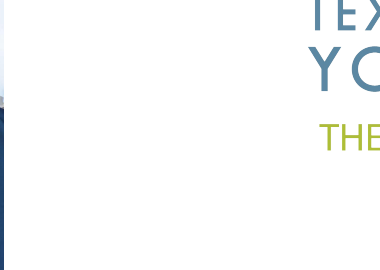




TNOYS

TEXAS NETWORK OF
YOUTH SERVICES

THEIR FUTURE IS OUR BUSINESS.



Amplifying Youth Voices & Engagement in Youth Homelessness Systems Change



Lauren Rose

(she/her)

TNOYS Director of Public Policy



LaBraia Owens

(she/her)

**Partnerships Coordinator and
Texas Emerging Leaders Board**



TNOYS' Mission

The mission of TNOYS is to strengthen services and support for Texas youth and families to help them overcome challenges and achieve healthy development.

Equity & Inclusion

A commitment to **diversity, equity, and inclusion** underscores our work.

TNOYS elevates the voices and experiences of youth and providers who have been underrepresented in the past, including people of color and those in the LGBTQ+ community.





Membership at a Glance

- Over **80 Organizational Members** serving youth, young adults, and families in **every Texas region**.
- A diverse range of individual members, including frontline staff.
- Representation across systems such as **education, child welfare, housing, and much more.**

Our work is guided by a comprehensive **systems-change** approach





By working **across systems**, we foster collaboration, build organizational capacity, and effect systems change.

TNOYS works across seven systems:

- Health
- Justice
- Housing
- Workforce
- Child Welfare
- Education
- Victim Services

Policy

We work with youth and providers on **research-driven** policy advocacy.

Past Win

First-ever line item in the state budget to serve youth and young adults experiencing homelessness.

Looking Ahead

TNOYS will continue to influence statewide, cross-systems policy change during the interim session. We invite you to join us!





Practice

TNOYS equips professionals with skills and resources to meet the complex needs of youth and families.

Past Win

Provided professional development to thousands of youth services professionals across Texas.

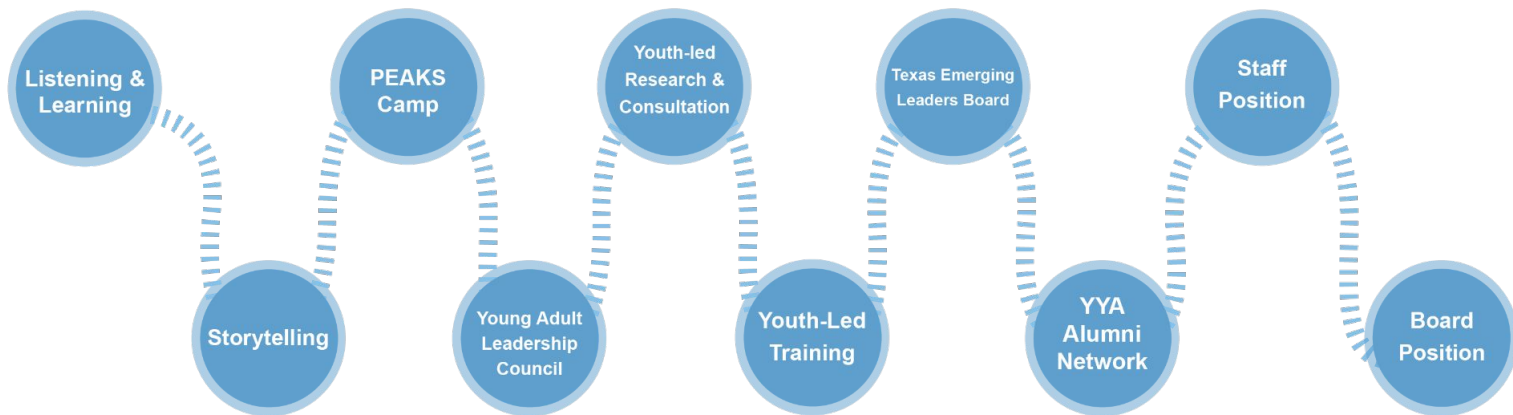
Looking Ahead

TNOYS is hosting trainings and events across the state to strengthen youth homelessness prevention and response.

Partnership

TNOYS **centers youth and provider voice** in everything we do. TNOYS offers many opportunities for youth to engage in our work in both big and small ways.

TNOYS' Youth Engagement Roadmap



What does youth voice mean to you?

*Share a time when you saw
successful youth voice in action?*

*What are you hoping to get out of
this session?*

Understanding Youth Voice

Defining “Youth Voice”

Creating a Shared Language

- “Youth Voice” does not only mean the spoken word of young people
- “Youth Voice” can refer to:
 - a. A principle that places value on the distinct ideas, opinions, attitudes, knowledge, and actions of young people
 - b. An umbrella term that encompasses a variety of activities and desired outcomes



Why “Youth Voice”?

The Benefits of Youth-Centered Approaches and Individualized Services

- Youth voice is (or should be) a fundamental pillar of youth engagement
- Supports young people in becoming active participants in their own lives
- Supports young people to have a positive impact in their communities
- Increases a sense of ownership and belonging within YYA’s communities and society more broadly

Why Is Youth Voice Important?

If young people succeed, we all succeed

- Research shows that when youth have the opportunity to use their voices, they develop confidence as well as critical skills like leadership and communication.
- By empowering youth and young adults' voices, we ensure that their unique perspectives and innovative ideas drive meaningful change.
- Involving youth in civic action is not just an investment in their future but a commitment to a more inclusive and equitable society for all.

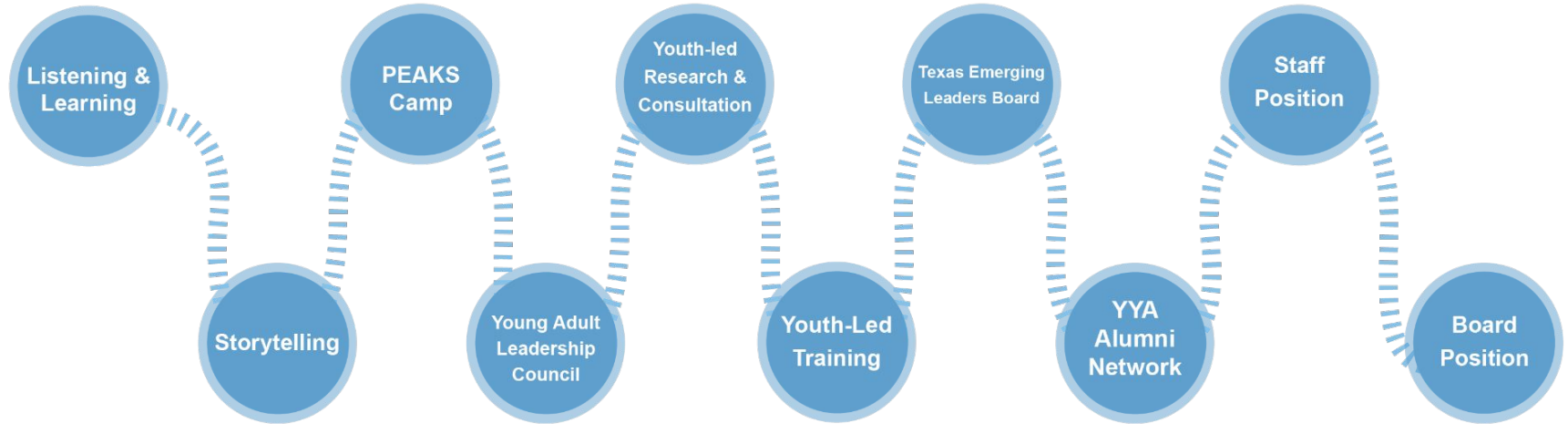


Reflection

- *How would you describe the ways in which your organization/region prioritizes youth voice?*
- *In what ways do you hear directly from the youth that you serve?*

Youth Engagement in Practice

TNOYS' Youth Engagement Roadmap



TNOYS Listening and Learning From Youth

Facilitated Conversations & Surveys

- TNOYS regularly engages YYA in project-based listening sessions and/or surveys to hear directly from them about their needs and perspectives of systems and ideas for systems change
 - Supported through:
 - Staff and YALC planning/preparation
 - Partnership with member organizations to recruit YYA
 - Compensation of all listening session participants
 - Participant checks in which we report back initial findings/reports
- Facilitated Conversation and Surveys are also baked into our in-house youth-leadership programs

TNOYS Storytelling

Broadcasting

- TNOYS regularly broadcasts youth voice through a variety of channels:
 - Twitter Townhalls
 - Videos on Social Media
 - YYA Newsletters
 - Blog posts
 - YYA keynote panel presentations (TNOYS Annual Conference)
 - Legislative testimony
- Supported through:
 - Establishing/reinforcing a critical awareness of issues discussed
 - Continuous staff support and preparation (run throughs, copyediting, etc.)
 - Providing options for participation
 - Compensation through participation in our YYA leadership development programs

Youth-Led Training

- Youth-led trainings are those where they are partially or entirely-led by at least one youth or young adult in the development and presentation
 - Youth-led development only = Youth-informed
 - Youth-led presentation only = *potential* tokenism/decoration
- Youth presenters bring both their lived experience and acquired knowledge to the training development and presentation
- Youth and young adults are clearly positioned as experts providing insight and knowledge to an audience of other YYA, adults, or both

Youth-Led Training

Understanding the Steps

1. Assessment
2. Recruit YYA Members
3. Build Relationships
4. Develop Critical Awareness
5. ***Develop Content**
6. ***Rehearse**
7. ***Deliver Training(s)**
9. Demonstrate Impact/ Advocate for Change
10. Reflect & Repeat

Preparation

Execution

Follow Through

TNOYS' YALC Program

Flagship Youth Voice Leadership Program

- A 12-month work-based learning and leadership program for youth and young adults ages 17 – 26 who have lived experience in systems such as housing and homelessness services, child welfare, juvenile justice. etc
- Supported through:
 - Professional Development wants/needs based on YYA feedback
 - Projects (grant deliverables) built into curriculum
 - Cross-team collaboration
 - Weekly meetings with staff and cohort members
 - Regular individual check ins
 - Compensation at a living wage

TNOYS YALC in Action:

Spotlight on LaBraia Owens

- Over 300 hours completed of professional development, specialized systems training, and leading with Youth Voice
- Worked hand-in-hand with TNOYS staff throughout YALC meetings, presentations, and trainings
- Examples
 - *TNOYS Annual Conference - YYA Keynote Panel*
 - *Shifting Youth Perspective through Desired Connection - YALC-led presentation*
 - *CASA Amplifying Advocacy Conference - Keynote Panel*



TNOYS' TELB Program

Positions of Responsibility

- 12-month work-based learning opportunity for young adults with lived expertise, that have already graduated from a youth professional development program to work in a more consultative role with local communities, higher level engagement, and employment opportunities at TNOYS and beyond.
- Supported through:
 - Previous experience in youth development programs
 - Monthly meetings with staff and cohort members
 - Regular individual check ins
 - Compensation at a living wage



Reflection

- *What youth voice activities were new to you, or things you've haven't tried yet within your organization?*
- *What activities could you embed within the next 6 months to a year, and what would you need to support youth participants?*

Youth Voice in Action

Developing TNOYS' Policy Agenda

Throughout 2024 across Texas

- TNOYS Town Halls to hear from youth & young adults with lived experience, youth-services providers and stakeholders across Texas
- Work with TNOYS Member committee on Systems Change and our Young Adult Leadership Council for feedback on specific recommendations.



TNOYS Policy Agenda

- Based in Research
- Centers Youth-Serving Stakeholders
- Centers Youth and Young Adults with Lived Experience
- Promotes Cross Systems Collaboration
- Promotes Equitable Outcomes For Youth
- Focused on legislative, congressional and agency level policy change

7 Youth- Serving Systems



Health



Housing



Child Welfare



Victim Services



Justice



Workforce



Education

VOSA

Messaging for Legislative Engagements

V-Values

Identify values. Create broad points of agreement and shared goals that resonate with nearly any audience.

O-Opportunity

Find an opportunity to connect. Be explicit about the problem and how it threatens shared values. Create a sense of urgency and connect individual stories to broader issues. Use data and stories.

S-Solution

Offer a solution that provides a sense of hope and motivation. The best solutions are connected directly to the problem.

A-Action

Have a call to action. Assign an action with a concrete next step for the legislator.

Example:

TNOYS' Policy Recommendation: Connect transition-age youth to workforce and higher education opportunities.

TNOYS Recommendation:

- Define “opportunity youth” in statute to help support youth and young adults aged 16-26 who are disconnected from school and work, helping them achieve long-term, gainful employment.
- Provide for a liaison on college campuses to connect students experiencing homelessness to resources and housing.

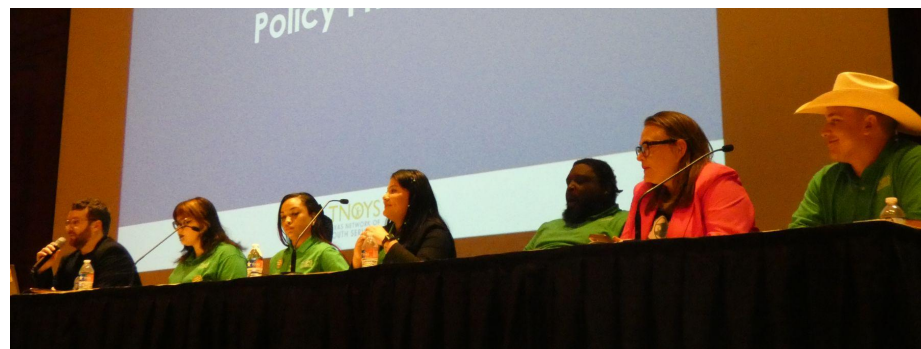
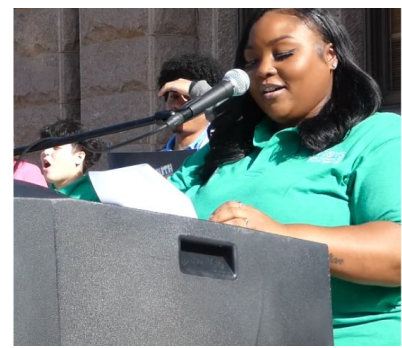
Applying the VOSA message framework



TNOYS DAY of Action for Youth

Tuesday, April 8 at the Texas Capitol

- Nearly 250 youth, young adults, and youth-serving providers assembled at the Texas Capitol for Day of Action for Youth;
- 24 organizations were represented;
- Attendees included 115 professionals and 84 youth and young adults from across systems, as well as 21 YYA from TNOYS' YALC, TELB, and alumni program.



Panel & Legislative Briefing on Opportunity Youth

Wednesday, April 9 at the Texas Capitol

- Hosted a panel on issues that impact Opportunity Youth and Young Adults, featuring 5 members of TNOYS' TELB and moderated by Aspen Institute TOYN Hannah Gourgey.
- 44 legislative staff and providers attended the panel.



Legislative Testimony on Homeless Liaisons by TELB Member & TNOYS Staff

Tuesday, April 29 at the Texas Capitol

- LaBraia along with TNOYS Staff, TNOYS member and partners testified in support of HB 1784 in the House Higher Ed Committee.
- This bill would ensure that every public college and universities would have a homelessness liaison on campus to direct students in homelessness to available resources.



Legislative Testimony on Opportunity Youth by TELB Member LaBraia

Tuesday, April 29 at the Texas Capitol

- Alongside, TNOYS partners and members, LaBraia testified in support of HB 3844 in the House Workforce Subcommittee.
- This bill would define Opportunity Youth in state statute, which would open funding for workforce programs for OY across the state.



TNOYS Annual Conference

June 10-13 2025 in Houston, Texas

- Youth track at with 37 external YYA Attendees
- YALC and TELB work conference but are also attendees
- 22 of 47 Workshops co-led by YYA
 - 7 led by YALC and TELB
 - 15 co-led by YYA external to TNOYS



100% Youth-Led Panel and TELB Plenary

TNOYS Annual Conference

- Launched the first 100% youth-led keynote panel at TNOYS, highlighting issues impacting system-involved YYA
- Facilitated a TELB plenary session focused on Opportunity Youth, in partnership with TELB members and system professionals



YALC Led Presentations and Trainings

TNOYS Annual Conference

YALC members have the opportunity to design and co-lead trainings with staff—and also lead their own youth-designed presentations

- Alternatives to J.J.
- Mentorship Matters: Unlocking Potential One Connection at a Time
- Investing in Tomorrow: Preventing Youth Homelessness Today
- Improving Youth Mental Health





Reflection

- *At what stage do you encounter the most issues when trying to embed youth voices?*
- *What are those challenges?*

Scenario Activities

Scenario Activities

- *In Groups of 4-6, read the scenario on the slide.*
- *Discuss how you might embed youth voice in this work.*
- *Think about what needs to take place to:*
 - *Identify an objective(s)*
 - *Recruit YYA*
 - *Establish trust*
 - *Execute youth voice activity(ies)*
 - *Demonstrate impact*
- *Designate 1-2 people in the group to share out.*

Scenario 1

You are a staff person at a drop in program for youth and young adults (YYA) in East Texas that is open Monday-Saturday from 12pm-8pm. You receive a small grant to improve services with an emphasis on incorporating youth voice. Your organization typically serves YYA, ages 13-21 who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness, but you see many young people who have been in the justice system. Most are unemployed and you've been hearing a few YYA mention "easy money" in an area known around town for "solicitation". You tend to see the same 10-15 youth stop in regularly over the course of any given week, with another 5-10 that you see much more sporadically over any given month. Sometimes the youth that use your services arrive at the drop-in program with their friends who seem like they might be able to use your services, but for some reason many never come in. While many of the youth who you do see regularly make use of the free meals, internet, workforce referrals, and bus passes, you notice that many youth don't talk to staff in detail about what they need to secure housing or employment.

Scenario 2

You are the new Foster Care Liaison on Texas Public University campus. Your role is to provide information to foster care alumni regarding support services, inform these students about other resources available at the institution, and provide any other relevant information to assist the students. Unfortunately the position was vacant for over a year before you were hired and it seems there isn't a lot of scaffolding in place besides some records from graduated foster care alumni. You've heard that there used to be a foster care alumni student organization on your campus but it hasn't been very active for the last 2 years. On school records, the organization still has 5 members who are current students. One of the previously most active current students has been very difficult to reach lately and it seems their phone number keeps changing unexpectedly. When you are able to make contact, they seem anxious and in a rush to get off the phone. You feel you are almost starting the work from scratch.



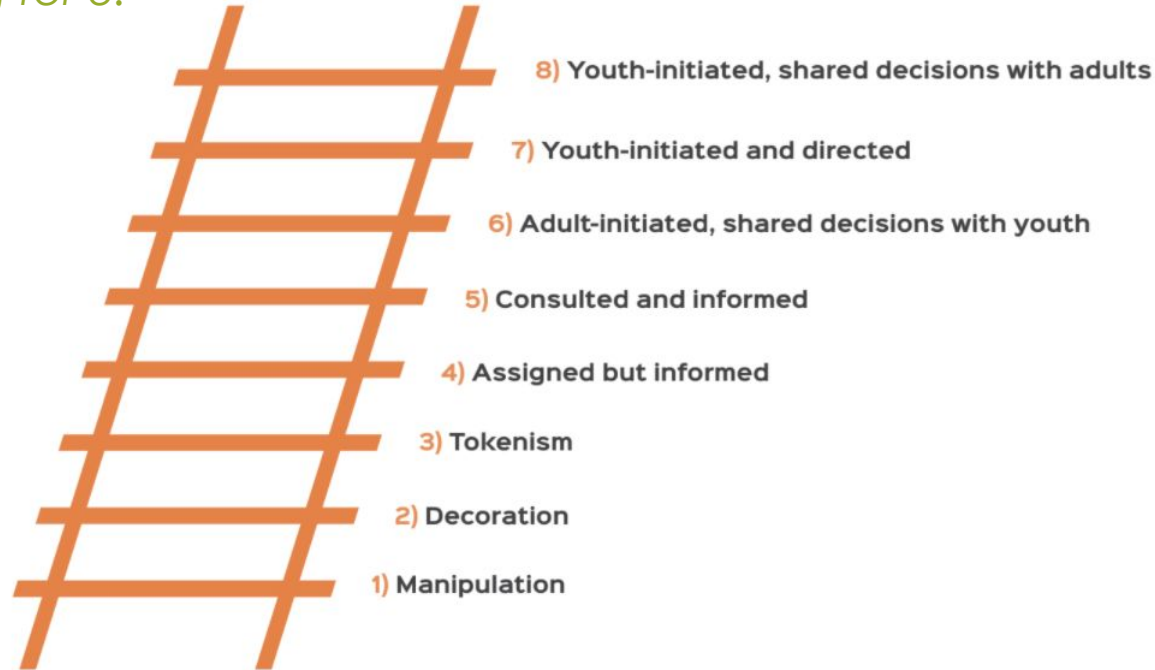
Reflection

- *How can your organization ensure that you are always hearing directly from the youth that you serve?*
- *How would you improve the opportunities for more robust youth voice in your organization?*

Best Practices for Embedding Youth Voice

Hart's Ladder of Youth Engagement

We're aiming for 8!



Adapted from: Hart, R. (1992). Children's participation from tokenism to citizenship. Florence, Italy: UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre

Adult Support

Best-Practices for Embedding Youth Voice

- Support must be built on a foundation of trust between youth and adults to be impactful
 - Prioritize getting to know the youth you work with. That's the fun part!
- Trusting relationships can be built across teams of staff/adults, though 1 dedicated primary point of contact should be established
- Establish clear paths and expectations for direct communication
- Clearly define what supports adults can and cannot provide
 - Should be established after thorough discussion about what YYA need
- Adults should engage in ongoing training on best practices to support YYA

Compensation

Best-Practices for Embedding Youth Voice

- YYA should be compensated for the lived expertise that they bring to the table
 - Compensation should happen at all levels of participation, if at all possible
- Prioritizing compensation is critical as it:
 - Demonstrates that YYA are valued for their time and seen as equal partners
 - Supports learning on-the-job transferable skills; learning payroll processes
 - Increases organizational/mission buy-in from YYA
 - Reduces logistical barriers for participation
- In-kind support is helpful, but not a substitution for payment at a living wage!

Ensuring a Positive Experience

Best-Practices for Embedding Youth Voice

- YYA who have a positive experience:
 - Are best engaged and best able to impact organizations and systems
 - Are best equipped to engage other youth who can receive services and/or participate in the work
 - Are more likely to stay engaged in the work even after they leave
- Support positive experiences by building authentic relationships, following the fundamentals of Youth Voice, and providing flexibility
- YYA need evidence that their work/feedback is acknowledged and implemented
- Offer encouragement and celebrate strengths and successes early and often

Questions?

Opportunities to Engage with TNOYS

Upcoming Youth Homelessness Systems Improvement (YHSI) Opportunities

- **Statewide Collaborative on Youth Homelessness (SCYH)**
 - Engage stakeholders working on behalf of YYA experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness to align on shared values and approaches; this collaborative emphasizes ongoing participation through monthly workgroup meetings, as well as general meetings.
 - **Practice Workgroup**
 - Connect quarterly with youth-serving professionals across our seven systems to discuss best practices in serving youth and young adults.
 - **Policy Workgroup**
 - Connect to develop policy recommendations for preventing and addressing youth homelessness and supporting youth and young adults experiencing homelessness.
 - **SCAN THE QR CODE TO JOIN:**



Regional Capacity Building Event Series

Thanks to support from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), TNOYS is proud to kick off a series of events to build capacity for providers who serve young people experiencing or vulnerable to homelessness.

Upcoming event locations are:

- Tyler - Listening Sessions; November 2025

Visit <https://tfaforms.com/5181844> to RSVP today



Benefits of a Member

Organizational Member Benefits



Access to TNOYS' members- only portal



Member discounts for all staff on TNOYS events, including trainings & conferences



Subscription to member newsletters, featuring funding opportunities & policy news, and members-only events



Invitation to all staff to annual member meetings



Ability to directly shape TNOYS' legislative agenda



Eligibility to participate in TNOYS Member Committees



Recognition on the TNOYS website and in various newsletters



Eligibility to participate in TNOYS Board of Directors



Discounts on partner products and services

Individual Member Benefits



Access to TNOYS' members- only portal



Member discounts on TNOYS events, including trainings & conferences



Free CEU certificates for recordings of training webinars in TNOYS online archive



Opportunities to connect with youth services professionals and agencies across systems



Invitation to all annual member meetings

Not Yet a Member?

Check out www.tnoys.org/become-a-member and email membership@tnoys.org with any questions!



Thank you!