

# Successful Strategies for Engaging Vulnerable Youth and Families

## CYFAR webinar

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THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

# You say Vulnerable I say Placed at Risk



The screenshot shows the Webster's Dictionary website interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with the Webster's logo on the left and tabs for 'DICTIONARY' and 'THESAURUS'. The word 'vulnerable' is highlighted in the search bar. Below the navigation bar, the word 'vulnerable' is displayed in a large, bold font, accompanied by a speaker icon for audio playback. Underneath the word, the part of speech 'adjective' is listed, followed by phonetic pronunciations: 'vul·ner·a·ble' and '\ 'vəl-n(ə-)rə-bəl, 'vəl-nər-bəl\'. A popularity metric indicates it is in the 'Top 10% of words'. Two interactive buttons are present: 'Examples: VULNERABLE in a sentence' and 'Editor's note: Did You Know?'. The main content area is titled 'Definition of VULNERABLE' and contains three numbered definitions.

Webster's

DICTIONARY THESAURUS

vulnerable

**vulnerable** 

*adjective* | vul·ner·a·ble | \ 'vəl-n(ə-)rə-bəl, 'vəl-nər-bəl\

Popularity: Top 10% of words

Examples: VULNERABLE in a sentence ▼

Editor's note: Did You Know? ▼

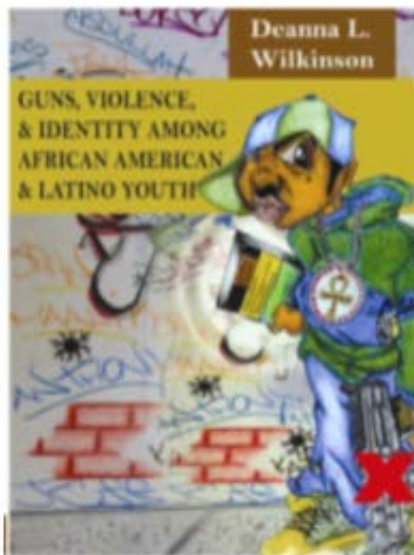
### Definition of VULNERABLE

- 1 : capable of being physically or emotionally wounded
- 2 : open to attack or damage : **ASSAILABLE** <*vulnerable* to criticism>
- 3 : liable to increased penalties but entitled to increased bonuses after winning a game in contract bridge

# Field Lessons from 2 Projects

- Engaging **Young Men (ages 16-24)** in NYC who had been caught up in gun violence.
- Engaging **practitioners** from social services, law enforcement, and grassroots backgrounds to enlarge their tool box when working young men caught up in gun violence.
- 2 engagement activities to try

# Example 1. NYCYS What we learned from interviews with 416 young men caught up in urban gun violence



Event Dynamics and the Role  
of Third Parties in Urban  
Youth Violence

National Institute of Justice  
(NIJ) Deanna Wilkinson

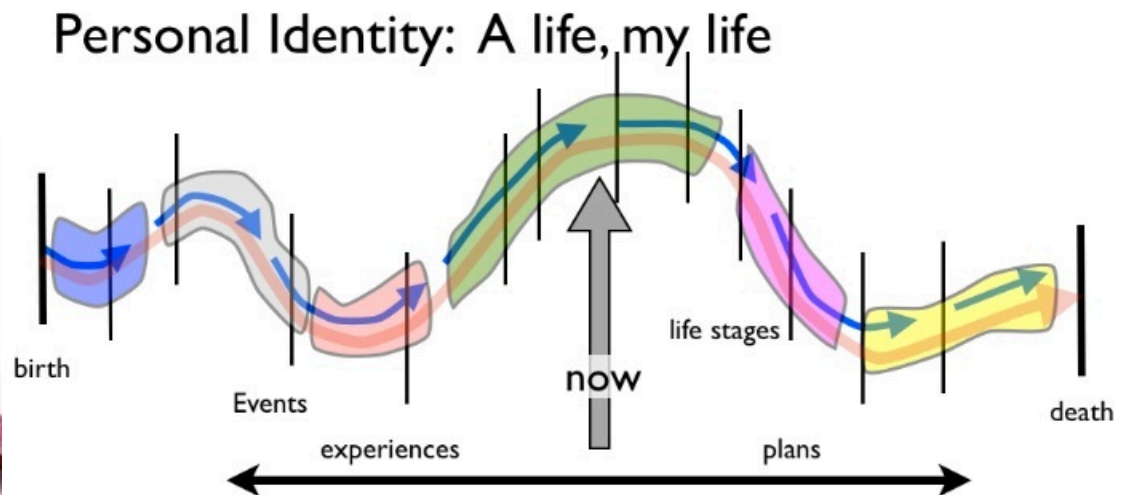


# Engagement Steps

- Volunteered in setting to learn language, styles, needs, and ways of connecting
- Listened and found we had many common experiences
- When natural I joined conversations by sharing stories.
- Initial step was being a naïve student – asking to be educated by the “experts”

## What we learned:

each person has a personal story – multi-layered like an onion, evolving throughout development



# Messages Youth Report

charityCase  
challenged lower-class  
trouble-maker  
angryBlackfemale  
angryBlackmale  
welfare-mother abused delinquent  
urban disempowered  
super-predator aggressive  
slow violent unruly poor  
risky inner-city volatile  
dangerous freeloader  
low-income lower-class Notworking  
unworthy predator resistant  
wild lacking high-risk disrespectful  
thief minority traumatized  
disadvantaged dependent  
scary unpredictable  
hopeless crazy criminal  
disenfranchised parentless  
uneducated disengaged  
undereducated low-income  
poverty-stricken hyper-active  
morally-bankrupt  
morally-corrupt

# Our Discourse can be problematic

- Words hurt
- Lack of cultural appreciation hurts
- Low expectations hurt
- The academic language itself e.g., “violent offenders” further stigmatizes
- Youth caught up in violence have other identities
- Building trust requires finding common ground and connection points



# Engagement Strategy 1

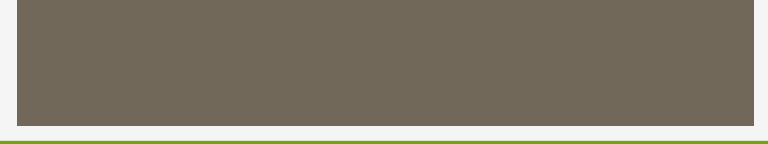
- **Could you walk a step in his shoes?**
- Circle activity for building community
  - 1) Directions, please take off your shoes, notice how it feels
  - 2) look around the room at everybody's else who is taking off their shoes,
  - 3) pick up your right shoe and pass that shoe to your right.
  - 4) take the shoe that is coming toward you. Study that shoe. -now look at your own foot. Size up the shoe. Will it fit? Are you willing to try it? Is it too big, too small, too dirty, too ugly, too high heeled, too worn, too what? Are you brave enough to put it on?
- As you think about putting on that shoe and walking a mile in that person's shoes what do you think you would experience?
- All you have to go on is the limited knowledge you have based on perception and projection. The more you know people in a room the more layers of the onion you may use to consider in filling in the storyline of the person's journey.

## Tips and Take-aways

- A good first impression is important
- Be a learner, not an expert
- Listen and observe
- Notice what participants are seeking
- Go slow to create opportunities for co-production
- Allow others to host (it is their home)
- Think about interactions baby steps in relationship building
- Prepare yourself to walk in the youths' shoes

# Example 2: Engaging Practitioners





Poll: What are 3 things that come to your mind when you think about Vulnerable Youth or Youth placed at High Risk?

# Some of the Initial Discourse among Practitioners

- This generation is...
  - Impossible to reach
  - Hard to work with
  - More violent and dangerous than ever
  - Do not value human life
  - No parenting
  - It starts in the home
  - We cannot make up for the lack of moral education
  - Babies raising babies
  - Destined to be poor, criminals, teen parents, etc.

# A working model of youth engagement...

- We did and it evolved as we had hard conversations and challenged each others assumptions.
- We had divergent perspective convened specifically to hear as many voices as possible.
- We were all learners

# Engagement Strategy to Open Dialogue on Perspectives

- **The CARDS youth are dealt activity**

- 1) Give each participant a deck of cards that includes characteristics from adolescent and young adults' life stories (in my case I drew from life history data from the NYCYS)
- 2) Domains included: family background and experiences, neighborhood experiences, school experiences, personal achievements, interests, talents, peer relationships, hopes for the future, criminal justice system experiences, involvement in other systems, health status, parenthood status, financial stability, housing status, etc.
- 3) Students are asked to develop a case management plan or a Positive Youth Development program for the youth in the cards.

# Example -17 year old David

- Raised by parental grandmother
- Father murdered, mother addict
- Oldest of four children
- Large extended family, very close
- Projects have been home since both, not too safe
- Began hanging with older cousins who formed a gang
- Got arrested first at age 12 for shoplifting
- Was a good student in elementary school
- Fell behind in school when mother got clean and took him and his siblings out of state for a while. Mother is in and out of his life.
- Kick out of school at 14 for drug possession and fighting
- 14.5 his best friend was murdered by a rival gang member; he was grazed in the incident. Has reoccurring nightmares and is extra cautious
- Became a father at 16, lived with girl and her family for a while until they kicked him out. Has been staying with friends ever since.
- Was locked up on Rikers Island for 7 months awaiting trial on armed robbery – prosecutor is offering a plea deal of 3 years.
- Loves to draw and cook, and spending time with his daughter
- Needs a job, he got fired from his last job for punching the manager over an insult.
- Wants to get back to school and make something of his life. Worries a lot.





Have you worked with a youth like David?

- Yes
- No

## Question to Guide Discussion

- What resources would help David in his current situation?
- What additional information would you need to gather before you would feel comfortable working to assist the young person in the CARDS?
- How would you get started engaging with colleagues? Engaging with the youth?

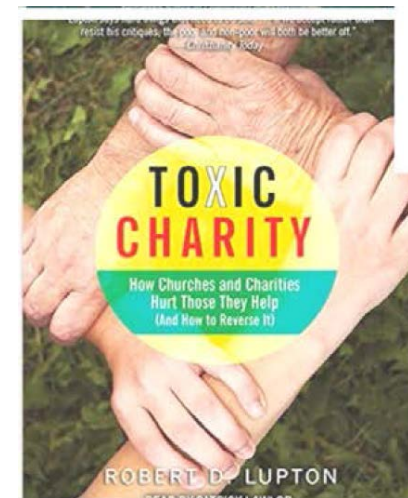
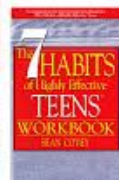
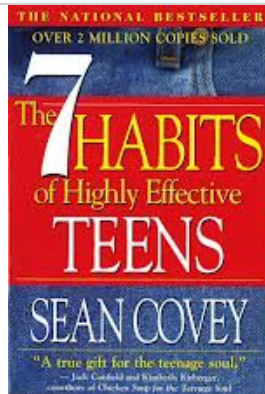
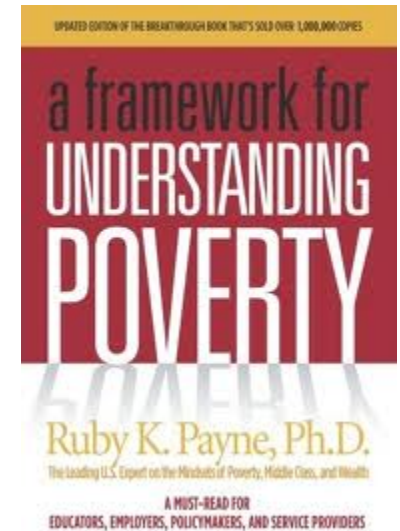
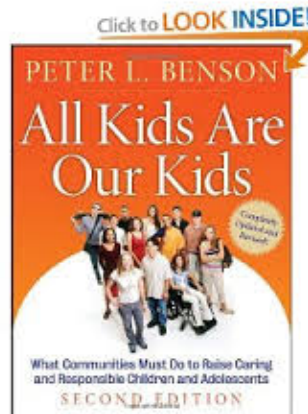
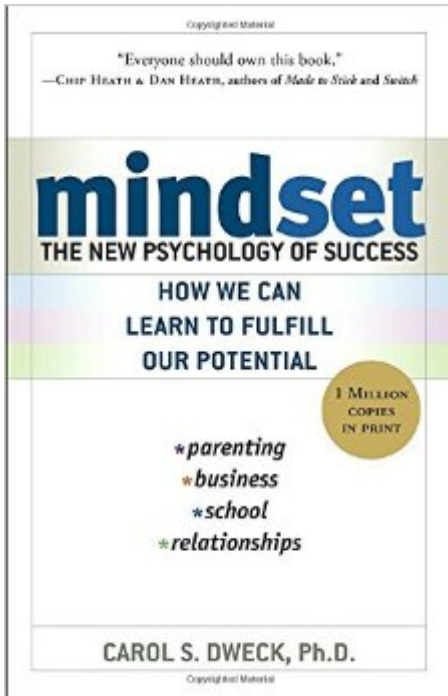
# Still learning... CYFAR Urban GEMS



# Indicators of Success

- What does successful engagement with other people look like?
  - They show up
  - They report gains and satisfaction,
  - They participate in the activities
  - They experience growth in targeted outcomes.
  - They invite others.
  - They take pieces of what we offer and build something with it themselves

# Recommended Literature





# Questions and Discussion



# Contact Information

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