

Youth Development 101

Youth development is a process in which youth have basic needs met and gain skills that can help them be successful now and in the future.

How can you support youth development?

SAFETY



Youth have a need to feel physically and emotionally safe. Participation in meetings or activities that occur in a safe, supportive environment can provide youth participants with a feeling of physical safety and security. In addition, organized activities can provide youth with a sense that there is additional structure in their lives.

MASTERY

Youth have a need to feel they have valued skills and abilities. Participating in activities that provide training and experience in a variety of areas, such as public speaking, media relations, understanding public policy, critical thinking skills etc. leads to the acquisition of new skills and the opportunity to apply these skills to a larger cause.



AUTONOMY



Youth have a need to feel that they are unique and that they can succeed in the world. Engagement in community issues and actions allows them to discover personal likes and dislikes and develop individual abilities. They also can see the impact of their efforts on their environment.

BELONGING

Youth have a need to be part of a social group. Youth group participants can make new friends and connections with other youth who have a shared purpose.



SELF WORTH/SELF-AWARENESS



Youth have a need to feel positive about themselves. By participating in meaningful activities that work to improve their community and enhance the well being of its members, youth can gain an increased sense of self-worth and a sense that they are part of something much bigger than themselves.

Learn More About Youth Development!

www.myan.org
www.youthdevelopment.org
www.theinnovationcenter.org
www.youthbuild.org
www.freechild.org
<http://cyd.aed.org/whatis.html>
<http://wch.uhs.wisc.edu/08-Youth/08-YD-WhatIsIt.html>

Why Involve Youth?

Involving youth in *authentic* ways can take more time, energy and creativity than doing a project alone, but the rewards are big. It is essential to have a strong understanding of the value of involving youth to keep you motivated when barriers arise. Below are a list of just some of the good reasons to partner with youth as you strive to make change.



Young people have a right to be consulted about decisions that will effect their lives, and will have unique insights into the strengths & weaknesses of a project aimed at youth.



Young people are fun to be with and can teach you a lot.



A youth perspective is different than an adult one and in the spirit of “two heads are better than one,” multiple perspectives are helpful when trying to create change or solve a problem.



Involving youth in authentic ways offers them opportunities to build skills and have leadership experiences that can influence their future choices and possibilities for work and school.



Involving youth lets them know that you are “walking your talk” about their importance to you and your initiative.



Youth have energy and creativity that when tapped can transform a project, community, school or any environment.



Youth make great peer & community educators and can creatively get a message across—to younger students, peers, parents, and community leaders.



Involving young people builds sustainability—young people who lead today build the skills and interest to lead tomorrow.

WHY GET YOUTH INVOLVED?

The Research

What does
26% mean
to you?

According to Wendy Lesko, author of *The 26% Youth Solution*, **26% is the number of youth under 18** in the U.S. So why does this matter to you? This means **26% of the population has a voice that is often considered less than or unimportant when it comes to making decisions and creating policies**, even policies that will directly affect them.

So why get youth involved? Because they are a voice that deserves to be heard. They are a voice that makes a difference. Youth in Maine have made positive contributions to their schools and communities in so many ways. They have created policies to reduce smoking on playing fields, introduced healthier food options into their schools, wrote letters to legislators, and have worked with their adult allies to build skate parks, improve walking trails, start teen centers and so much more.

The Research

There are many resources available on the value of creating youth ownership, youth involvement and authentic youth and adult partnerships. The following is an excerpt from *A Guide for Engaging Youth in Leadership and Decision-Making in Service-Learning Programs*. (To read this guide in full, click http://www.atthetable.org/images/Details/04170215153699_YV_Guide.pdf.)



When young people are truly engaged as leaders and decision-makers, young people, adults and organizations benefit. One of the hallmarks of successful programs is that they honor youth voice. They do so by providing opportunities for students to plan their experiences with adult assistance and make decisions and solve problems related to the activities. Effective programs also contain well-organized activities that meet genuine community needs and allow time for students to reflect on and learn from their experiences. After reviewing numerous studies on service learning, researcher Shelley Billig observed that outcomes related to service learning are maximized when students are given greater degrees of responsibility for planning, decision-making, problem solving and assessing their learning. In other words, youth voice is not only an essential component of high-quality service learning programs but also helps to magnify the positive results of service-learning.

Research conducted in the youth development field supports the value of youth voice, leadership, and decision-making for adults, organizations, and young people. A study by the University of Wisconsin-Madison and the Innovation Center for Community and Youth Development, a Division of National 4-H Council, called "*Youth In Decision-Making: A Study on the Impacts of Youth on Adults and Organizations*" states that there are a number of effects that young people can have on adults and organizations by being included in decision-making roles (Zeldin, Kusgen McDaniel, Topitzes, Calvert, 2000).

Some of the effects highlighted in the study on adults are:

- ◆ Adults view the competence of youth, and perceive them as critical to organizational improvement
- ◆ Adults enhance their commitment to the organization.
- ◆ Adults feel more effective and competent in working with youth.
- ◆ Adults develop a stronger sense of community.

The effects on organizations are:

- ◆ Youth involvement becomes the organization's expectation.
- ◆ Young people clarify the organization's mission.
- ◆ Organizations become more connected and responsive to youth in the community.
- ◆ Organizations place greater value on inclusivity and representation.
- ◆ Organizations are more appealing to potential funders.
- ◆ Organizations become more active in the community.

Scales and Leffert (1999) compiled the effects of participation in youth organizations on young people and learned that youth voice and leadership by young people leads to:

- ◆ Increased self-esteem, popularity, sense of personal control, and enhanced identity development
- ◆ Greater development of life skills including leadership, public-speaking, dependability, and job responsibility
- ◆ Greater communications in the family
- ◆ Decreased loneliness, shyness, and hopelessness
- ◆ Less involvement in risky behaviors like drug use and juvenile delinquency
- ◆ Better academic achievement
- ◆ Increased safety

James Connell in 1998 summed up the effect of youth leadership and decision making on young people:

[Young people] need ample opportunities to try on the adult roles they are preparing for. This means they need to participate in making age appropriate decisions for themselves and others, ranging from deciding what activities to participate in to choosing responsible alternatives to negative behaviors . . . They also need to practice taking leadership roles . . . [and] need to experience themselves as individuals who have something of value to contribute to their different communities.

“[Young people] need to experience themselves as individuals who have something of value to contribute to their different communities.”

Some other resources to check out include, but are certainly not limited to:

- Leifer, Loring. *Younger Voices, Stronger Choices: Promise Project's Guide to Forming Youth/Adult Partnerships*. (Excerpt available at <http://www.energizeinc.com/art/ayou.html>.)
- *Youth on Board: How and Why to Involve Young People in Organizational Decision-Making*. Produced by Youth on Board in collaboration with the National Center for Nonprofit Boards.
- Pittman KJ, Zeldin S. *Premises, Principles, and Practices: Defining the Why, What & How of Promoting Youth Development Through Organizational Practice*. Washington, DC: Academy for Educational Development, Center for Youth Development and Policy Research, 1995.

Tips for Youth & Adult Partnerships

ACCESS

WHY

There are many great reasons for involving youth, but deciding to involve youth is only the first step. Making youth/adult collaborations accessible to youth in all ways is a way of showing your respect and commitment. It helps set the stage for healthy relationships. Part of your role as an adult partner is to open doors.



WHEN

Schedule meetings/functions that include youth after school hours whenever possible. Be sure to think about time of day whenever youth are asked to join and if the event is during school hours, facilitate them getting time off from school, with credit if applicable. Also have food available when possible if you are inviting youth (or adults) to attend after school or during the dinner hour.



WHERE

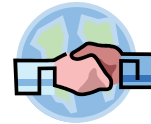
Keep in mind that many youth rely on others to get places. Check with them to see if they have rides or if they need any help figuring out how to get to where you are asking them to go. Provide directions verbally or in writing.



RELATIONSHIPS

POWER

Check your assumptions about youth and be ready to challenge yourself to work with youth as EQUALS if you discover you are not already working with youth in this way.



TRUST

Trust is key to any good relationship. Both parties must earn this trust. Show youth that you can “share the stage” and that you will take their ideas, feelings, thoughts seriously. Do this repeatedly so they know you are genuine.

COMMUNICATION

All cultures have certain “speak.” Make sure youth participants understand the words you are using, especially if there are acronyms for departments or other pieces of information that are considered common knowledge within your group. They will most likely teach you some words you don’t know, too.



TIME

Spend time with the youth you work with. Ask them questions about their lives and engage with them in conversation. Take time to have fun with them whenever possible and remember adults and youths often have similar needs: respect, care and attention.

LEADERSHIP

ROLES

Provide youth with meaningful roles within the group. Ask them to lead committees and offer positions of power when possible. Invite more youth to the table, especially if only one or two are in a group of many adults. This may help counter any feelings or experiences of “tokenism” that might exist.



SPACE

Give youth time to talk. It is often difficult to share “air time” especially if there are many more adult than youth on a team or committee. Be mindful of sharing the space and be willing to speak to other adults who might not be doing this. Resist the urge to take over.



TRAINING & INFORMATION

Provide the most adequate and up-to-date information and training available to youth. Be sure you give youth participants adequate background on the committee or group you are asking them to join, if they have not been part of creating it. Take time to answer any questions they might have and offer them support in receiving additional training and information in their area of interest.

