

JUST SIX
QUESTIONS

RESEARCH
SUMMARY



Changing leaders, leading change: A leadership development model for marginalized youth in urban communities

Key Details

KEY WORDS

Youth leadership development, critical youth work, positive youth development, community development, youth civic engagement, youth activism, community organizing, marginalized youth, urban youth

POPULATION GROUP

Racialized Youth, Newcomer Youth, Youth with disabilities or special needs, LGBTQ Youth, Francophone Youth, Youth living in poverty

STEPPING UP THEMES

Civic Engagement & Youth Leadership; Strong, Supportive Friends & Families

RESEARCH ORIGIN

Ontario

SOURCE

YouthREX

“It is essential that we shift from thinking only that “leadership development is good for youth” to recognizing that youth leadership development and practice is good for communities, organizations, cities, and supports positive private and public processes and outcomes”

1. What is the research about?

This report responds to the urgent need to increase individual and community-level capacity over the long term by investing in developmental opportunities through youth leadership. Research outlined in this report demonstrates that multidirectional benefits accrue to youth, especially those at-risk of or experiencing social exclusion, and their communities when youth leadership development opportunities are advanced. The report draws on current theories and evidence on youth leadership development in order to determine key elements of an urban youth leadership development model.

2. Where did the research take place?

This research is based on an extensive review of literature with a focus on the demographic shifts taking place in urban communities. These shifts include an increase in racialized and newcomer families and young people, and concentrations of overlapping disadvantage in specific urban neighborhoods.

3. Who is this research about?

This report focuses on urban youth who face multiple barriers to equitable civic participation and the need to design opportunities for them to access and benefit from culturally and structurally responsive youth leadership development programs.

4. How was the research done?

The report draws upon current theories and evidence on youth leadership development in order to determine key elements of an urban youth leadership development model. The report is informed by a systematic and comprehensive desk review of the literature using both national and international sources. It is focused on three lines of research 1) critical positive youth development; 2) critical youth work; and 3) youth leadership development. The literature selected includes recently published books, peer-reviewed journal articles, and online reports and papers from universities and major philanthropic organizations.

5. What are the key findings?

Purpose-driven and relational leadership has both individual and community-level developmental benefits for youth and their communities. Youth programs should provide young people facing multiple barriers with the resources they require to participate fully in leadership development opportunities. Programs should be designed to support young people to develop the skills and capacity to design system level interventions to address

the conditions impacting their lives. In order to accomplish this, leadership development programs for urban young people should:

- provide opportunities for critical and culturally relevant **leadership, knowledge** and **skills**
- provide opportunities to connect with peer or adult **leadership mentors**
- provide opportunities for experiential application of leadership competencies through **leadership practice**.

6. Why does this research matter for youth work?

Youth leadership development (and associated adult-ally leadership development) is a strategic response to demographic, social, political, and economic needs facing urban communities. Calls for increasing youth leadership come from the grassroots to the provincial level of government. Youth leadership needs are distinct from adult leadership needs. Therefore, youth leadership development programs are cautioned not to uncritically adopt adult (and outdated) approaches to leadership. Relational and social change orientations to youth leadership development cultivate 21st century skills – collaborative, responsive, and differentiated leadership practices. Youth leadership draws upon but also contributes to positive youth development. By changing our conceptualization of “leaders” and who has access to leadership opportunities, we lead change for a more equitable present and future.



Houwer, R. (2015). *Changing leaders, leading change: A leadership development model for marginalized youth in urban communities*. Youth Research and Evaluation eXchange, Toronto, Ontario.