage everyone to participate and be a part of the process when they are seconding, thirding, and fourthing every motion.

Juliet LaMonaca: Janet and I are going to go around and start collecting any questions that you have. So if you want to take a moment during the presentation, we will go ahead and move on to Shante and Verneasha.

Shante Packer: My name is Shante Packer, and I am from Milwaukee, Wisconsin. I am here on behalf of Teens with Choices. The Teens with Choices group began when we started wraparound. Wraparound started providing services for teens, and we thought that teens weren't getting heard, so we thought that we would provide services for youth to be heard in the community. Wraparound thought that it would be best if we only had teens from wraparound joining the Teens with Choices group, but we thought that no one in the group wanted to be labeled as "wraparound kids," so we decided that we would have it open for all kids throughout the community.

After about six months in our group, we decided that we would try to be peer mentors. As we started trying to become peer mentors, we found out that kids really weren't involved. So as a group, we decided we would be better known if we gave back to the community that once helped us. The reason I thought of that was because I was in the system once, and I thought if I gave back to the community, it would be a way of saying "thank you" to those who helped me. We do monthly activities and fund raisers and volunteer work. For our fun activities, we do bowling, car washes, skating, and things like that. I think one of the reasons youth come into our group is because they are not forced to come, and they like giving back to the community as well as to other youth. It is our goal, as youth, to try to get more support from the adults in the community so that we can try to be peer mentors for each other.

Verneesha Banks: I am actually the facilitator of the Wraparound Milwaukee Teens with Choices group. I want to start by saying, Shante, you did an excellent job. She was really nervous about how to present all the information. I want to commend her for being the youngest advocate at Teens with Choices. She is 14 years old, and she is up here representing the whole group. That is excellent.

I think the most important thing that she spoke to that came out of the Teens with Choices youth group is that we started by trying to develop a peer advocacy process for children involved in Wraparound Milwaukee. And what happened with that is that we didn't receive a whole lot of community support as far as finances and just bodies available to help train indi-

viduals. So we regrouped and talked with the group. They didn't want to lose the group, because they really enjoyed meeting and they really enjoyed that process of normalization for them, that they were labeled as just "wraparound kids," that they had more to give back to the community than just to have services poured into their lives. So I didn't want to let the group go. And what the group turned into was basically advocates for our own community. We do reach out to different community organizations, and we try to participate in any volunteer activity that we can. We do volunteer fund raising for other organizations in the community. Right now, that is the primary focus of the group, to give back to the community.

One of the things that Shante spoke about is our hope that after being here and experiencing what Devereux has done, which I think is an excellent thing, I am very motivated to go back and demand that Milwaukee, Wisconsin get on board as far as having youth ownership and access in the wrap-around process. I think that Shante is going to be very instrumental in doing that. I think it is important now that we really recognize the benefits of having youth involved in developing services and not just using them as tokens because they are cute or they look nice on stage. Thank you.

Jessika Glick: I have a bit of a unique role in my organization, because I am coming from two places. I run a youth group, and I am a youth coordinator, but I also come from the system as a consumer. My program itself is a lot like the youth group in Milwaukee. It involved a lot of community service and leadership and things like that. I am going to talk a little bit about my background and how I got involved. When I was about 17, or almost 18, I started volunteering at the Parents Support Network [PSN]. I was going through a lot myself then, and our executive director, Lisa Conklin, was starting to put together a youth group for the kids of the parents who were receiving support from our organization. I ended up starting to get involved in there, and I was taking a lot of time then to learn about myself and my mental illness and to help my friends who were going through the same things. So when I got involved at the youth group, it was really easy for me to move into a leadership position. It was really empowering, and it really helped me get through a lot of my own stuff.

That first year we made a video, a documentary on teen mental health. We took five kids to the Federation conference and had them present there and be on a panel to answer questions. And after that, they decided that they wanted to be an advisory board. We started to set that up but didn't end up getting the commitment toward it, so we started moving in a different direction.

I worked on and off with PSN for the next couple of years, going through my own stuff. I sat on the PSN board of directors for a short amount of time, but generally I was just doing volunteer work. Occasionally, I would get a stipend to do it, which definitely helped my participation, being a poor teenager at the time. I still am poor. I was working other odd jobs, like at ice cream shops and things like that. I was always really good at getting fired from jobs, too. But after a fiasco at an ice cream shop, I went to Lisa Conklin, and I said, "I don't want to do this anymore, I don't want services. I want to do something that will help me more and be more fun and that I can help other people with." So I asked her if I could have a job, and Lisa worked really hard to find the money to pay me for my position. She ended up writing a youth leadership position into the family leadership grant to support me for 20 hours a week.

We were starting from scratch then for a youth group. That's what I did. I got some youth together, we created a mission statement, rules, guidelines, goals, things like that. We just started from ground zero again, recruiting youth. The youth came from different organizations. The parents that our organization was supporting, their youth would get involved. Some of the other agencies would refer youth occasionally, or kids would bring their friends a lot. So we made rules. What we do is a lot of community service. They have done a ton of great stuff. We hold an Easter egg hunt every year. Last year, we ended up with over 100 little kids involved in a park, and kids dressed up as bunny rabbits and took Polaroids and all kinds of stuff. I didn't dress as a bunny rabbit. They are really into doing a lot of fun things.

Funding is a huge problem for us because we are a nonprofit organization, so it is hard enough for my position to be supported, never mind giving us money to do stuff. We are always scrounging for money. We

have done things like yard sales and bake sales and stuff like that. I didn't expect to be presenting to such a large group, either. I am very adamant about the fact that they [the youth] pick all of the activities that we do, and we will sit down and have planning meetings. And that they tell me what they want, because if I go ahead and do something, even if it was something that they would normally like, if I do it without their permission, they don't want to do it. It is important that they are part of the whole process.

I have really strong bonds with a lot of the kids. We are really close. I am like a mentor to a lot of them. I get paged at all hours with crying teenagers. It is great, because now that I am becoming an adult—I am going to be 22—it is really important for me to be in this position because I have been through what they have been through. I am still growing, going through the whole growth process and trying to grow up, so they don't think of me as somebody who is trying to push my ideals on them. I've had kids who have said, "My mom wants me to go to therapy, but I want to come see you." I am like, "I am not a therapist." I have one girl who no matter how many times I say it to her, she tells people, "I have got to go see my counselor today." I am like, "I am not your counselor."

Some of the training I have received, I definitely could have used a lot more of it. Because my role was so new to the organization, nobody really had any idea how to make the whole thing go. I received some service coordination training about system of care, and that was helpful. But I think the most helpful thing was that I took a respite training, which had nothing to do directly with my job, but to get certified for respite. That helped me more than anything with learning how to deal with the kids, crisis intervention, things like that. Stuff that I just wouldn't have known normally, things that I could have used training-wise, in coming into this as a teenager. I am a student on and off, but just not being educated directly for this role, I probably could have used a lot more support with things like how to do outreach, how to make phone calls to other organizations, things like that. Things that you wouldn't normally think that you don't know how to do. And I realized I didn't, but I've grown so much and learned so much from doing what I do. I've become a really great advocate for the kids if they need me to be, or I've taught them how to

do it. I've gone to IEPs [Individualized Education Programs] with the kids where I haven't had to say a word. They have begged me to come, and I haven't had to say a word because they knew what they were doing, and they didn't need me there at all except for support. I've always been a strong advocate for myself, mostly because I am outspoken and very stubborn. So I think that has rubbed off on my kids.

I am just going to talk a little bit about how when I came to PSN it was an office full of moms. I have eight or nine moms, and one of them is in the audience—Kathy. I have lots of moms; they are always on me about stuff. When I came into the office it was the first time. They weren't used to having youth around, especially someone who is just like one of their kids, who is working with them in their office. So it created a lot of—not difficulties, but it was a learning experience for everybody. I really think that our office is different now because of me. I remember initially I would have trouble. I know that everybody loves their kids, but sometimes they get carried away and start saying things about how their kids need medication, or should be doing this, or this disorder, and I think I opened everybody's eyes to sensitivity around talking about that kind of stuff. These are your kids, and maybe they don't want you saying these things, or maybe you should listen to them when they tell you they don't like their medication. I think definitely the office operates in a different way because of that. I've said things to people that I've heard them repeat to parents, and it makes me feel really good, because it makes me feel like I've definitely convinced the people around me to be more open to the youth voice in general. I guess that is it. Thank you.

Cheri Villines I want to pick up on the funding issue because it is a struggle for everyone who is working with youth to try and get the necessary funding to hold the groups together, to bring them to conferences like this, and to put them where they need to be to get them to the right tables. We have talked about bake sales and car washes, but I think it is something that we need to be talking about and questioning on a whole other level.

We had someone who came to the Teen Advisory Board in Georgia. She was on her way to Washington, DC to review grant requests for dealing with issues

around teen pregnancy, and she wanted input from our teen board. The first thing they said to her was, "How many teens are going to sit on the grant review committee?" I think those are the tough kinds of questions we need to be asking, so that when money is being allocated for various programs, the kids are also there saying, "Where is the money to make sure that the youth are able to go and participate in all of the various trainings?"

I thought what Jessika said is really significant, about it bringing a whole other level of awareness as a professional in terms of how you speak about things when there is a teen consumer sitting in the committee meeting with you. And I think that is the way we should be thinking about things all the time. It really focuses that attention for the professionals. So I think funding is a significant issue, and I think we need to always look around and say, "Where are the youth?" I would be curious, just with a show of hands, how many of you all in here are involved with programs that serve kids with emotional and behavioral difficulties? Keep your hands up. How many of you have teen participation in the programs and policies and procedures of your program?

We were asked to speak about future goals. Our goal is that within five years the hand of every person that serves in those kind of programs will stay up when we say, "What about the youth voice?" Because it is incredibly significant, and if you think about it, we are talking about that on so many levels, but as I said, we see the teen consumers as the last frontier. People still talk about them the way we would talk about other groups we wished to exclude from various tables in the past. We are here to say that that is not appropriate, and we are training kids to speak up and say, "That's not appropriate, we want to come to this table, we want to be there with you."

Janet Walker: We are going to start with a few of the questions while Juliet and I are working on the list there. Question: "What is the best part about serving on a teen board, and what have you learned from being here at this conference that you will take back to your home communities?"

LeRoy McLeod: I've learned that it is not really easy sitting up here with all these people looking at me. I've

learned that it takes a lot of responsibility and respect and trust in yourself to be able to sit up here and do something like this for other people. The best part about serving for my peers and the people that I care about is the fact that I know things are getting done for them. And when they have a problem, they can come to me and trust in me that I'll help take care of it.

Verneesa Banks: I guess what I've learned from being here is that there is support in the community to have youth involvement. Like I said before, I am going to be on a mission when I get back to Wisconsin. We talk a lot about family empowerment, and getting the families involved, and having them develop their own plans, especially in the wraparound model. But we don't do that with our youth. So my mission when I get back is to just really push Wisconsin to hold true to what they are saying, that we really need to have the youth to be a part of that plan development. It is their future that we are talking about.

Janet Walker: Question: "Is there substance abuse treatment in your group, and if so, did this contribute to religion as an issue that had to be dealt with?"

Cheri Villines: I'm not sure I understand the question. Maybe if we could get a little clarification on the question?

Janet Walker: If the person who asked that question wants to come to one of the mikes and clarify.

Audience Participant: I've been to all-day trainings at one time or another on the controversy and the conflicts between the mental health treatment way of doing things and the Alcoholics Anonymous [AA] way of doing things. And nothing ever gets resolved from going to those. They just say there is a problem, basically. And I don't know what I even feel about it. But so often substances are involved in why people are in treatment programs, and I just wondered if that was a part of yours, and if this was part of the issue?

Cheri Villines: I am not a substance abuse person. Wherever you have teenagers you have substance use issues. We are not primarily a substance abuse treatment facility; we are primarily a psychiatric treatment facility. So I can't address that issue. But I would like to address the issue of spirituality. I think for a long

time within the mental health tradition we have felt very uncomfortable looking at spiritual issues. Yet, if you look at our kids, faith is one of the most significant things about them. It is one of the most significant things to them. That is what we are trying to struggle with and come to grips with at Devereux. We have kids from a Native American background, we have Muslim kids, we have kids who practice Wicca, we have kids who practice the more mainstream, traditional religions, all living together. We are really struggling with it. We are interested in any input, suggestions that folks have about things that have worked in facilities where they have been. So I don't think I can address the issue that you talked about, the split between the AA and mental health model. But I think the whole issue of spirituality, spirituality within a treatment context, is a really significant issue for us as the professionals who work with these kids to deal with. We don't have answers, so we are doing what we typically do, saying to the kids, "Help us figure this out. We know that we can. We know that there are solutions. Help us figure out what they are." Maybe next year we will have some ideas for you on what we are trying within our context. Right now it is just something that the kids have surfaced, and said, "We don't like where things are, we want some changes." We are trying to figure out how to get there.

Juliet LaMonaca: "What specific things have you done at Devereux as far as policies that have made the biggest changes?"

Cheri Villines: We are conferring about what things we think are important. We've made some significant changes in terms of our point cards, which is the system of focusing on behavior for the folks in our treatment program. I would have to say the most significant policy change is that we expect that the consumer will serve on every committee within the structure of our program. And we are training them and being sure that they are at the right tables. That is really a significant policy change.

I want to quote one of our elder statesmen, one of our earliest teen board members. We were asked initially if we would like to have a building naming contest, because we have a campus, and we have buildings. So we took that to the teen board, "Would we like to name the buildings?" And after we go through, "Oh,

yes, I am going to call it the Antonio Building, and I am going to call it the LeRoy Building,” and people getting excited about having buildings named after them, one of the early teen board members said, “I am not about the names on the buildings here; I am about what goes on in them. And that is what I want to address, and that’s what I want to focus on.” So I think it has been a significant policy change that we are saying we want teens to serve on all of the committees that operate at Devereux. We have a standing hospital committee that looks at everything from the facilities to the different treatment modalities. That is a very significant policy change.

We’ve looked at smaller things—to us maybe smaller things. To the folks who live on our campus, very large things. One of the really significant discussions that Antonio presided over was what kind of movies should be shown in a residential treatment facility. And the discussion—we have it on videotape—was very animated. He needed a gavel that day because it became very heated. People had a lot of opinions. So we also look at those kinds of day-to-day things.

But I think the most significant policy change is that we want the teens at the table. I have a hard time not saying kids. We were corrected about that a couple of years ago at a Federation of Families conference. And I will have to share with you one story about our teen board, because someone challenged us from the audience and said, “I find it demeaning to be called a kid.” My own kids say that to me, “Don’t call me a kid.” But it is kind of the term that we have come to deal with. And he asked our teen board members, “Aren’t you offended when she calls you kids?” And they sort of went down the line and did what you would expect them to do with the staff sitting right there, they said, “No, I am not really upset by it.” But one young woman said, “You know, I’ve learned since coming to Devereux, I never have been a kid, and I need to be one. So I am not all offended by it.” So I always think about that when I am using that word and if there are folks in the audience who don’t like that, please forgive us. But we have sort of worked it out among ourselves that that seems like a good way to reference our folks.

Juliet LaMonaca: Another popular question that people in the audience wanted to know was how to go

about setting up something like this in their own community, how to go about funding, especially with wraparound services, and also how to sell the idea of getting youth involved to other people who are in the mental health system and juvenile justice system.

Jessika Glick: I’ll touch on that a little bit. I think you need to find the kids first, and I think a lot of times they will do it without the funding or they will be willing to get enough funding to do what they want to do. They are very resourceful. I’m sure all of you know that your kids can get money out of you when they want it.

Juliet LaMonaca: [Question not recorded.]

Cheri Villines: I definitely am. I went through the mental health system, and to me that was very motivating to get involved in doing that as a career. So after I left the mental health system, I went on and got a bachelor’s in psychology and have worked in a lot of different treatment centers, which has been a really interesting experience, after being involved on the other side of the fence.

Jessika Glick: I have no idea what I want to be when I grow up, and I think that is okay. As far as school, I am technically a liberal arts major, but I am always taking classes that I think will help me in my job, things like community service classes. I am going to take a public speaking class this semester, which I should have done already, because I am not feeling very eloquent today.

Antonio Chambers: I am going to continue on in mental health, since I enjoy it since I came out of the system. I want to be on the other side helping people come up, since I know the way. I want to go on and become a police officer. But I think mental health plays a part in being a police officer, because you deal with all kinds of people. The majority of the people that they deal with are mentally ill. Just being educated in it, I think I would play a pretty good role in becoming a police officer. I think I am going to go on.

LeRoy McLeod: I, myself, am an artist, and where I like to help people, I am considering going to school for art and therapy and becoming an art therapist to help young individuals.

Audience Participant: I wanted to ask if on your customer satisfaction surveys there are any patterns about the strengths of your staff. I am a line worker, so I want to know, what should I be?

Cheri Villines: We do have those questions on there, and if you will put your name on that list that is going around, we will send you a copy of our survey.

Audience Participant: One of the things that I found in working with a youth group, the biggest complaint is that they weren't involved in any of the grant writing. They weren't considered as part of the grant writing team. Have any of you had that experience, or is there any intention of bringing you in on any of that?

Verneesha Banks: We did try to write a grant for Teens with Choices, but the problem that we ran across is that—myself included—we had no experience in grant writing, and we were turned down. I did try to solicit grant writers to help the teens do it, but to be real, we didn't have any support in that area, either. We didn't have any funds to pay for it, so people weren't willing to just help us write a grant.

Jessika Glick: I was just going to say, if I get grants in, if they are not based upon the program that I already have in place, if they are to do something a little bit different, I generally will talk it over with the kids. I am a great writer, but I have not had enough experience in grant writing, and I have been trying to get more help to do that. I recently worked on a grant that we thought was done well, but apparently was not. So it is kind of discouraging in that way.

Audience Participant: My name is Turi Tinker, and I am from Birmingham, Alabama. I am the president of a youth support group down there called Youth Millennium. We started about June of '99, our anniversary will be coming up in a few months. And I was wondering what kind of activities do you do, in particular?

LeRoy McLeod: Our teen board has done a bunch of things. Like last year we raised money for the prom, to help all the kids, not just for the teen board members. We do it for pretty much everyone. We got a horse and buggy for them. The latest trip that we did was to Planet Hollywood. We took everyone out to eat.

Audience Participant: I was out here in Portland and I guess I was the only one my age down here. I am in the first percentile, I guess. It is good to see that you all are doing things like that. I thought I was the only one. I'd just like to give you great applause.

Audience Participant: My name is Rod McKenzie, and I am from Birmingham, Alabama. I am the ambassador for the group that Turi is with. When we started our youth group about a year ago, we did some things you guys were talking about. We let the kids make most of the decisions. One of the decisions that they made first was the name for their group, which was Youth Millennium. They all took a vote, seconded it and thirded it, like you said earlier. And then we went on from there. They came up with a mission statement. They said to themselves, "What are we going to be in the community? We need to have a mission statement so people can see what we are about." Somewhere in this year we will be getting T-shirts made with our mission statement on the back and the Youth Millennium logo. And the kids involved in the group are proud of the group, and they don't feel that they are labeled or anything like that, and they enjoy coming together. We serve three different counties, so when they come together we get kids from various schools from our district. They come together as a core group, and we discuss ideas and different causes.

One of the other things they wanted to do was have guest speakers come in and speak with them on various topics. They wanted to do activities in the community as well as plan fun activities on the side. So twice a month we have a meeting where we take care of all our business. We let them conduct their own meeting where they have an agenda, they review minutes from the last meetings, and then we discuss business that is current and what we are going to do in the next couple of months coming up. Turi is the chairperson. We have a co-chairperson, a sister to him. We have our own secretary, we have our own treasurer, and we have our own activity chairperson. We let them collaborate as a group and they come up with their activities, what they want to do for the month. They vote, and we do a fun activity, and we adopted a sister living facility in one of our neighborhoods, where we go once a month, and our kids participate in activities and games. They play checkers and cards, whatever they want to do with the residents

there. The residents enjoy their company. It is hard for me to get the kids to leave. We do that once a month. Basically what we are trying to do now, I guess being here, learning other ways to come up with ideas, and the only thing we thought of was a fund raiser, like car washes, something like that.

Cheri Villines: We would like to get your card. While we were sitting here, what I would like to see is a national conference on youth empowerment and bring all of these kids in. That is where we would do the grant writing training for the kids, to educate them about how to write the grants. That is where we could showcase all the different things that are going on around the country. We would have to have all the money to support getting the kids there, because none of these programs have money. So anybody who is a really talented grant writer out there, I wish you would see us. We need to get our groups together and exchange ideas about things that have worked with you and things that are working with us. But we should be training youth in grant writing, and we should be training youth on how you serve on boards and on some of the jargon. And what better way than to do a national conference for the youth? We do it for the professionals; let's do it for the youth.

Jessika Glick: I just want to say that ever since I have been doing conferences, and I'm sure Juliet will vouch for me, too, I have heard an awful lot of "We would do a youth conference," an awful lot of it. But I haven't heard a lot of, "We are doing a youth conference." So I want to say that I think it is really important, I think it is a great idea, but I think it is really important to follow through on that and to get the youth involved. And I know we are all very willing to do that.

Audience Participant: I am Pat Baker with Allies with Families, which is the Utah Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health, and first I want to congratulate you all. You were eloquent, Jessika. But I also have a word of caution. Our youth are part of our families, and what I am hearing is wonderful. But it is also, all of the challenges and the values that you are expressing, are the same things that we have said about family involvement. And I don't want this to become where youth involvement supplants family involvement. And I've seen it happen over and over again. So it is just a word of caution. We are all part of

families, and I think that we need to have youth involvement and youth voice. And I don't want there to be any mistake about that. That is not what my value is. But I don't want it on the back of family involvement.

Audience Participant: I just wanted to say, there are a few really good national youth conferences around this kind of stuff. This is the first time I've been at this conference, but I am really connected with services for homeless and runaway youth. It sounds like there is a whole network there, but that we are just disconnected, maybe because the groups of young people overlap a lot. Destination Future, if folks are familiar with that, is an annual conference for independent living. That happens every year, sometimes in DC, sometimes in Estes Park, Colorado. National Network for Youth has an amazing symposium every year in Washington, DC where we do a field day. It is almost half young people, and there is stuff about grant writing, and there is stuff about talking to legislators, and stuff about youth voice. There are those two things now. And third, there are a couple of other advocacy ones. It is primarily for youth in out-of-home care, but Survivors of the System is a phenomenal one. The Canadian Youth in Care Network and the Australian Youth in Care Network also both have really, really, really good web sites, and they are entirely young people. There are not adults giving them permission to do all these things. It is entirely youth done.

Janet Walker: Thanks for all that information. I would just like to let everyone here know that the next issue of Focal Point that we are going to be putting out is going to be devoted to youth voices. And we would really like to hear from anyone who knows about any kind of youth participation programs that are going on.

Audience participant: I don't know if this is appropriate to share or not, but several of you have mentioned fund raising. My best friend works for a family shelter, on the board, and three years ago they started a spaghetti supper, and they do it at Christmas time, and it is a take-out or eat-in. It is \$12.50 a plate or \$25 a couple, \$20 of which is tax deductible. And the first year they made about \$2,000. This is the third year they did it, and they made \$10,000, just by selling spaghetti. It is around Christmas time when people are

wanting to do something, but it is not so much money that people feel like, “Well, now I am not going to be able to buy something I want.” This year, when they did the sit-down part, someone on the board had done a Power Point presentation about homelessness and the family shelter and things like that. So it has kind of

grown from a real tiny thing to something that was very big, just from a little idea.

Juliet LaMonaca: I want to thank everybody for coming. Thanks to all the presenters.