



Aetna Better Health

HEERO (Helping Each other/Everyone Reach Out) Workshops

What is a HEERO workshop?

Child welfare is laid upon a foundation of good intention, ensuring child safety and well-being. However, children in the child welfare system who are taken into foster care are met with loneliness and disconnect, resulting from losing relationships and connections with important people and places in their lives. The losses and the impact of those losses are significant. The loss begins at removal and under the guise of safety pervades as they grow and age out of state care. The system of "casework as usual" does not effectively address this.

We have also come to realize that the same is evident for adult participants (parents/caregivers) in child welfare service: the experience is lonely and isolating at a time when both family and children need "their people" and support of those people most.

The goal of **HEERO workshops (Helping/Each other/Everyone Reach Out)** is to facilitate the development and sustainability of lifelong unconditional relationships; a network of support for youth who are in care and for adult service recipients involved with the society related to the unmet needs for safety for their child(ren). HEERO builds networks and creates space for participatory practice and healing for children and their networks.



The **HEERO workshops** are a series of intentional activities and exercises that are conceptually connected that youth participate in together, supported by peers. This is an innovative approach connecting youth and adult participants with family, kin, community and culture and other informal supports – whom they identify as important - through participating in the workshop.



The workshop and process utilize a peer navigator model of "youth helping youth" and a network meeting model post workshop ongoing. This process seeks to connect and re-connect participants to important people in their lives and to activate those important people to assist youth in meeting their unmet needs.

The approach intends to support improved outcomes for youth in the areas of social relationships known to buffer the toxic stress impact resultant from experienced adversities. Concurrently positively impacting other domains such as health, mental health, and overall well-being. For adult recipients it is to decrease the sense of loneliness and "aleness" and similarly buffer the adversity of the stress of society involvement and past adversities; concurrently positively impacting collaborative case planning for the child's care and support for parents and family in the context of relationships, that are unconditional and based on caring and love.