

MaineJobs SPOTLIGHT:

YLAT Specialist

Ahmen Cabral, Muskie School of Public Service, University of Southern Maine

How did you get started?

My graduate internship led to a full-time position working on several projects, including juvenile justice and foster care. I was drawn to work with the Youth Leadership Advisory Team (YLAT) because I could make a difference for youth. Through YLAT (www.ylat.org) I engage youth leaders in foster care in improving programs, strengthening policies, and making life better for all youth in care.



Youth Leadership Advisory Team specialist Ahmen Cabral's job, or mission, is "making life better for all youth in care." (Merry Farnum photo)

What training did you have?

I have received training on group facilitation, policy writing, research and evaluation, grant writing, adolescent development, transition frameworks, community engagement and network building.

What skills are essential to your job?

The most important skills are clear communication, developing effective relationships with members of different teams, and facilitation skills (both in group meetings and in accomplishing project activities). Computer skills are

also important!

What is a typical day on the job like?

There is no typical day. I work on a variety of projects and do everything from conducting meetings, leading activities with youth leaders and adult partners, facilitating trainings, writing reports, conducting research, and communicating with the partners involved in each project.

What's your favorite part of the job?

I love working with youth leaders, social workers and community members

as they develop simple and practical solutions to problems that children face in foster care. When members of the community learn what youth in foster care experience, they commit themselves to helping in tangible and important ways. I am inspired and energized by youth leaders and community partners who demonstrate a strong commitment to support all youth in care.

What's the greatest challenge?

Sometimes it is challenging to build or maintain the kind of supportive, lifelong connections a young person needs to be successful. We all need more than paid professionals in our lives to help us in the tough times and to celebrate our successes.

Who succeeds in the job?

You can succeed and thrive in this job if you see the potential in each person and the possibility in each event. You need to value the contributions that different people with different perspectives and roles bring to addressing community challenges. You have to be able to multi-task, be organized and adapt to changes.

What advice would you offer to someone interested in a job in this field?

Get involved now! Volunteer. Become a mentor. Join a community network. There are youth in foster care in every community who need positive adults in their lives to open doors and offer support.

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