



YOUTH VOICE ADVOCATE

Staff Role and Bio

JOINT INITIATIVES FOR YOUTH + FAMILIES (JI) - *An Equal Opportunity Employer*

Joint Initiatives is a nonprofit organization that was established in 1989 specifically for the purpose of bringing together agencies, systems and the community for the purpose of supporting children and youth by enhancing collaboration, ensuring higher impact services, and collectively impacting and improving the lives of young people and their families across the Pikes Peak Region.

YOUTH VOICE ADVOCATE

ROLE: Often youth going through services or systems (e.g., mental health, juvenile justice, substance use issues, foster care, or homelessness) can be dehumanized, with their opinions/feelings/insights ignored, and they may experience further trauma. When a youth advocate (who understands what those situations can feel like) steps into a young person's life, it is often transformational for that youth and can lead them to a path of stability and success.

Our youth advocates serve as a liaison between youth representatives and the CMP & CYDC. They attend ISST and E-ISST as advocates for high-risk youth. Advocates promote, speak, and support schools and the community with restorative justice practice and implementation – and much more!

EDGAR FLORES, YOUTH VOICE ADVOCATE

BIO: The ages between 9-15 shaped me into the leader I am today and the opportunity to serve as a Youth Voice Advocate for JI. Growing up in the south east of Colorado Springs was not the easiest nor the hardest. I faced multiple adverse situations as well as navigated difficult thoughts.

As a naive kid, I thought soccer was universal. Adversity struck and my team was left without a pitch (field) to practice on because we were kicked off, so we traveled to our local park where my life forever changed. At this park, we coincidentally met Sarah and my relationship with SeSSI (Southeast Springs Soccer Initiatives – a violence prevention program founded by Joint Initiatives) grew from that moment on. SeSSI, people who cared, and others guided me while I grew up with negative influences around me. With constant reflection I realized the importance of kindness, community, and how the act of caring goes a long way.

From then on, I always found myself in a position of educating, helping, or listening to others which brought me happiness. Much like SeSSI and others who helped me, I wanted to put myself in a leading position of helping those in need. Such drive put me in the position I am today, advocating for the youth in my community as I've developed relationships with a variety of young people. Beyond that, I always strive to help those around me and try to enlighten the minds of people around me, especially the generations to come. In return I hope for a more united, safer, and equitable community.

All in all, I want to repay those who assisted in my growth as a young human by doing the same with people in my community.



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ZYSHAUN JACKSON, YOUTH VOICE ADVOCATE

BIO: Zyshaun Jackson was born in Colorado Springs and has lived in Colorado his whole life. Zyshaun likes to say he is a youth that turned it all around. He sits on a couple of national boards and local county boards. He embraces always speaking up to help youth and families. Zyshaun has given a Keynote speech and facilitated nationwide trainings on Restorative Justice.

Zyshaun represents youth in El Paso County to make sure systems are responding to youth and family needs. Zyshaun is passionate about his own personal and societal growth. He plans on starting many businesses to continue the fight to help the little people.



PARENT ADVOCATE

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PARENT ADVOCATE

ROLE: Often families with youth going through services or systems (e.g., mental health, juvenile justice, substance use issues, foster care, or homelessness) can feel their youth is dehumanized, that their opinions/feelings/insights are ignored, and want to avoid their youth being further traumatized. When a parent advocate (who understands what those situations can feel like) steps into a family's life, it is often transformational for that family and can lead the family to a path of stability and success.

Our parent advocates serve as a liaison between family representatives and the Collaborative Management Program & Colorado Youth Detention Continuum. Advocates attend ISST and Expedited-ISST (Individualized Service and Support Teams) as advocates for families of high-risk youth. They promote, speak, and support schools and the community with restorative justice practice and implementation – and much more!

EBONY HAYES, PARENT ADVOCATE

BIO: Ebony Hayes is a mother of four with a unique lens and ability to support parents on their pathway to success. Her lived experience allows her the ability to build unique professional relationships with parents navigating systems. "*I'm the normal person in the room,*" is how Ebony often describes herself. Her resilient journey and ability to empathize with the challenge of "making it to the other side" provides a level of support often times overlooked by system(s) professionals. Her unique expertise is a necessary added support for families on their pathway from "*surviving to thriving.*"