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***Connected Communities-Thriving Families***

**Youth Congress Roles and Responsibilities**

Too many Missouri children enter the child welfare system and leave their families and communities for reasons unrelated to harm or neglect, but due to misdirected responses to family and community hardship. This flawed approach not only harms children, families and communities, but is unsustainable as a system. We propose a systems redesign that engages and empowers communities to support and empower families. This redesign will rebalance the continuum of care to connect appropriate resources that respond to community conditions and community specific solutions to inform policy changes and funding priorities.

The Youth Congress will provide a vehicle for young people in Missouri to become involved in the co-design of prevention and support services to enable children and families to remain safely in their homes together and in their communities. By engaging youth in the Connected Communities-Thriving Families initiative, the vision, policies, practices and procedures will be informed by their lived experience and perspective. The Youth Congress will bring new energy, information and knowledge into community conversations through youth targeted, age and gender sensitive interventions. As part of developing future leaders of our communities, members of the Youth Congress will inform, co-design and guide implementation on community solutions to meet community and family needs.

**YOUTH CONGRESS WILL:**

* Be youth led with assistance, as needed, from the project leadership.
* Convene consistent, structured meetings, providing feedback and input on community strengths and opportunities.
* Inform, co-design and guide implementation on community solutions to provide meaningful and consistent access to prevention and support services.
* Focus on community building and engagement of youth voices.
* Interface with local/state officials, advocates, policy makers, and stakeholders to inform policy and budgetary actions.
* Be a safe place for youth to have open discussions.
* Serve as part of the overall governance process for Connected Communities – Thriving Families throughout implementation.

**MEMBERSHIP**

The Youth Congress will:
Seek a diverse representation of youth in race, gender, sexual orientation, age, life experiences and formal/informal leadership skills.  Life experiences may include spending time in the foster care system, receiving home-based services to avoid foster care, or accessing needed supports to assist you or your family.

* Have 10-15 members of youth across the State of Missouri.
* Be comprised of youth from 15-20 years of age.
* Letters of interest describing own lived experience, what issues you would like the Youth Congress to address, and strengths you will bring to the Youth Congress.
* Members will receive a $50 per diem when attending Youth Congress meetings or completing project assignments between meetings.
* Snacks and/or meals will be provided during convenings.
* Meeting times will be decided uniformly by the Youth Congress.
* Transportation assistance will be available for attending Youth Congress meetings.

**Youth Congress Member Roles and Responsibilities**

* Attend all meetings in person and/or virtually or notify Project Manager if unable to participate.
* Lead or actively participate in meeting discussions and decision-making processes.
* Execute outreach and engagement activities within the community to assist in mobilizing other youth and individuals with lived experience.
* Act as a representative of Connected Communities-Thriving Families Youth Congress to the community, policy and law makers, funders, community groups, and other stakeholders critical to the success of Connected Communities – Thriving Families.
* Bring your best thinking and authentic self.

 **Missouri Coalition for Children Statement of Inclusion**

***“Together we Thrive”***

We believe to *Thrive* we must:

* Celebrate our differences as strengths,
* Lift up the voices of those with lived experiences,
* Reflect the communities we serve and work in,
* Address and eliminate the biases that exist within systems of care,
* Recognize, welcome and affirm the rights of children and families to live their lives with dignity regardless of, but not limited to, color, ethnicity, faith, religion, disability, gender or sexual orientation,
* Commit to growing and learning from our mistakes, and

Together we ***will*** Thrive