

# Advocacy with Youth:

Examining the Empowerment Model and Ageism to Serve  
Youth Better

# Objectives:

- Be able to identify what strengths you/your agency already have that can be used to better serve youth.
- Learn how to screen volunteers and staff to ensure an empowering experience for youth that seek services with your agency.
- Identify personal barriers to serving youth effectively and specific methods to overcome those barriers.

# Who Am I?

- I have worked with Youth since before I became an adult!
  - As a Sexual Assault Advocate and Preventionist at Oasis Youth Center
  - As a mentor at a middle school in Los Angeles.
  - As staff at a rehab.

# Why Youth?

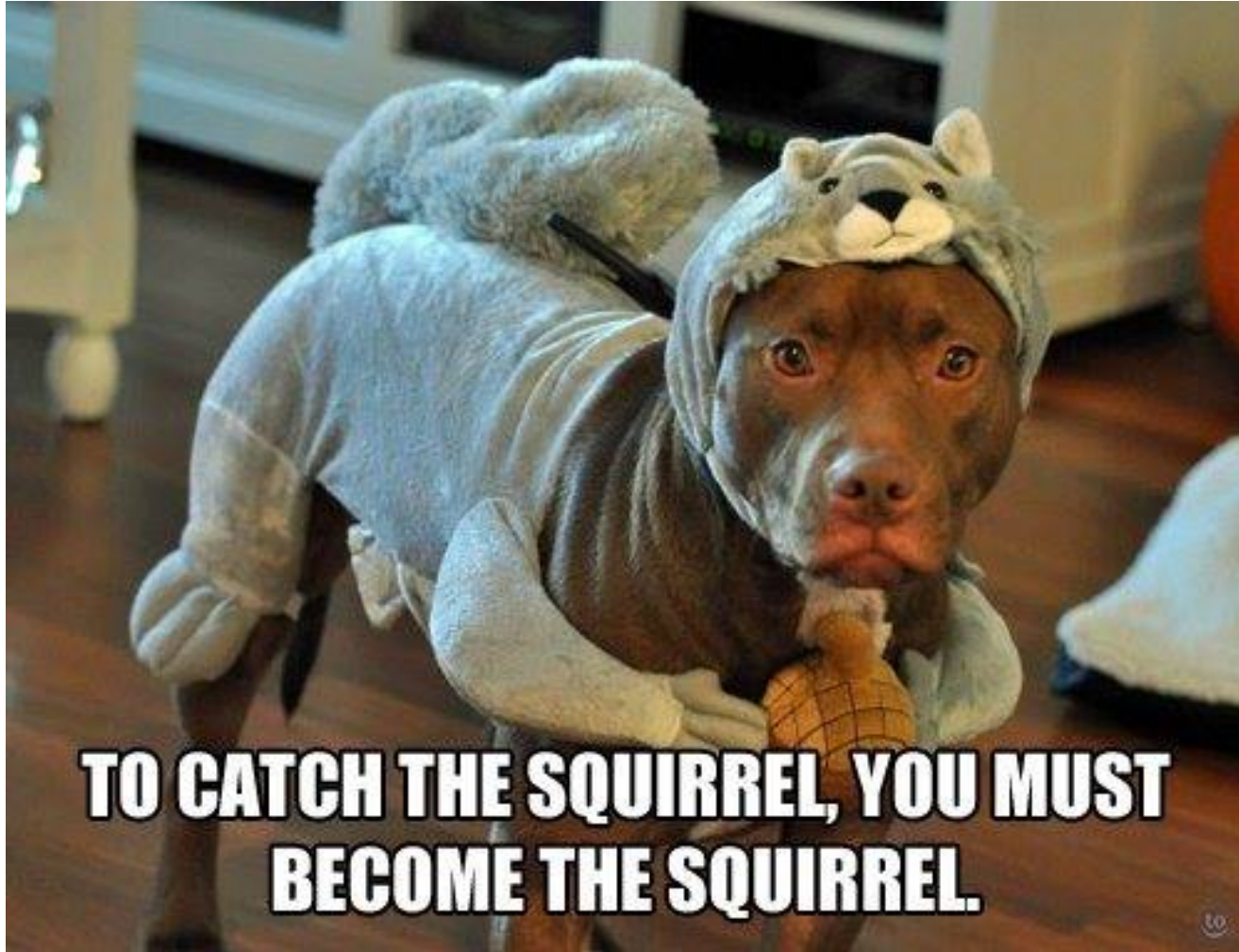
- Mostly because I was one... Sure, we all were!
  - I was a young person that needed a lot of help.
- Youth need your services!
- Ageism is the only form of oppression that we all experience in our lives.
  - How does that make us better or worse for our working with youth?

# Strengths! Good Advocacy is Good Advocacy

- You Already have this down!
- Being a good advocate for youth, is very similar to being a good advocate for everyone else.
- What is an Advocate's Role?
- How can the empowerment model be harder with young people?
  - Mandatory Reporting
  - Assigned or real helplessness

# Empowerment! It's not just for adults anymore.

- Young people need to feel heard and respected... You may be the only person in a young person's life that can provide that.
- The system is set up to keep youth "safe", not autonomous. How can we set them up to feel that they are able to make as many choices about their circumstances as possible?
  - Intakes
  - Not investigating (Hotlines)
- How can we get support when we see a young person struggling? How can we best support them?



**TO CATCH THE SQUIRREL, YOU MUST  
BECOME THE SQUIRREL.**



# Start With You

- In order to be a great advocate for a young person, you have to remember what it was like to be one...
- You have to believe 100% in their power to heal and in their resilience.
  - Trauma can affect young people's development and health BUT this is not inevitable. Positive intervention can prevent stress from becoming toxic and decrease the risk of stress-related disease and cognitive impairment.
  - ME
  - If you join their crisis, even if your heart is in the right place, that does not support their resilience.



# What is Ageism?

- Stereotyping and discriminating against individuals or groups on the basis of their age. This may be casual or systematic.
- Ageism is the belief that we, as adults, know better than the young person does about their own life. It is the opposite of empowerment.
- We can oscillate between wanting to save them and blaming them.

# Volunteer Screening:

- Quality over quantity.
  - Developing screening for your staff and volunteers can be hard. Often, organizations are desperate to acquire volunteers, so much so that we do little screening of their abilities.
- This can be harmful to any group that experiences stereotypes. This is definitely true of youth. Having a good heart, does not make someone good at implementing an empowerment model. Especially with young people
- How do we screen for ageism and what is it?

- Volunteer Applications
  - Include scenarios (Hotline, In-Person)
  - Gauge comfort levels with youth
    - If you have a youth specific program, check motives
- Trainings
  - In person training with other volunteers
  - Notice responses that could be problematic
  - Shadowing
- Follow up and Accountability
  - Ongoing training for volunteers and staff for continued growth

# Staff

- All of this applies to staff as well, but staff have more training opportunities and are going to set the tone for your volunteers and agency
- If you or your staff are not comfortable working with youth, have open discussions
- Get support from leadership and peers
- On-going training is essential

# Intakes

- How your agency screens survivors sets the tone
- Youth friendly (and really, people friendly) intakes are essential
  - How much information is necessary?
  - How do you acquire this information?
  - How do you let youth know what your obligations are in order to facilitate their choices?
- Consistency is key

# Consistency

- Just like working with any survivor, good communication, boundaries, and consistency creates a youth friendly environment
- Having volunteers, staff, and policies all in line with each other supports the empowerment of young people that reach out to your agency

# Referrals

- Take time to get to know what services there are in your community for youth.
  - These services do not have to be for survivors of Sexual Assault! You are the experts on that, but knowing what other services there are for youth to get engaged in keeps you relevant to the young people you serve.
- Supporting the resilience in young people means helping them get plugged in to programs that:
  - Have supportive adults
  - Are positive and create opportunities to build skills
  - Support healthy social skills



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**WHO'S AWESOME?**  
YOU'RE AWESOME