



YYA EI Focus Groups

Executive Summary
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▶ Who We Engaged (in six separate conversations)

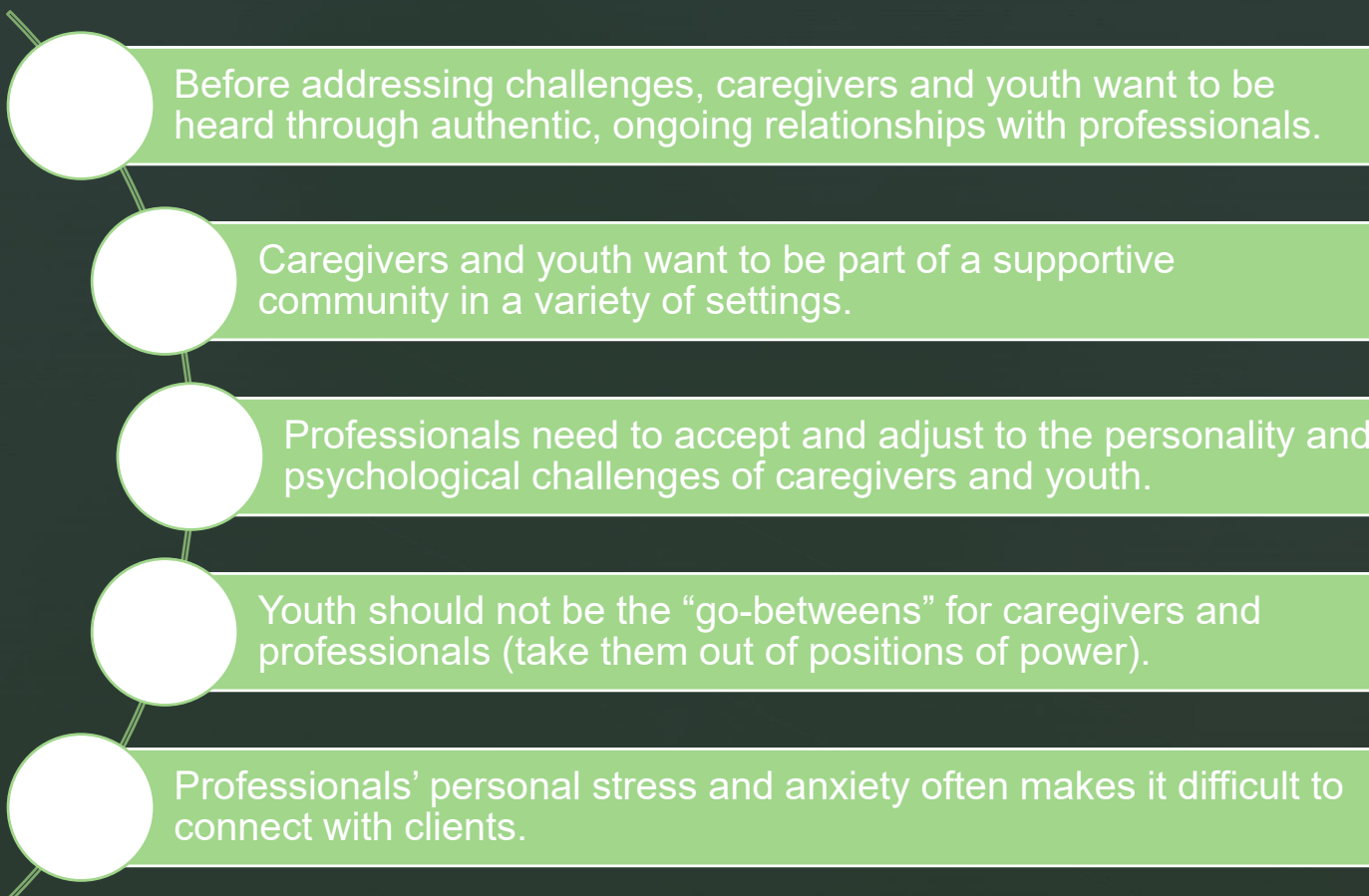
- Seven youth from refugee families in Summit County.
- Three caregivers from refugee families in Summit County.
- Fifteen professionals working with refugee families in Summit County.
- Twelve youth at the alternative school in the Four Counties region west of Toledo.
- Six caregivers of youth at the alternative school in Four Counties.
- Sixteen teachers and staff at the alternative school in Four Counties.



General Findings across All Groups



Key Feedback Themes



Before addressing challenges, caregivers and youth want to be heard through authentic, ongoing relationships with professionals.

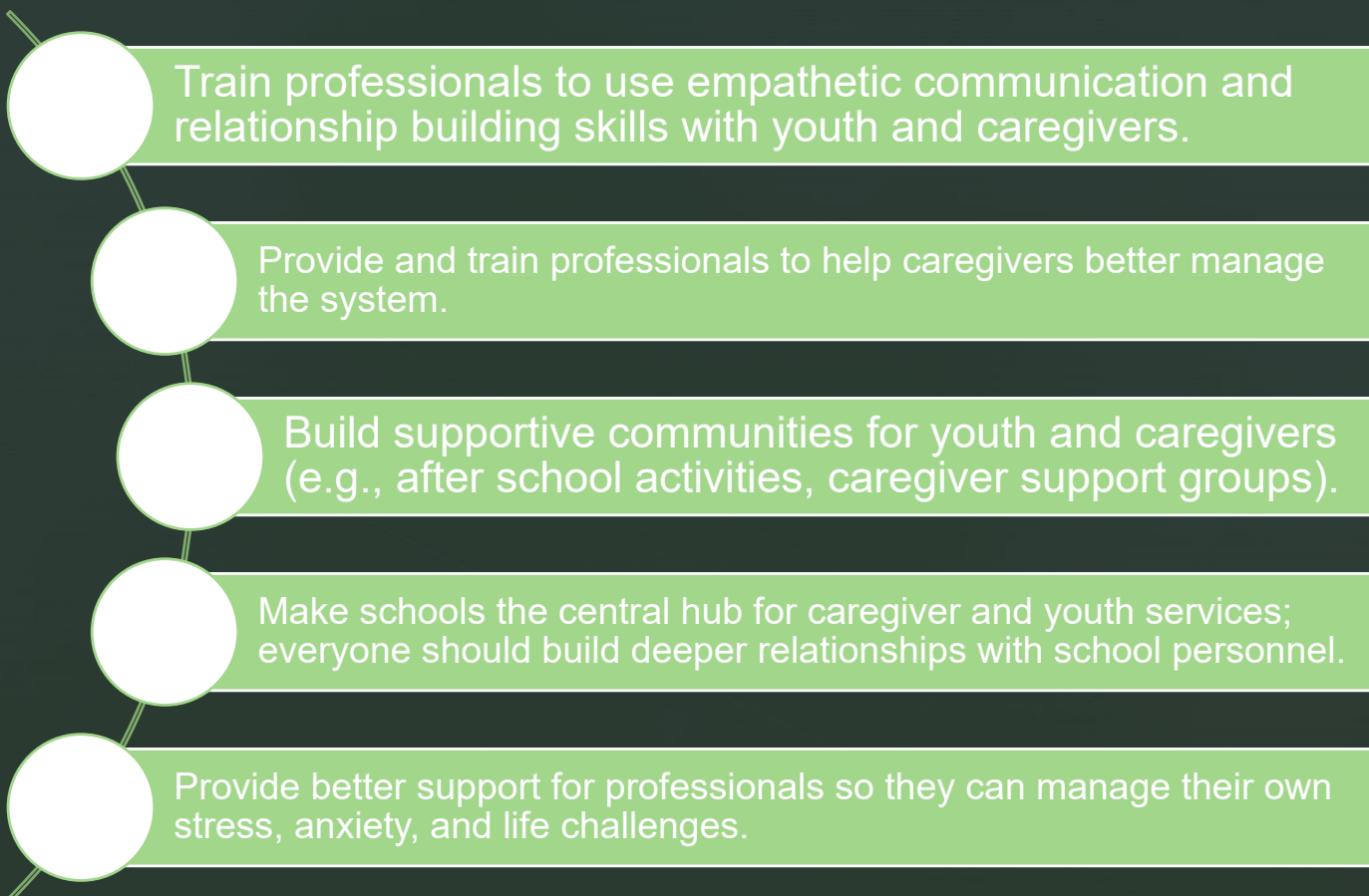
Caregivers and youth want to be part of a supportive community in a variety of settings.

Professionals need to accept and adjust to the personality and psychological challenges of caregivers and youth.

Youth should not be the “go-betweens” for caregivers and professionals (take them out of positions of power).

Professionals’ personal stress and anxiety often makes it difficult to connect with clients.

Core Recommendations



Train professionals to use empathetic communication and relationship building skills with youth and caregivers.

Provide and train professionals to help caregivers better manage the system.

Build supportive communities for youth and caregivers (e.g., after school activities, caregiver support groups).

Make schools the central hub for caregiver and youth services; everyone should build deeper relationships with school personnel.

Provide better support for professionals so they can manage their own stress, anxiety, and life challenges.

▸ Youth Quote

*Vibe with us – listen to us and
take time to build a real relationship
before trying to fix us.*

This quote captures the most important insight
across all youth and caregiver conversations.

What Is a “Vibe”?

In other words, how do clients know that a professional is trying to accept, connect, and build a real relationship?

- Professionals treat us as equals – they respect us.
- They don't judge us, our behavior or our lifestyle.
- They are vulnerable about their own lives – they open-up too.
- They ask a lot of questions without presuming the answer – they get curious and follow-up.
- They acknowledge my problem and validate it without saying “Oh, that's common, here's your generic solution.”
- They take their time with me.

Other Notable Issues

- Mental health issues affect many youth, especially depression and anxiety (school is very stressful for most).
- The pandemic caused increased youth isolation and mental health challenges.
- Youth find comfort in close friends more than any other source – just by being there for each other.
- Teachers with good relationships with youth have a great impact on their well being.
- Families are often NOT safe places for youth to share their problems, especially social/emotional issues.
- Youth and caregivers want help socializing with people outside of their group -- they want more friends and more ways to connect with them.



Specific Findings per Group

Refugee-Specific Feedback

- Caregivers don't understand 1) the lives of their children because they didn't grow up here, and 2) the complex school system. Therefore home is often not a place of real support.
- The language barrier is NOT SOLVED BY HAVING AN INTERPRETER PRESENT. The issues/systems are too complex, with obtuse language that is very difficult to explain in any language.

▶ Refugee-Specific Feedback

- Caregivers want support from someone they know, not a stranger.
- Teachers often ignore caregiver questions about their children.
- Refugees get the best help from community organizations.
- Mental health issues have a huge stigma among refugee caregivers, but NOT as much among the youth.

▶ Refugee-Specific Feedback

- Key caregiver requests
 - We need life/culture coaches because so many of our problems come from a lack of knowledge about life in the U.S.
 - We need more peer-based support groups.
 - Our children need more after-school activities.

▸ Refugee Caregiver Quote

*Don't assume we know anything –
slowly cover the basics
to begin every conversation.*

Refugee Professionals Feedback

- Requests
 - More interpreters (despite limits, they are essential).
 - More cultural competency training.
 - More communication training to overcome language barrier and help build trust.
 - More support groups for youth and caregivers.
 - *Recruit community liaisons to help connect families to professionals – this is critical for this population of caregivers.*

Four County Youth Feedback

- Our families aren't safe.
- All adults snitch on us when we open-up.
- We get labeled as "bad" and then that's how we get treated by everyone.

▸ Four County Youth Quote

*I don't like all the new people coming into my life –
once I get to know [a professional],
they leave, and I have to start over.*

Four County Caregiver Feedback

- When doctors don't see our kid's bad behavior in the office, they assume I'm crazy.
- Staff rotates too much.
- Accept how I parent my kids!
- I've lost so many friends over my kids, there is no one to help me.
- Be more proactive in communicating with me; check-in via text; report good things too; ask about red flags.
- Build a parent community at the school.
- Don't tell me what to do.

▸ Four Counties Caregiver Quote

We need true respite care – with the kids we are parenting, we need a break, and yet people are afraid to even have a relationship with us.

▸ Four County Caregiver Quote

*We are angry because the system has failed us,
and we should not have to watch some video so
we can be less angry – you change the system,
and we will stop being angry!*

Four County Professional Feedback

- We need to do better at communicating and building relationships with our parents.
- We need to better manage our own personal stress to be able to empathetically relate to caregivers.
- Requests
 - A good phone app to easily communicate with parents.
 - More support groups for kids and parents.
 - Better communication between school and other professionals like doctors.

Why Union County Navigator Program Is Successful

- They build deep relationships.
- They connect all parts of the system.
- Schools are the primary contact.
- They work on practical and emotional issues.
- They teach pros distress tolerance.
- They work with the whole family.
- Youth have access to extra-curricular activities.
- They conduct regular focus groups with caregivers and youth.

▸ Youth Quote

When asked for final thoughts, most youth enthusiastically agreed with this statement:

*We want to have more conversations like this,
where we get to tell you how we want to be
supported.*