

Understanding
and Leveraging
webs of support
during youth
transitions across
educational and
career pathways

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Pronouns: she/her



Session goals

Grounding in
relationships

Define webs of
support
framework

Examples from
youth

Map webs of
support

Brainstorm action
in your own
programming

Norms



Chaotic time



Open engagement



Expertise in the zoom room



Build knowledge together




Be aware of your space



Webs is built on many frames- shared language



Conversations, reflections, actions, and learning must go beyond this conference



Why did you come
to this work?

What do you hope
to get out of this
conference?

3 min

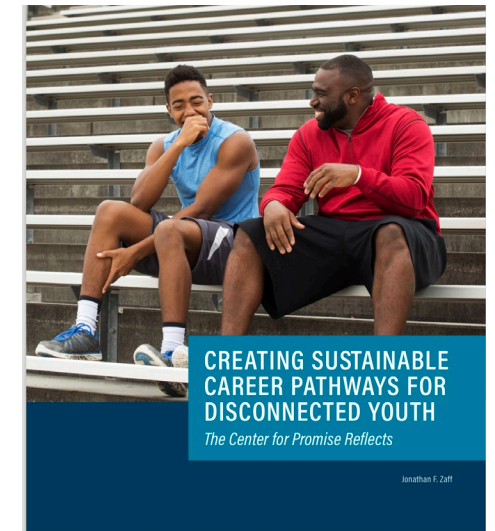
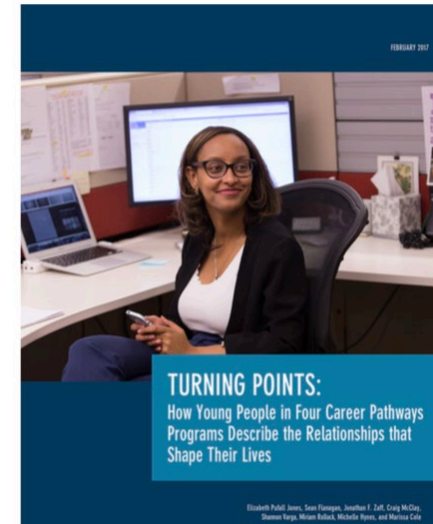
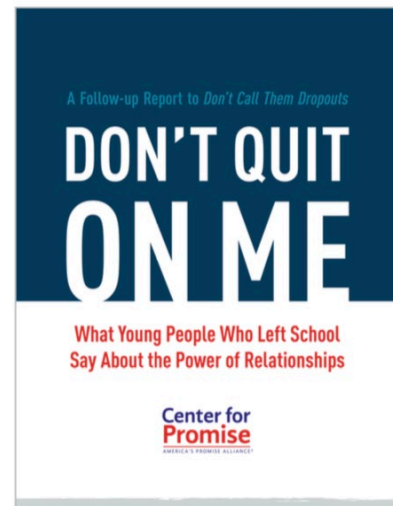
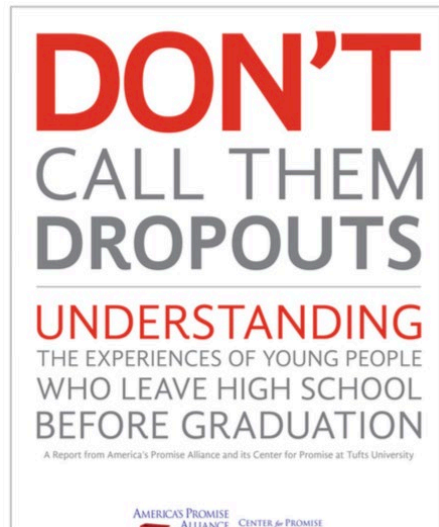
THE FIRST INTERVENTION WE SHOULD DO IS SELF-REFLECTION

Dr. Lauren Mims




Youth data collected through over 130 in depth interviews and nearly 3,000 surveys say:

- Relationships matter
- Youth most often interrupt school or work due to toxic environments
- There are often too many hurdles, and too few supportive adults
- A web of supportive adults as opposed to a single adult is necessary for sustained transitions



Relationships matter

“... I’m gonna cry. But that was...a turning point ‘cause nobody has ever said that they were proud of me. And he’s like ‘I admire you for all the stuff that you’ve been through.’ And he had said...‘Some day I hope that I can grow up to have like your strength and your determination and your motivation.’ ... [T]hat really touched me, and...me and him are still friends. And he’s actually here too; he’s at [name of company] too. And then through him I met my friend... And he [the friend]’s been like my little big brother that I never got to have...he takes care of me whenever I need something...I remember I didn’t have lunch for...a whole week, and he’s like, ‘Did you eat at all?’ And I’m like, ‘no.’ And he’s like, ‘Why didn’t you tell me? Why didn’t you tell me you needed food? ...I would’ve gotten you food.’ [I said], ‘It’s okay, I’ll be fine.’ And he’s like, ‘No it’s not okay.’ And so he’s...my best friend now.”



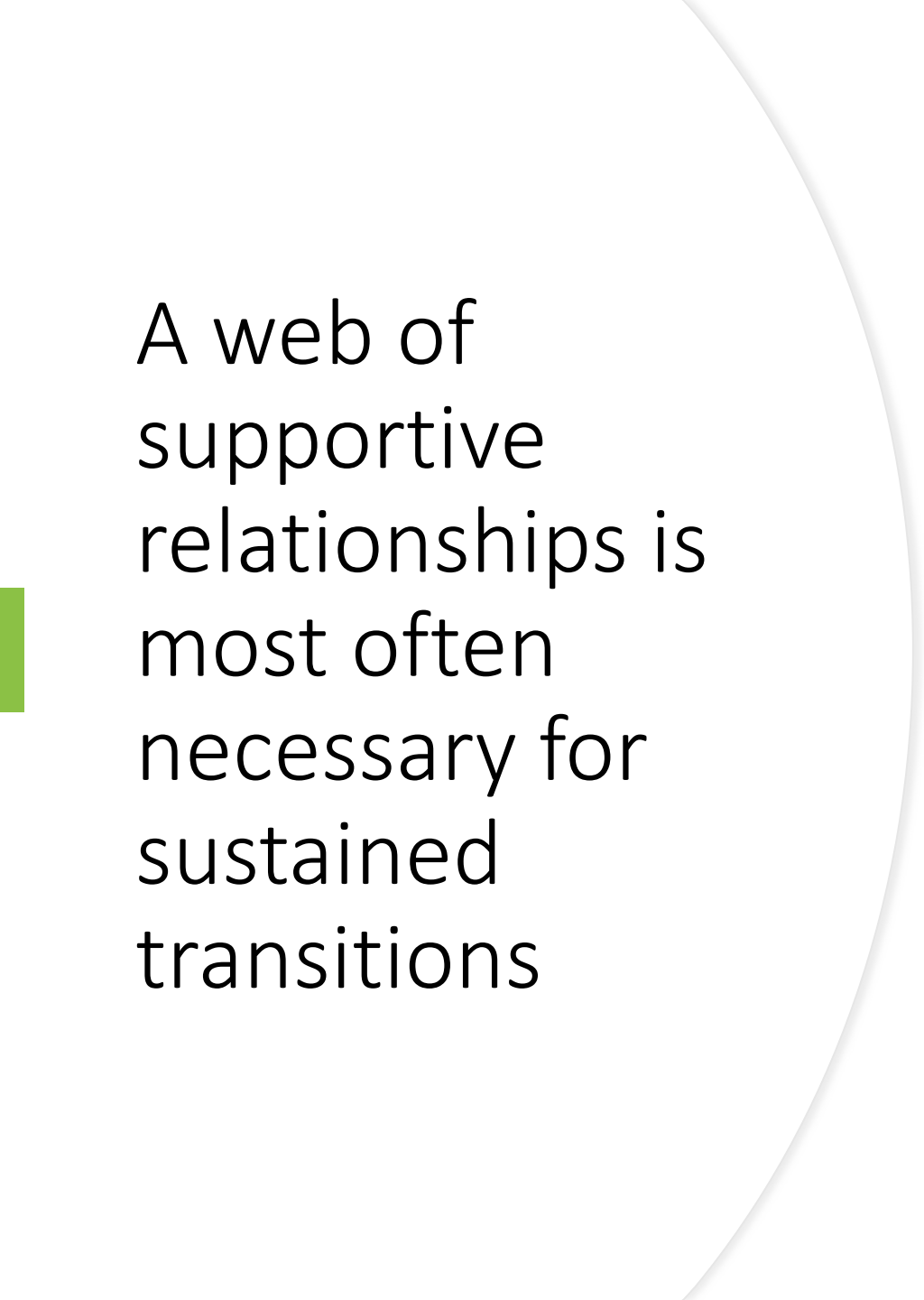
Youth are often
leaving and
navigating toxic
oppressive
environments

“I’ve been in foster care since my twelfth birthday. So, I moved around a lot and I’ve never been consistent with school. Back to childhood, I’ve missed like months at a time and things like that. The biggest issue for me was when I went to high school was the teachers not understanding how to deal with kids like me. I was really behind; I had been moving around a lot. They weren’t sure what to do with me, how to help me. They eventually ended up writing me off. I was moving around foster homes a lot so it’s like you didn’t get any support anywhere. After a while I just stopped going to class, stopped doing homework, skipped school and got into doing drugs and things like that. And uh, it took my sister and seeing how good she had done in [program] to get back into school because the reality was that I found out if I stayed in my high school I would have no chance of graduating on time. And the teachers just told me ‘tough shit’.” — Denise

There are often too many hurdles and too few supportive adults

“Teacher didn’t care, principal didn’t care ... I told my counselor and a couple teachers, but I didn’t want to because they didn’t care ... you know from the way that they come at me on a regular basis ... they don’t try to talk to me.” — Marco

“I was trying to stay engaged as much as I could but it was like nobody was helping me, nobody. I would go to school. The teachers wouldn’t even acknowledge me, I would say I’m behind, can you do this for me? They were like no, all I can do is give you this and try to do what you can do today. A lot of teachers didn’t even know my name, it got really bad and came to the point where I wasn’t going to graduate.” — Antonio



A web of
supportive
relationships is
most often
necessary for
sustained
transitions

“I think a lot of our students come in not having that sense of community. [The program] is one of those first places where they can feel that. It’s really weird for some students: ‘Like I’m supported everywhere. This isn’t how things happen.’ That was a bit of a struggle for me, having to reach out. I don’t know how. ‘Well, [the program leaders say,] we’ll teach you how to work out and we’ll help you and we’ll give you the feedback and we’ll tell you how you can do it even better. And if you don’t feel like you’re doing better we’ll give you some feedback or we’ll develop some goals to get you to your target of what you want to do.’ That culture of being able to approach anybody, changing my mindset about how we should be supporting each other and not fighting against each other or trying to steal resources or opportunity from folks, I think that’s what’s really great about this program.” – Marquise



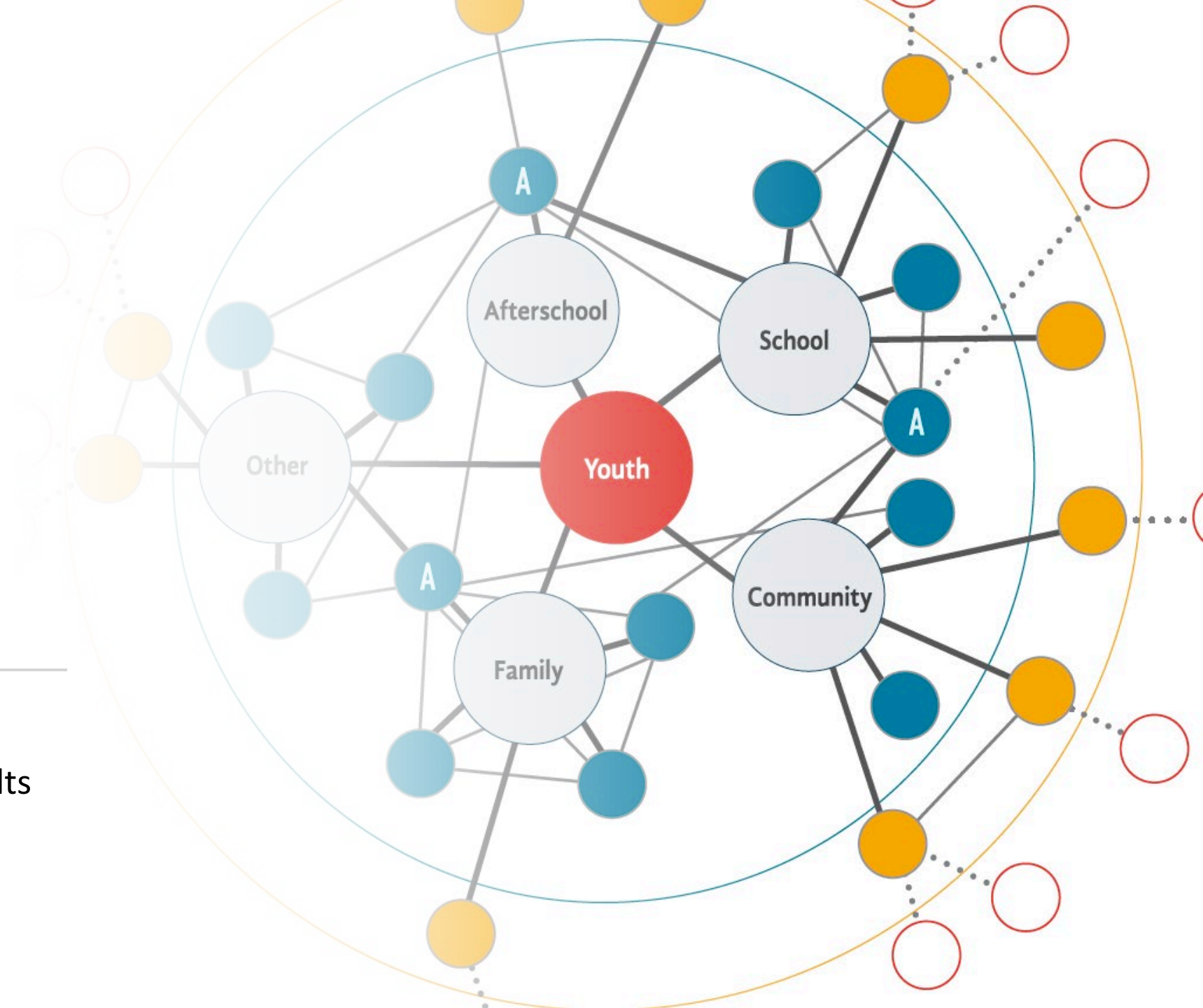
5 min

What were your relationships like with adults who did not rise to the level of mentor across your educational and career journeys?

How have relationships with those adults affected how you show up as an adult in the lives of any young person you engage with?

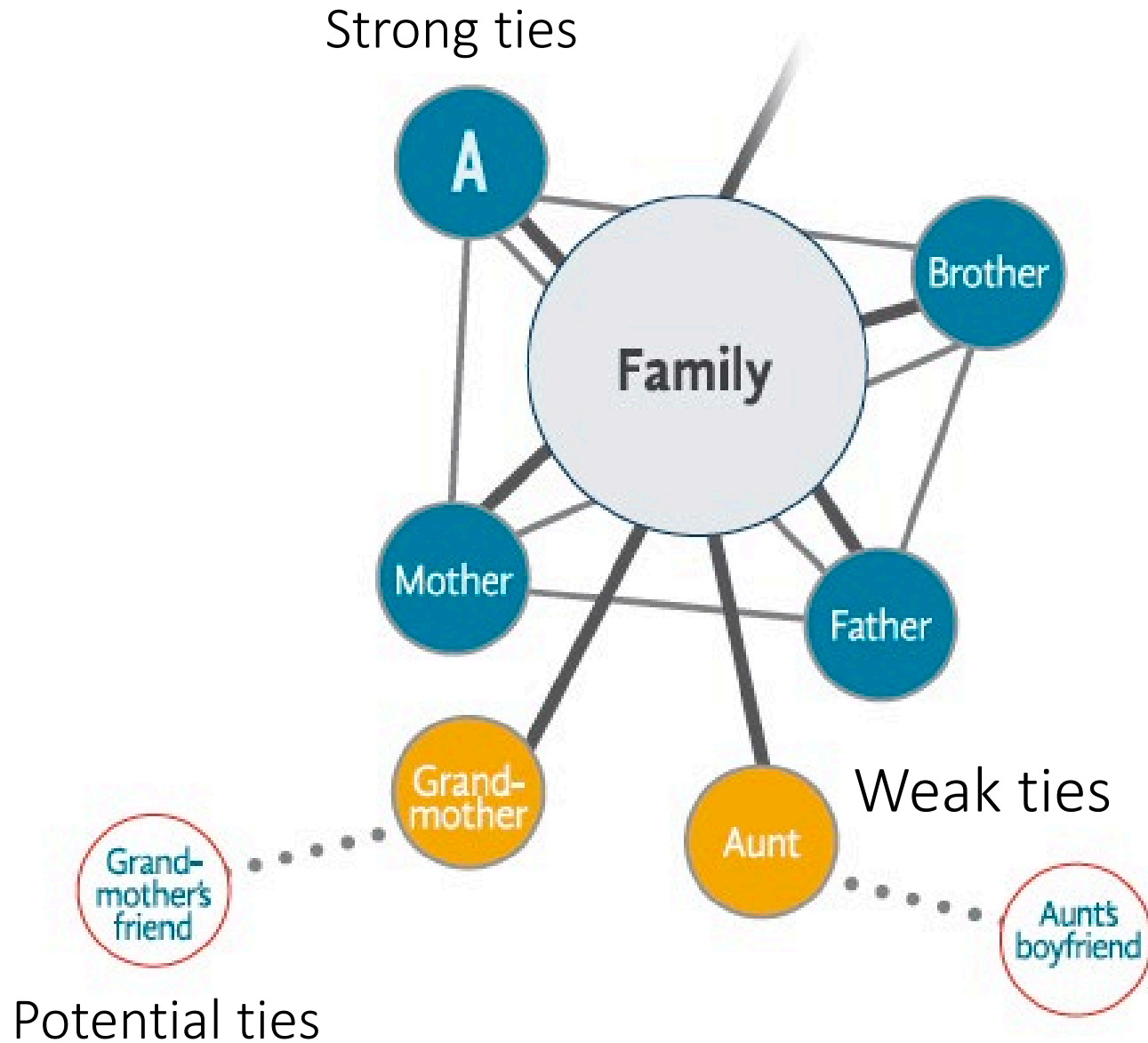
Webs of support

Moving beyond the dyad and
towards a call to action to all adults

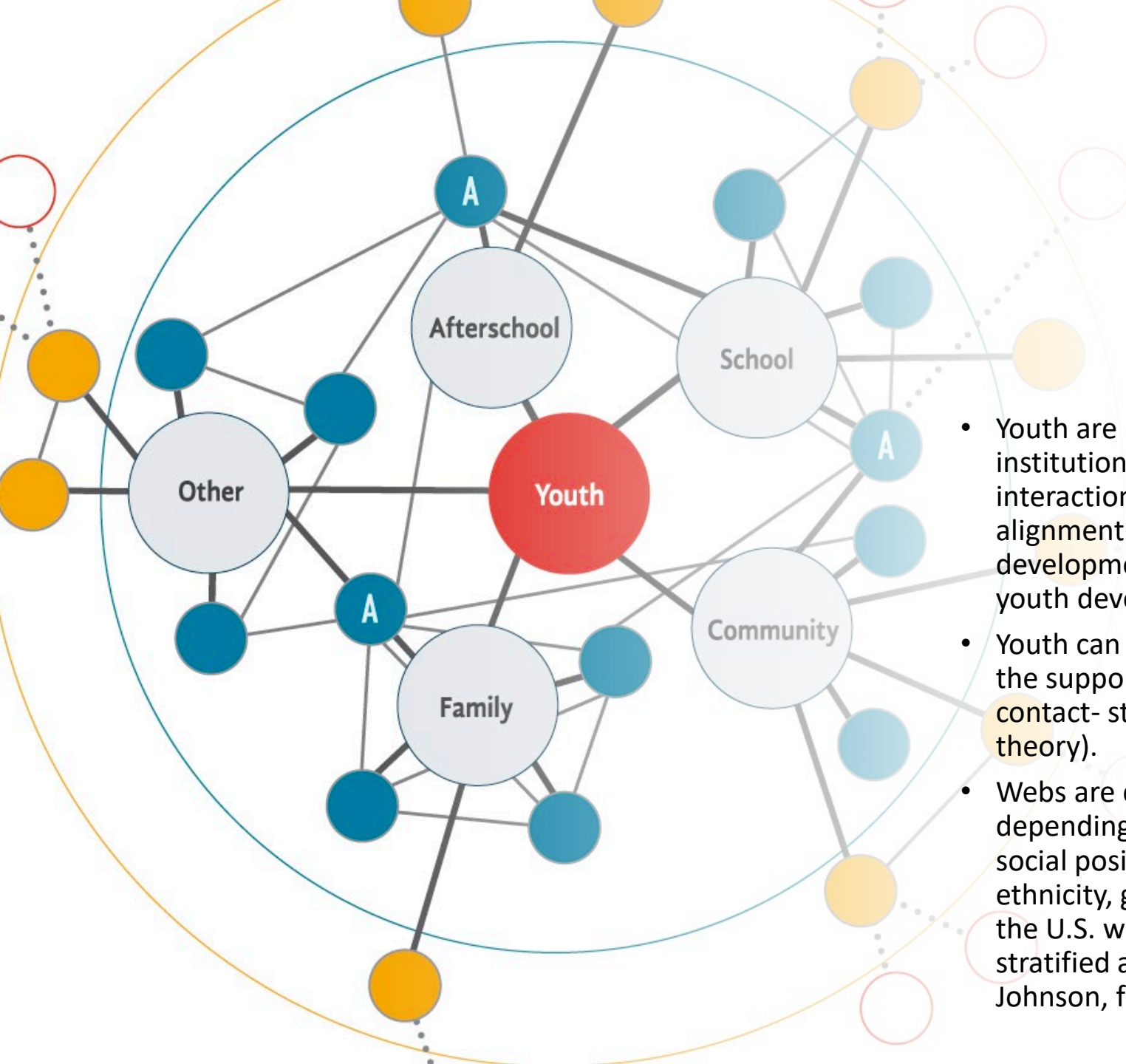


Definition

- A web of support refers to the network of relationships youth have with adults and peers across contexts in which supports are provided that help the young person advance in development towards their goals.
- As a **tool**, Webs of Support can be utilized to define and visualize current and potential supports in a young person's life and changes in networks, as well as identify areas where greater support or more coordinated support or intervention efforts would be more effective.
- As a **framework**, Webs of Support can be utilized to organize programs, policies, practices, and research from a systems perspective; which acknowledges the importance of understanding the alignment of relationships and resources available to young people with their social position, historical, and other contextual information.



Relational
cores instead
of contexts



WoS draws on several pre-existing theories


- Youth are embedded in multilayered ecologies, filled with systems, institutions, policies, and practices that youth have bi-directional interactions with; Youth are active agents in their own development; alignment between external resources and internal needs leads to development (Relational developmental systems theory; Positive youth development; Youth systems).
- Youth can have different kinds of relationships in webs depending on the support exchanged, length of time known, and frequency of contact- strong ties, weak ties, potential ties (Social Network theory).
- Webs are dynamic and the structure and actors change over time depending on developmental needs, individual characteristics, and social positioning attributes of the young person (e.g., race, class, ethnicity, gender, etc.; Integrative Model) ← particularly relevant in the U.S. where resources, opportunities, and connections are often stratified along racial lines (Bonilla-Silva, 1997; Sanchez et al., 2014, Johnson, forthcoming)

Resources exchanged in relationships

- Social capital
 - Bridging social capital- connections to new networks and resources; external resources
 - bonding social capital- psychological value gain from interactions with others with shared identities; internal resources
- Social support:
 - Emotional- nonjudgmental space
 - Informational- advice, guidance
 - Instrumental- practical support such as a ride or lending money
 - Validation- affirmation in relation to the rest of society or peers
 - Companionship support- enjoying presence

3 minute break!



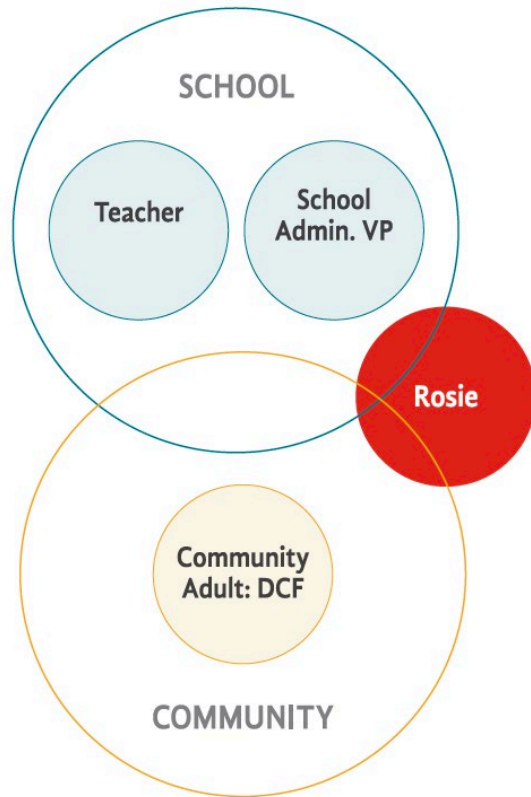


Webs as a tool for seeing resources and change

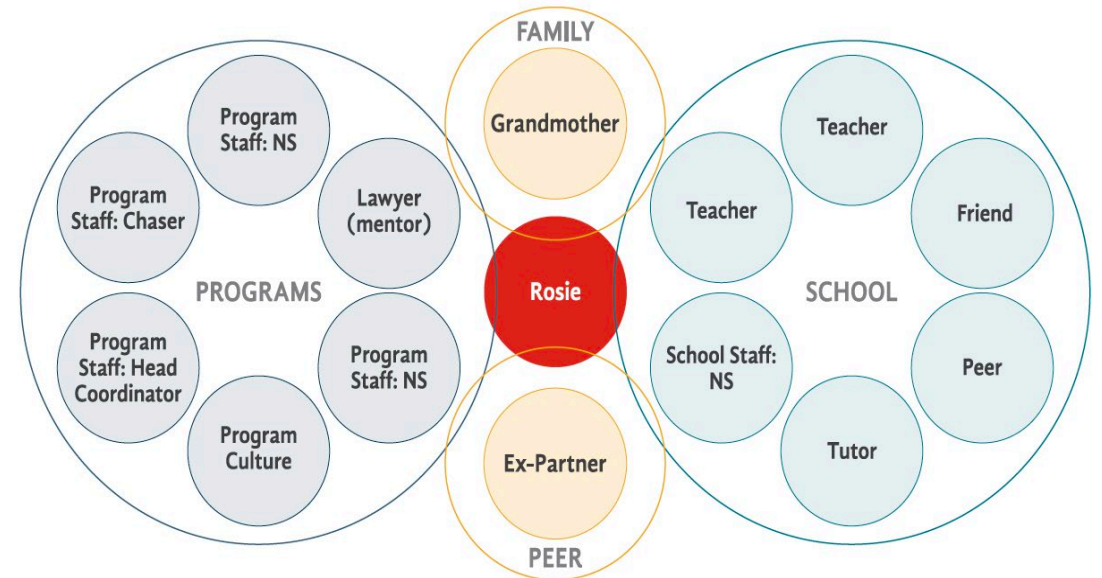
- In the most straight forward sense this is a tool that can be used for seeing how people view relationships and resources in their lives
- This can be done:
 - At multiple time points- Asking people to map current relationships repeatedly and discussing changes over time
 - Retrospectively- Asking people to map their relationships and resources across transitions

Retrospective example: Rosie

Before leaving school

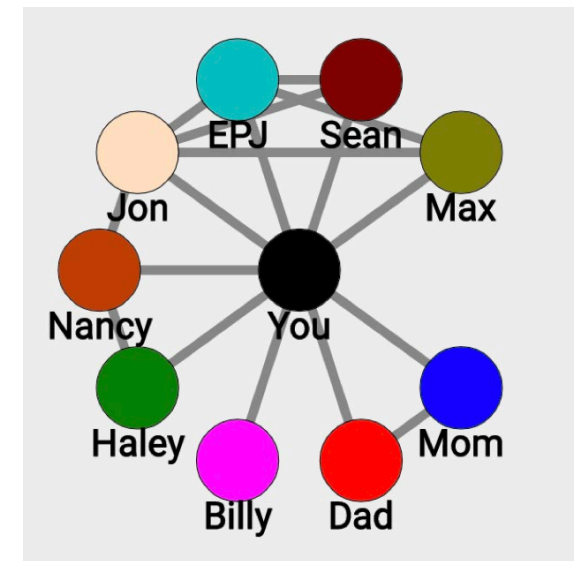
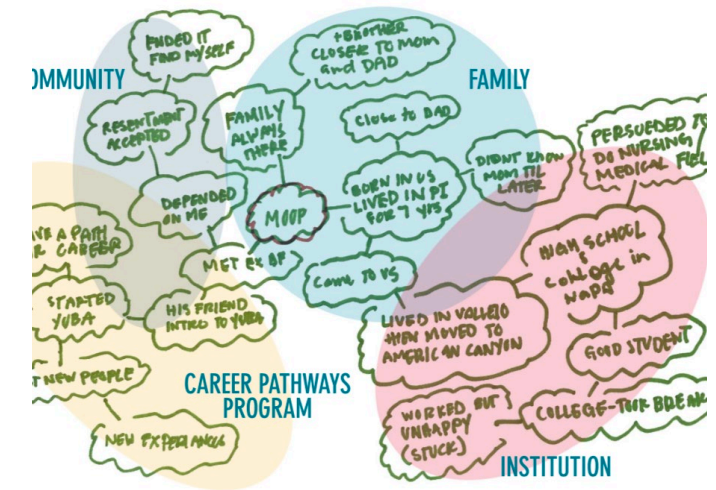


Returning to school



Current relationships

- Modalities we've included in our research, hand drawings, applications, concentric circles
- Youth are asked to think of who they interact with most, list those people, and answer questions about each of those people including:
 - Frequency and mode of interaction
 - Trust
 - Length of time known
 - Types of support
 - Relationship among all actors in the web
- Data collection and reflection through narrative or answering questions





Youth web mapping reflections

- “I don’t trust people to give me helpful advice and therefore my support network isn’t that large. Most likely linked to the fact that I don’t feel understood... My support system does not interact with each other and I don’t know why.”
- “I was surprised at how little I interact with these people since I look to them as my web of support.”
- “...professionals are the people I want to interact with more because I have friends and family I connect with regularly but need more adults to open opportunities for me.”



Youth web mapping reflections

“Something that surprised me is that I struggle with trusting these adults...I could use more support at home because I really don't get a lot.”


“I am a heavily emotional as an individual and need emotional support before practical...”

“I realized how many people were actually there for me...I want to interact more with my coaches and teachers because I want support.”



Youth web mapping reflections

- “I could use more support communicating with the ones [adults] in my life.”
- “...my support system looked slightly isolated from the rest of my web; therefore it would be beneficial for them to connect more....I don’t actually utilize my web of support/people in my web as much as I should be.”
- “I could use more support at home because my family doesn’t really know what’s going on in my life.”



Webs as a frame:
thinking about
how attitudes,
structures,
policies, social
position, and
practices affect
webs

- Illustrative example from a tale of two schools located in sanctuary cities in the Northeastern area of the United States that serve high populations of emergent bilingual students.

School A

Everything we talk and say, everything we speak with the truth, but nobody believes us. They believe more to them [native English speakers]. That's why I haven't said anything, and, well, they punish you for nothing, because they punished me for two hours and a half for having said that to them, and the person who was talking bad was him, not us.

When I came to school they gave [an ID] to me...
When we walk down the hall, everyone says, 'Here come the immigrants, the group of immigrants,' and I haven't wanted to get into trouble, so I listen to them and I remain quiet because I don't want any problems and I came here to learn.

It's like, if I have a problem at home or with somebody, I can tell my parents, and if I want to tell someone else, I rather call my parents and tell them all about it..., but I don't feel like going to a teacher... My parents know my life and they know how to advise me.

The program in which we are, we've learned... but the rest of the students aside from [EL program name], those who are not in it, they do teach them and assign them homework. They set expectations for their students in class and they learn a lot, but we don't...we're learning the same, almost the same thing all day.

...I think that we're still not ready, at an English level to take that exam (state assessment). And well, we have to take that exam to transition to the next year's school grade, so, last year, I didn't feel prepared to do it. Because I didn't know—I knew some English, but I didn't feel prepared to do so. So that brought me down and didn't motivate me to keep on going.

I do belong for the reason that people look down on me and that's where I gain more strength to show that I'm not less than others, instead we're all equal... I've had so many problems in this school ever since I started school, I've always had problems, so I didn't like it and sometimes I've wanted to leave school. For example, bullying from the way one dresses, the way one speaks, the way one walks... The truth is that seeing that racism that they have on us, one gains like more courage to learn, to learn English and show that you can.

School B

...my teachers, they are really good and they're always there for me... They always tell me, 'Always focus on what you want to accomplish and never give up. I know you can do it.' And that has helped me a lot to learn English and also other things, to keep on going and achieve my goals.

Well, I think that all the teachers talk about how each of our lives were, I imagine, our journey from our home countries to here, right? Because in the first year, when I came here, we wrote a book with him (pointing at a classmate)... We wrote a book about immigration. That each of us had to write a paragraph and with all the classmates as well, we made it into one book. That up until now, I still have that book at home.... And so, I feel that, that way, I feel like the teachers are also trying to—trying to get information out of us so they can know more from us.

I go after school to [see] a teacher that I know, [teacher]... She does stay after school every day helping students from all English levels, like level 1 with their homework. Everyone stays, and I stay back as well. And all of us support each other, because English level 1 students, those in English level 2 know less, less English than I do, so we're there, helping each other out.

She helps me. I help her, too... When new students come in from Spanish-speaking countries, she sometimes calls me down so I can give them like a little tour around the school and just explain to them how the locker works and everything so I help her with that... I like it because it's like you get to help these other students and it's like you're willing to... I want to help them because it's like my first day here it was just crazy so I understand how they must feel, right? I mean they must feel the same way... Yeah and especially because you know they're Spanish. We communicate better, understand each other more.



Discussion about the two schools

- Is there anything else I didn't discuss that you noticed?
- Would it surprise you to know that school A structures their English learning program as a pull out and school B structures their learning program as mainstream?
- Would it surprise you to know that neither school had more than one or two staff youth identified as sharing their native language?

10 minutes!

Map your webs

Think about who you interact with most, and write down something to signify them

Then consider each actor and indicate in some way

What kind of support you get from each person

How much you trust each person (scale of 1-5, 5 being completely)

How often you interact with them

The primary mode of contact

Who that person knows in the web

- Did anything surprise you when you were answering questions about the supports in your life?
- Where do you have a lot of support (e.g. at work, home)?
- Where could you use more support?
- Are the people who should be interacting, interacting on a regular basis, for example a teacher and a parent?
- Are there people you want to interact?
- Other things you notice?

Reminder of resources

- Social capital
 - Bridging social capital- connections to new networks and resources; external resources)
 - bonding social capital- psychological value; internal resources)
- Social support:
 - Emotional
 - Informational
 - Instrumental (i.e., practical)
 - Validation (i.e., affirmation)
 - Companionship support

Brainstorm!



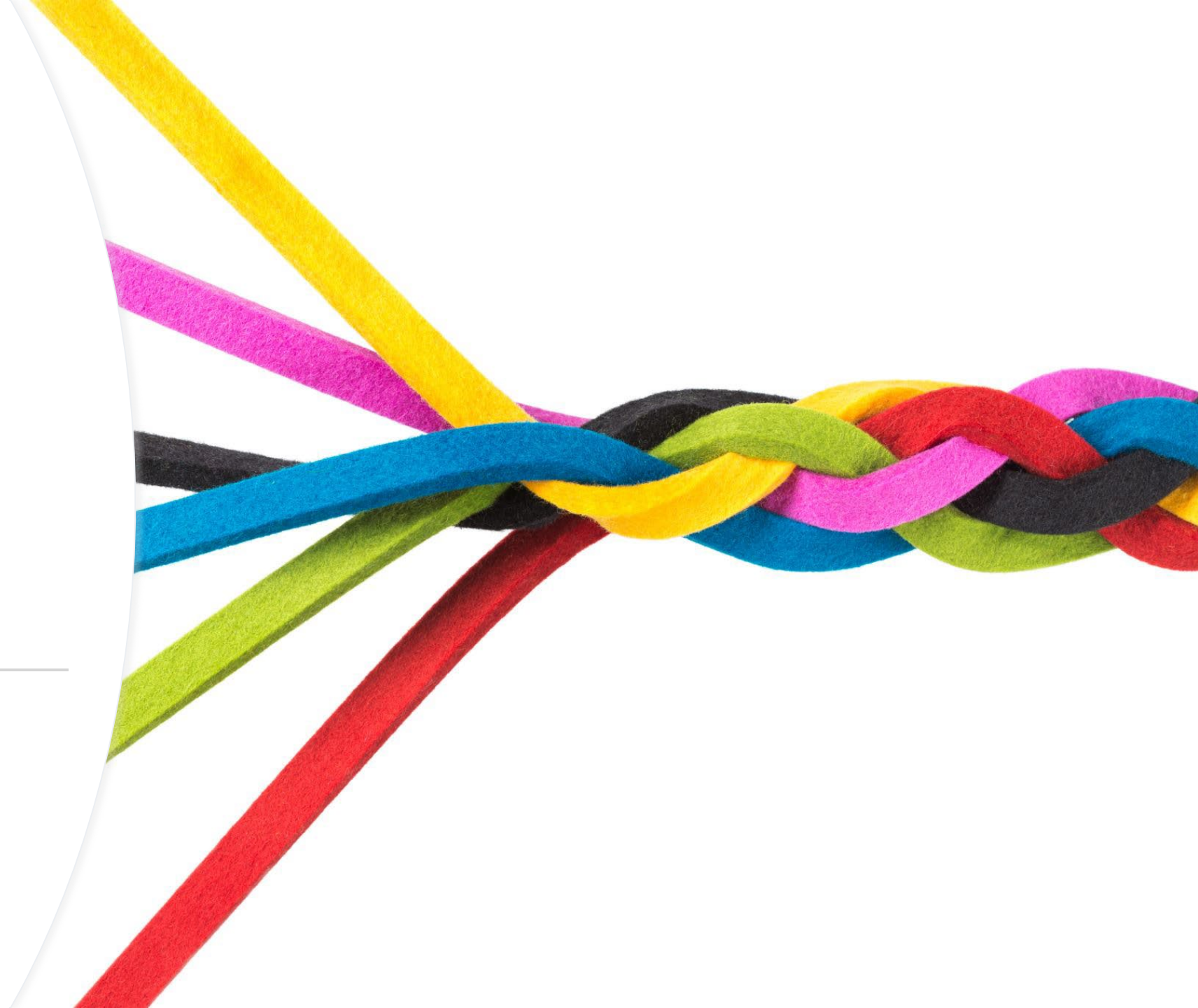
- What are the attitudes of adults and youth in your organization about youth?
- Do your policies consider the embedded nature of relationships and youth agency?
- Are your practices aligned with your attitudes and policies?
- How does your organization account for social positioning of themselves and young people who they intend to serve?

15 minutes!



Group discussion

Remaining time



WoS highlights:



- People fill institutions and uphold policies, structures, practices, and attitudes
- Youth agency, characteristics, and social positioning are essential to understanding the availability of adults and resources for them as well as how to engage with them
- Relationships between all adults and peers in a web matter
- All adults have the potential to provide at least one kind of support
- Superheroes aren't sustainable or scalable



Closing reminder

Youth are still out there overcoming oppressive systems everyday so we owe it to them to do whatever we can to get these barriers and policies and attitudes out of their way.

Some references & resources that informed this presentation and for continued learning:

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