

Using the YCA for Implementing Competency Development (Case) Plans

System Level: Before You Begin

1. Department philosophy and leadership must support a strengths-based approach for it to be successful. Please see Policy Level Preparations for a more detailed description of the steps that help in this process.

2. Review existing forms and guidelines related to case plan development (such as case plan forms, informal agreements/contracts, court reports, etc.). Assess whether they support inclusion of strengths. For example, are there sections where information about the youth's skills and interests, supportive adults, education or career goals, learning experiences related to reparation of harm, and long-term goals can be included? If so, create a template to illustrate where each piece of information from the YCA can fit into the case plan. This mapping process can help create training materials for staff so they have concrete guidelines for where they should be putting certain types of information.

Paperwork needs to be developed that is easy to understand, simple to use and doesn't create a huge time burden. The paperwork needs to be useful to the direct service staff (probation officers, counselors, etc.).

If forms and/or guidelines do not support inclusion of strengths, consider revising them. Forms and guidelines can also be revised to make inclusion of strengths more explicit, which provides an additional guide for staff as well as a clear endorsement of their inclusion for any user (such as judge or referee) of the case plan materials.

Supervisor Level: Training and Worker Preparation

1. Once staff members are trained on the Strengths approach and using the YCA, they can proceed to practicing implementation of competency-based/youth development case plans. Have workers select youth and complete the YCA (using real youth from their caseload is great and most relevant).

2. Have staff practice mapping the information from the YCA (particularly the information in the summary/goals section) into case planning forms. Have them practice writing up case reports or other required materials including youth strengths. Staff members can work in small groups to receive peer feedback and also have at least one case plan reviewed by a supervisor and/or strengths "expert."

3. Develop a process where staff can learn from each other. If you have staff or team meetings, allow time for staff to share ideas, challenges, solutions, and successes. If you don't have team meetings, consider instituting them, at least for the initial period of implementation, so that staff have a forum to talk about their experiences, gain support, and share ideas from written reports, strengths resources, and creative strength interventions. Be sure to recognize and use your own staff's strengths. Recognize the hard work staff members are putting in and the learning curve that many of them will be experiencing.

Worker Level: Implementation

1. The YCA (notes and short versions) has a summary page [the long version of the tool allows for answers to be written in throughout the tool] with the key information to be included in the case plan: the youth's skills/resources (and interests), short-term competency development/skill building areas (in a variety of possible topics), people who can support the youth in developing competencies/skills, and the youth's view of the future and long range goals.

Remember that the youth's own goals are powerful motivators and can assist in helping engage a youth, even if the worker or the court places other expectations on her/him.

2. Find sections in your case planning forms/templates where each of the key YCA areas can be incorporated. Inclusion of this information helps build a balanced and proactive case plan. Supervisors will want to review case plans to make sure that goals attend to the three YCA domains (Repairing Harm; Creating a Healthy Identity; and Connecting with Family, Peers, and Community).

3. Consider using the Sample Case Progress Note to revisit the youth's strengths and development goals throughout the case. Also, review the handout related to monitoring and managing cases to maximize engagement and emphasize successes, even if they are small.

4. Have supervisors review case plans during the early implementation phase and then periodically to ensure the practice of incorporating and building on strengths is maintained. Supervisors should also review case progress notes and completion summaries to verify that strengths information gained during the assessment is utilized throughout the case.