



Georgia's Youth Mentorship Strategy: Using Mentors to Support Youth Ambassadors

Background

The Georgia State Team, composed of the Georgia Advocacy Office (GAO), [Sangha Unity Network \(SUN\)](#), and the Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities (GCDD), implemented a youth mentorship initiative that matched mentors with Youth Ambassadors who were part of the [Center on Youth Voice, Youth Choice \(CYVYC\) project](#). The main objectives of the mentorship initiative were to support Youth Ambassadors to successfully participate in the training curriculum and to develop an individual showcase project. Mentors were members of the Georgia State Team who agreed to provide additional support to Youth Ambassadors during the life of the project. Mentors supported Youth Ambassadors in understanding curriculum material, completing assignments, and designing and implementing their projects. Mentors attended training sessions on a rotational basis, to ensure that they were familiar with the week's lesson and to help out during the session if needed. Mentors also checked in with Youth Ambassadors after each session and provided support. In their role, mentors increased connections among the youth and between the youth and the State Team members and provided structure and guidance to the youth.

Building on this foundation, the Georgia State Team hosted an in-person retreat that brought together Youth Ambassadors, family members, and their mentors. The purpose of the retreat was twofold: 1) to create a comfortable and supportive space for Youth Ambassadors, their supporters and mentors, and the program staff to strengthen their relationships, and 2) to further support youth to complete their individual showcase projects. At the retreat, the Youth Ambassadors worked with their mentors to review content related to self-determination

and supported decision-making (SDM). Youth also learned about Georgia's new [I DECIDE framework](#).

After the review, each Youth Ambassador practiced teaching an element from the

[I DECIDE concepts](#). The team offered a rotating mentorship support session whereby Youth Ambassadors met with all the different mentors to review their individual showcase projects and get input and feedback from each supporter. This strategy was valuable for the Ambassadors as they engaged in statewide activities focused on advancing alternatives to guardianship through their [advocacy \(showcase\) projects](#).

I DECIDE represents the concepts Direct, Enlist, Choose, Inform, Determine, and Experience as the key components of any supported decision-making process. GAO uses the acronym DECIDE to teach the process of supported decision-making.



Youth Ambassadors work on their projects with mentors and family members.

Implementation

The State Team formally paired Youth Ambassadors with mentors about halfway into the formal online Youth Ambassador curriculum once Youth Ambassadors started brainstorming ideas for their showcase projects. This way, mentors with relevant knowledge, expertise, and experience could provide support in youth showcase project concept formation and design. The retreat then created space to deepen the engagement and foster these supportive relationships between Youth Ambassadors, their family members, and mentors. The retreat also provided an opportunity to get input from multiple mentors on each of the individual Youth Ambassador projects for the showcase.

At the retreat, mentors supported youth to:

- » understand and be able to teach the I DECIDE framework
- » develop their presentation and advocacy skills
- » build capacity on their State Team

At the retreat, the organizers had a group of attendees willing to act in a mentoring role. So, they devised the concept of a rotating mentor support session. The rotating mentoring session allowed each Youth Ambassador to have short one-on-one opportunities, in 20-minute segments, to practice explaining their project and to get additional perspective and advice from each of the six mentors. As mentors worked with each Youth Ambassador, they pulled in additional expertise as needed. For example, mentors with knowledge about mobile app design advised youth who included app design in their project. Some youth created projects that were outside the mentors' expertise. In these situations, the team pulled in other experts to help guide youth to finalize their projects. The goal of this rotating mentor support session was to develop, and later implement, the individual youth projects in preparation for the showcase.

Impact

Youth Ambassadors reported that they valued the experience. One Youth Ambassador said that the retreat was the best part of his CYVYC



Youth and mentors listen attentively as a Youth Ambassador teaches from the DECIDE framework.

experience and has talked about it in numerous presentations he has given. Youth Ambassadors also reported feeling supported by having the opportunity to share their ideas with six different mentors, while also having one specific mentor to work directly with them on their project. Project staff reported that having mentors made all the difference in the success of their project, in keeping youth engaged, and in creating a variety of tools for promoting alternatives to guardianship.

Mentors remained in contact with Youth Ambassadors as they prepared and implemented their presentations at Georgia's showcase. The mentors and the Youth Ambassadors continue to meet regularly and have built a Youth Community of Practice for Georgians as part of their work. Youth Ambassadors have also delivered presentations to various organizations and continue showcasing their projects.

One unexpected outcome was that family members who participated in the retreat as supporters were able to process with and learn from each other. While the retreat was not initially designed to include family members, they reported learning new concepts and sharpening their knowledge.

Lastly, in addition to being energizing, the retreat helped the whole team coalesce, jointly reflect on shared values, celebrate accomplishments, and explore possibilities. This led to sustaining commitments from the youth, their families, and their mentors, resulting in the formation of a family Community of Practice.

Suggestions for Replication:

- » **Clear expectations.** The Georgia State Team clearly communicated the expectations that each Youth Ambassador would develop an individualized project and that mentors would provide support. Structure and Guidance. Mentors helped youth stay on track with their projects by providing structure and guidance.
- » **Individualized support.** Mentors helped each Youth Ambassador feel supported. They created a specific role for all the involved staff to individually work with one young person on their project. The rotating mentor support session was an opportunity for Youth Ambassadors to find the “right match” in their mentor as they continued the development and implementation of their projects, and on their advocacy journeys.
- » **Collaborative support.** The rotating mentor support session allowed each Youth Ambassador to talk with six different invested supporters as they developed and finalized an idea for their project.

State Teams could use any of these strategies—pairing youth with mentors, having a rotating support session, hosting a retreat—separately or in a variety of combinations based on the needs and resources of their teams.

For more information, please visit

<https://idecidega.org>



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