On Being Youth Centred

A Guideline for Individuals and Organizations
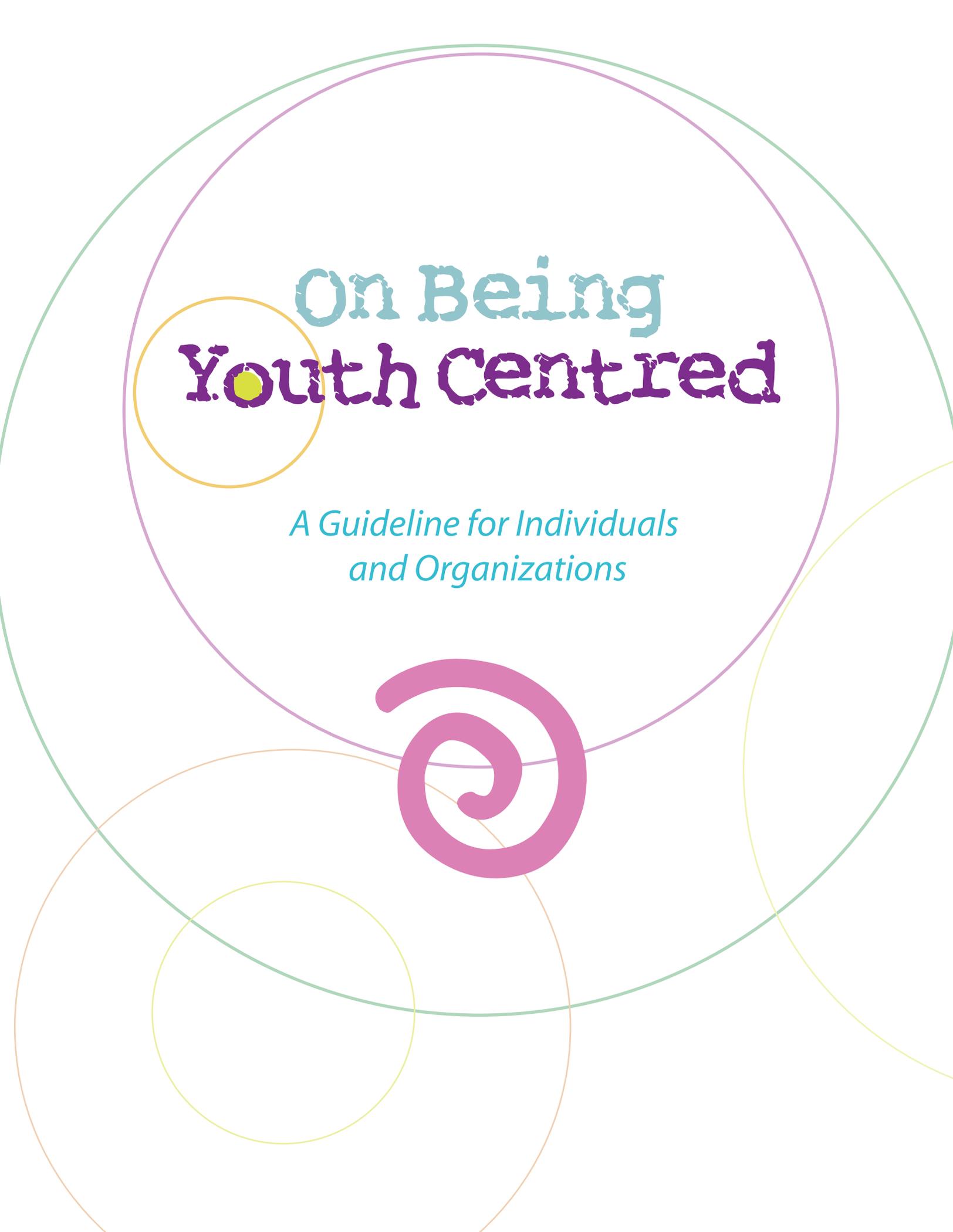
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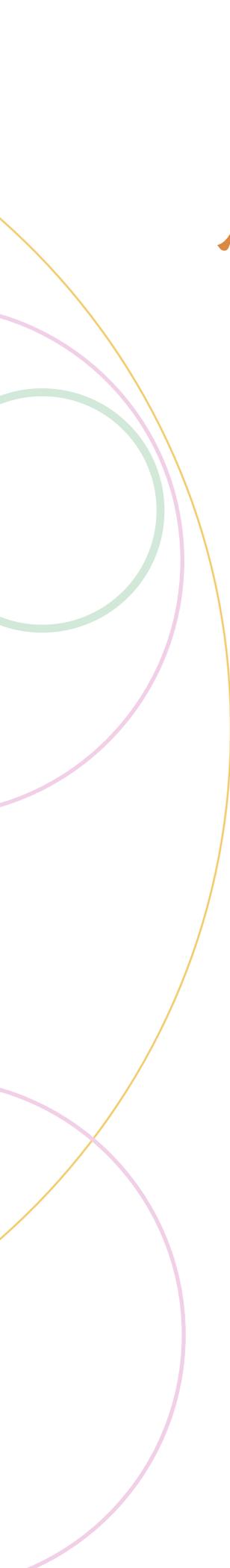Public Health Services

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On Being Youth Centred

A Guideline for Individuals and Organizations

A youth-centred approach means that youth are meaningfully engaged.

Youth engagement is when youth meaningfully participate in all aspects of the youth health centre, including governance, program planning and implementation, evaluation, building partnerships, and communication.

Contents

Introduction

Over the past decade, adults have placed a greater value on the role of youth in planning, implementing, and evaluating social change. Evidence of this change in Nova Scotia is seen in recent important policy documents such as **Our Kids Are Worth It : Strategy for Children and Youth**. *The first guiding principle in the strategy is "Our programs and services must be child and youth centred."[1]*

The provincial **Standards for Youth Health Centres** also emphasize the importance of being youth centred. As stated in the standards:

> *A youth centred approach means that youth are meaningfully engaged. Youth engagement is when youth meaningfully participate in all aspects of the youth health centre, including governance, program planning and implementation, evaluation, building partnerships, and communication.[2]*

But what does it really mean for an organization to be youth centred? How can adults ensure that they approach their work with youth in a youth-centred way? What are some of the factors that support the implementation of a youth-centred approach? What are the barriers to being youth centred?

This document has been created to help address these questions. This guideline can be used by individuals and organizations to reflect upon the way they work with youth. The guideline is intended to help readers gain a better understanding about whether or not they use a youth-centred approach and to offer suggestions about ways for individuals and organizations to strengthen their youth-centred approach.

Youth Involvement in Developing This Guideline

To begin the work of creating this document, three focus groups were held with youth. The purpose of the focus groups was to allow youth to share their thoughts about what it means to be youth centred and the role of adults in youth programs and services. This document has used what youth said were important concepts as its foundation. The results of the focus groups are documented in a separate report.[3] An environmental scan and selected literature review also provided background information for the report.

What Does It Mean to Be Youth Centred?

There are many terms that are used to describe youth participation in actions to support program implementation, or more broadly, social change. Commonly heard terms are youth focused, youth friendly, and youth centred.

Each of these terms describes a different degree of youth and adult participation in actions to promote change. The youth who participated in focus groups to help provide information for this document suggested that the concepts of youth friendly, youth focused, and youth centred exist on a continuum.[3] For this reason, the FreeChild Project Measure of youth participation was chosen as the model of youth participation as described below.

The FreeChild Project is a non profit youth engagement organization. Based on their years of experience in supporting youth participation, they have published a way of thinking about different degrees of youth participation. The FreeChild Project Measure of youth participation is presented in Figure 1, with an explanation of each type of participation following the figure. The FreeChild Project Measure used the commonly known Hart's Ladder of Young People's Participation as its foundation.

Commonly heard terms are youth focused, youth friendly, and youth centred.

The FreeChild Project Measure for Social Change by and with Young People

All community members equally make decisions, take action

Young people initiate, share decisions and action with adults

Young people consulted; adults act

Young people assigned action but inform decision making

Young people initiate; young people take action

Adults initiate shared action with young people

Figure 1: Types of Youth Participation

The spiral diagram from the FreeChild Project represents the non-linear motion of social change. Social change is a process that continually changes and evolves rather than starting in one place and ending in another. The spiral also shows the motion of opportunities becoming narrower as fewer people are engaged. As you move outward from the spiral, you move through the continuum of being youth friendly to youth focused and ultimately to being youth centred. Each item in the spiral is explained in the chart on the following page, with the item in the centre of the spiral appearing in the top left cell.
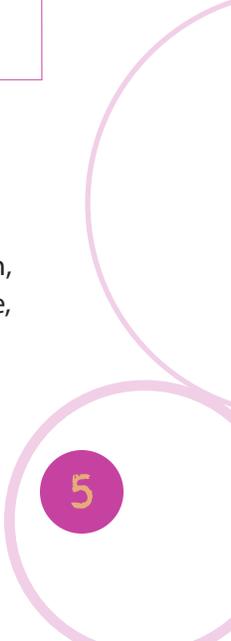
Youth Friendly	Youth Focused	Youth Centred
Young people assigned action but inform decision making. Adults control the engagement of young people in community change. Young people may influence adults through direct and indirect communication.	**Adults initiate shared action with young people.** The leadership of adults is predominant, looking to young people for their input instead of their leadership. Adults use the knowledge and abilities of young people to help them decide what to do.	**Young people initiate, share decisions and action with adults.** This approach uses the skills and leadership of young people with the power of adults in order to benefit the whole community. While young people are recognized as the drivers of social change, adults are involved for their unique experience, talents, and abilities.
Young people consulted; adults act. In this approach adults may listen to young people during planning, decision making, or evaluation. This one-way flow of information does not represent a true partnership between young people and adults.	**Young people initiate; young people take action.** By focusing on the skills and leadership of young people, this approach uses the power of young people to change the whole community. Young people are the drivers of action that reaches to other young people and throughout their communities.	**All community members equally make decisions, take action.** This is the best position for social change by and with young people because it engages every person within a community in decision making and action democratically. Instead of simply seeing a community as a place, this approach views the community as a group of people working together. Age, race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, nationality, language, ethnicity, and other qualities are embraced as things that allow everyone to make a valuable contribution to the goal, not as limitations, barriers, or threats. All members are able to feel included and to participate in a meaningful way.

Youth who participated in the focus groups highlighted that in a youth-centred approach, youth are involved from the very beginning of an initiative throughout all phases of planning, implementation, and evaluation. They highlighted the importance of being involved in governance, and that key to a youth-centred approach is having fun. Youth identified that an initiative that is youth centred should be supported by staff who have a passion for working with youth and that adults are valuable mentors, supporters, and holders of useful knowledge. Youth also identified many personal benefits of a youth-centred approach, including building self-esteem and confidence, as well as a positive impact on their mental health.[3]

Youth Health Centre Stories

The following stories about youth health centres (YHCs) help to show the differences among being youth friendly, youth focused, and youth centred.

A Youth-Friendly YHC

Sara and Steve are young people who saw a notice about the new Youth Health Centre at their school.

They decided to see what it was all about. When they arrived, an adult named Jackie introduced herself to them as the coordinator of the centre. Jackie was very nice and was pleased to show her two visitors around. She explained what the centre offered, asked them if they had any questions, and invited them to come back any time. Later, Sara and Steve talked about the visit privately. They both thought Jackie was friendly and that some of the programs the centre offered seemed OK, but neither of them really felt that it was "theirs" or, for that matter, any different than any other part of the school. Adults had set the centre up in ways that they thought would be friendly for youth, but no youth were consulted as part of the whole set-up. Sara and Steve agreed that it felt like going to a friend's house and, while waiting for the friend to get ready, talking to an adult in their living room.

> *Adults had set the centre up in ways that they thought would be friendly for youth, but no youth were consulted as part of the whole set-up.*

A Youth-Focused Effort to Develop a New YHC

Roula and Marc thought it was great to be involved in the planning of a youth health centre.

They and a few other young people brainstormed with Laura, the coordinator of the new centre, about what the space should look like and how it should be set up. They came up with some good ideas to really make the centre different from the rest of the school environment, like having red walls and posters of popular bands, as well as youth-targeted safer-sex posters. They also discussed how condoms and dental dams could best be distributed to youth. Laura took notes and did not judge any of their ideas, but explained to them that she would take the ideas to the YHC advisory committee who would be in charge of the set-up.

Laura took notes and did not judge any of their ideas, but explained to them that she would take the ideas to the YHC advisory committee who would be in charge of the set-up.

The YHC advisory committee consisted of Laura, Mr. Edwards (the school principal, who would be retiring at the end of the year), Coach Jones from the Phys. Ed. Department, Linda Lamont (a new math teacher, who just started at the school and wasn't really sure what the YHC was all about), Stacy West (the school guidance counsellor who thought the YHC would be great), and John Phelps (a parent and representative from the School Advisory Committee). Laura presented the ideas that had been developed at the brainstorming meeting, and although Stacy seemed supportive of some of them, Mr. Edwards made it clear that the committee had certain limitations. Things like painting the walls could not be done at all, but some colour for the YHC, like orange curtains, could be considered. Linda said nothing during the entire meeting, John seemed extremely nervous about any mention of safer sex, and Coach Jones agreed with everything that Mr. Edwards said. The best that Laura could do was accept the decisions of the committee and then try to explain to Roula, Marc, and the rest of the youth she had met with previously why most of what they suggested was not going to be implemented.

Youth-Centred YHC Planning

Raoul, Chris, and Miki were students who were really concerned about a friend who seemed to be getting increasingly disconnected from them and from regular activities.

Raoul suggested that they ask the youth health nurse about depression. Chris said it would be a good idea to maybe get her to do a presentation on depression so that lots of youth could learn more about it, the warning signs, and what to do about it. Miki told the others about YHCs in place at other schools. All three agreed to talk to the youth health nurse the next day about setting up a YHC.

An equal discussion took place among the five of them about YHCs and what would be required ... they all agreed that Sharon and Miki would meet with the school principal to discuss the idea of a YHC.

Raoul, Chris, and Miki met with Sharon, the youth health nurse and Jasmine, the guidance counsellor. An equal discussion took place among the five of them about YHCs and what would be required, how best to approach the school administration, who would need to be hired, how much funding it might take, and how to go about raising the funds. At the end of the meeting, they all agreed that Sharon and Miki would meet with the school principal to discuss the idea of a YHC. They would both report back to the whole group about the result of the meeting.

Key Elements of a Youth-Centred Approach

Over the past decade, there has been a growing number of researchers looking at the key factors that support using a family-, person-, client-, or youth-centred approach. All of these approaches have many key success factors in common.

As you reflect upon your own organization's approach to working with youth, you can consider the extent to which your approach incorporates each of these enablers for a youth-centred approach.

Using a Strengths-Based Approach

In all aspects of program planning or service delivery, there is a focus on the strengths that individual youth bring to the encounter.[4, 5] In a one-on-one service delivery setting, such as a counselling session, the service provider might begin the session with a discussion about the particular strengths that the youth has to build upon in their life. The concept of strengths is very broad and may include skills, talents, interpersonal skills, familial and peer supports, spirituality, knowledge gained from personal experience with adversity, personal hopes and dreams.[6] In a program-planning setting, an early activity might be an inventory of strengths collectively held by the planning committee, including personal understanding of issues of concern to youth, planning skills, connections to community resource, and so on.[7] A strengths-based approach always assumes that all participants have strengths to contribute to the process, whatever the process might be.

Valuing a Youth-Centred Approach throughout the Organization

While it is valuable to have one service provider who approaches their relationships with youth in a youth-centred way, it is even more important that such service providers work within organizations that believe in and model a youth-centred approach. Organizational strategic planning, facilities design, human resources planning, fiscal planning, and organizational policies and procedures should all be reflective of a youth-centred approach.[4] Youth participation must be seen as occurring everywhere with the organization, not just in youth-specific projects. When an organization is youth centred, youth participation is an integral part of all aspects of the organization.[8]

● Valuing Diversity

Valuing diversity means recognizing that everyone is different and acknowledging that these differences are valued assets and something to be celebrated.[10] People can be different in their age, culture, gender, sexual orientation, and physical or mental abilities. They can also be different based on where they live, their religion, and family values. People are different in many ways, and an organization that values diversity respects these differences and works to ensure that everyone is included in the activities of the organization. Youth-centred organizations demonstrate that they value diversity by making sure that their programs and services

- build positive self-esteem

- support youth in working together regardless of their differences

- support youth in communicating across their differences and value the contributions of everyone

- affirm their identities with regard to culture, gender, sexual orientation, religion, or abilities[10]

Youth-centred organizations that value diversity adopt policies and practices that acknowledge and eliminate barriers to full participation in programs for all youth.[4, 10-13]

It is important that people working with youth understand the impact of dominant groups upon youth who are from non-dominant groups. In our communities, decisions about programs and services for youth usually reflect the knowledge and values of dominant groups. Decisions are usually made by people who are members of dominant groups, using the dominant group as the standard. This approach can create significant barriers for people from the non-dominant group.[14] Examples of dominant groups in Nova Scotia are people who are white, Christian and heterosexual or who identify their gender as either male or female.

A youth-centred approach to decision making recognizes that there are differences among youth, actively identifies inequalities that result from being different from the dominant group, and takes steps to address those inequalities.

● Focus on Developing Youth-Adult Partnerships

Youth-adult partnerships are a way for youth and adults to work together for program or community action.[9] In such partnerships, all participants are equals, and all participate in shared learning and shared decision making. Developing effective youth-adult partnerships requires careful planning and time for relationship building.[7] This document provides details about the key elements of successful youth-adult partnerships in a later section.

● Continuous Evaluation

In an organization that uses a youth-centred approach, evaluation is continuous both at the organizational or program level and within the context of a relationship between a service provider and an individual youth. Expected results are jointly agreed upon among all involved youth and adults, as are the means for monitoring progress and measuring results. Because the process of evaluation is continuous, changes in programs and services can be made on an ongoing basis as necessary to respond to evaluation findings.[4]

Thinking about Valuing Diversity Every Day

In order to value diversity, we constantly need to challenge the assumptions that we make about people and situations. In the example below, Anna has come to a youth health centre nurse for the first time. She thinks she may need an HIV test. She is very nervous as the nurse begins taking a sexual health history. Here is how their conversation went:

Nurse A: What age did you first have sex?

Anna: At 14.

Nurse A: Did you use a condom?

Anna: No.

Nurse A: What type of sexual behaviour have you engaged in that makes you think you might need an HIV test?

Anna: I'm not sure.

Nurse A: Well, have you had intercourse, or oral sex, which means mouth-to-penis contact?

Anna: No.

The nurse concludes that Anna is low risk for HIV infection and probably doesn't need an HIV test.

Through this conversation, we can see that the nurse has made assumptions about Anna and her sexual partner.

Compare this to the next conversation that Anna has with a different nurse.

Nurse B: Have you ever had sex with a man?

Anna: No.

Nurse B: Have you ever had sex with a woman?

Anna: Yes.

Nurse B: Have you ever had oral sex with a woman, which means mouth-to-vagina contact?

Anna: Yes.

Nurse B: Do you know the HIV status of the woman or women that you have had oral sex with?

Anna: Yes, she just found out she is HIV positive.

While there have not been any documented cases of female-to-female transmission of HIV, the nurse knows that this type of sexual contact is considered a possible means of transmission and so concludes that an HIV test may be appropriate for Anna.

This example is based on the real story of a young woman who had her sexual health history taken by two different health professionals. Nurse A made the assumption that Anna was heterosexual, which made Anna even more nervous and unable tell the nurse that her partner was a woman. Nurse B did not make such an assumption. Anna felt much more at ease with her and went on to discuss HIV risks in greater detail.

Here are a few more examples of the importance of valuing diversity:

- **Do you hold meetings on Friday afternoons or Saturdays?** We often think of Sundays as a day to avoid for meetings because it is the Christian day of rest. How ever, other religions observe religious time on other days.

- **If you are a health-care provider, do you ever assume that because someone appears to be and dresses as a male that they don't need a Pap test?** Transgender youth who have made a change from female to male still have a uterus. It helps to speak in terms of body parts. Rather than saying "if you are a young woman, you need a regular Pap test" say instead "if you have a uterus, you need a regular Pap test."

- **Do you only produce health promotion materials and programs in English?** Are you sure that English is the first language of every youth who may access the materials and programs?

- **Do you ever ask a young person if they have a girl friend or a boyfriend**? A better way to ask this question is do they have a partner, to avoid making assumptions about sexual orientation.

Key Elements of a Youth-Centred Approach

Youth-Adult Partnerships

Youth-centred organizations are those that fall at the outer edge of the spiral in the FreeChild Project measure of youth participation shown in Figure 1. Partnerships between youth and adults where decision making, action, and ownership for results are shared are the heart of youth-centred organizations. "Youth-adult partnerships are means through which youth and adults can work on issues that matter to them both."[9] Researchers have looked at what makes youth-adult partnerships successful. Success factors are described below.

Clear Intention

"Strong relationships do not emerge spontaneously in youth organizations."[15] They begin with a clear intention on the part of both individuals and the organization to work in a youth-centered way. It is difficult for individuals to use a youth-centred approach if they are not supported by the philosophy and structures of the organization in which they work.

Define a Clear Purpose

All participants in a youth-adult partnership must come to consensus about the reason for the partnership and any underlying assumptions about the way in which the partnership will work. A clear purpose helps to provide a guidepost for measuring progress. Members of the partnership should agree on the activities that will be undertaken as part of the partnership, and all should understand how those activities all support the achievement of the purpose.[16]

Engage a Third Party to Help Explore Group Assumptions and Values

While it is important to be clear about the reasons for the partnership to discuss and resolve issues of power and to clearly identify the strengths and roles of various participants, this work can sometimes be challenging. Particularly in a new partnership where participants may not have much experience working with one another, the presence of third party to guide such discussions can be very useful in moving the partnership forward.[9]

● Address the Issues of Power and Roles _____

In order to be successful, there must be a sharing of power in youth-adult partnerships.[3,5,7,17] It is not uncommon for organizations and partnerships to struggle in sorting out issues of power and roles. In most cases, adults will have more power than youth because it is adults who hold the financial and legal accountability in organizations.[16] For this reason, special attention must be paid to clearly defining the roles of adults and youth.[15]

Sharing power in decision making is often a new role for adults, and the challenge of learning how to do this cannot be underestimated.[16] One of the mistakes often made by adults entering into youth-adult partnerships is believing that adults need to give up their power in order for youth to gain power. An example of an action that arises from this type of thinking is when adults do not participate in discussions or decision making during meetings with youth. This circumstance has been shown to frustrate youth, who are seeking opportunities to learn from participating adults.[9] Studies have shown that youth want and expect support from adults such as coaching, discussion, and connections to community resources and leaders.[18] The youth focus group participants echoed the results of these studies, stating their belief that adults provide important knowledge and mentoring.[3]

When adults give up their power, their ability to support youth in developing confidence and skills is greatly reduced. The aim of youth-adult partnerships is *shared* power, where all partners contribute their strengths and share equally in decision making.[9] Adults have knowledge, experience, relationships, and resources that are often not available to youth but are necessary for the success of the partnership.[15]

Adults may struggle at the beginning of a partnership to understand their role as they attempt to find the right balance of power in the partnership. Examples of specific adult roles that have been observed to be useful in youth-adult partnerships where power is shared include

- asking guiding questions to identify practical issues, but leaving the responsibility for addressing an issue with the youth

- providing structure when needed, such as agendas for meetings to help keep discussion on track

- monitoring the progress of activities and providing reports to youth and adults involved in the partnership

In the study that looked at these roles, the researchers found that after youth saw these activities being modelled, they started using the same techniques. Therefore, not only did these roles for adults assist in keeping the partnerships moving forward, they served as useful modelling techniques to support youth in developing leadership skills.[13]

Write Group Ground Rules

Group agreements help set the foundation for partnerships. They put in writing the group's shared understanding about expected behaviour of participants and establish ground rules for providing input.[13, 19]

Seek Education

Youth and adults do not often have the opportunity to work collaboratively.[7] Adults may need education about how to find the appropriate balance of power in their relationships with youth.[16] Both youth and adults may benefit from education about collaboration and ways to make youth-adult partnerships successful.[7, 13, 16]

Provide Equal Access to Information

In a partnership, all partners should have equal access to information. This may require that adults support youth in acquiring the information in a language or format that best meets youth needs.[6, 17]

Integrate Reflection into Meetings

Regular opportunities to reflect on the progress of the partnership and the work that is being undertaken collaboratively are important. Such reflection helps partners to gain a better understanding of each other, which enables relationships to be strengthened.[9]

Barriers to Using a Youth-Centred Approach

There are barriers to effectively implementing a youth-centred approach that can undermine the chances of success of even the best-intentioned project.[20] The barriers can be roughly organized in terms of those that arise from attitudes and those that are a result of logistics or organizational issues.

Attitude Barriers

● Lack of Recognition of Bias

Including youth in planning and decision-making activities requires a change in attitude for adults who are used to working in adult-only groups. Many adults view youth as being incapable of meaningful participation without recognizing this bias towards youth. It can be helpful to address this barrier among adults as any diversity issue is addressed, including recognition of the different strengths and talents that youth can bring to the discussion.[7]

● Youth as Worry or Threat

A stronger version of the bias about youth participation is that many adults in our society have little confidence in the potential of youth as contributors to society and instead worry about or feel threatened by youth.[7,18] Youth focus group participants shared their concerns about the negative images of youth portrayed in the media.[3] Adults may feel that they must protect youth from making mistakes or protect the group from the mistakes youth will make and so control the involvement of youth in ways that limit their ability to contribute.[20] This barrier can be manifested in terms of tokenism or in terms of adults refusing to relinquish power over the decision-making process as described below.

● Power Relationships

Cultural norms establish expected relationships between youth and adults that make it difficult for both groups to work together as equals. Formal instruction in school can lead youth to expect adults to have all the answers, and adults are not necessarily used to consulting youth in making decisions

that may affect youth.[20] In addition, adults may not be prepared to surrender their perceived power over such decision making because of a lack of confidence in youth. Youth may lack the skills and experience to participate in the same way that adults would, so the establishing of an equal power base is not as easy as just having adults surrender power.[9] There must be a recognition of the strengths of all parties and an investment made in allowing those strengths to be collectively used.

This can be challenging because adults often want proof of ability before surrendering power to youth, while youth feel unable to act without a demonstration of respect through the opportunity to use power in the relationship.[16] Typically, adults have the true administrative and financial power of organizations, as well as the knowledge, relationships, and social capital that youth may lack, so care must be taken to develop models that allow for meaningful engagement of youth.[7, 15]

Youth focus group participants believe that the sharing power must start from the beginning of an initiative. They clearly stated that youth need to be involved in governance and decision making from the beginning.[3]

● Tokenism

Involving youth for appearances, seeking to protect youth from making mistakes, and limiting the involvement of youth due to a lack of confidence or understanding of how they can contribute can all lead to tokenism.[20] Youth may be called "representatives," but they are often appointed by adults and lack the mechanisms to obtain and represent the issues of other youth.[21] Youth focus group participants identified examples of tokenism, such as being asked to review documents for input after the document has already been written.[3]

Involvement of youth may be limited to those who are already engaged in community activities and have the leadership and communications skills to interact effectively with adults, without adults recognizing that these youth do not necessarily represent the majority of youth in the community. Involvement of youth may also be accepted by adults with the attitude that there will be tremendous benefit to the youth through the opportunity to learn from adults rather than in the spirit of partnership.[7]

● Adult Perceptions of Youth Enthusiasm

Adult expectations and perceptions of youth bringing "vibrancy", "energy", "creativity", and enthusiasm can serve as a barrier in that such perceptions can perpetuate stereotypes. Adults can place a burden of expectation upon youth and may feel that they should not engage their own creativity in favour of allowing the youth to exercise theirs.[9] This in turn can lead to frustration among youth who feel that adults are not contributing as much as they could.[20] Such stereotyping can also lead adults to not expect or value the experience of youth in favour of their "energy" and ironically to devalue their own adult creativity, contributions, and opportunity for development within the decision-making process.

● Youth Limitations

Adults may not recognize the limited experience and abilities of youth in some areas (such as communications, working in partnership with adults, or decision making) and may place unrealistic expectations upon youth.[7] The inability of youth to meet adult expectations then frustrates the youth and perpetuates the retention of power by adults. Collective use of appropriate skills and abilities of group members must be achieved for success as well as maintaining a youth-centred approach.[9]

Logistics and Organizational Barriers

● Hours of Work/Meeting Logistics

Youth may not be available during traditional office hours due to their own commitments to school or work. Youth also may lack the flexibility in their schedules that many adults enjoy. Alternative meeting times that work for youth and willingness by youth to explore ways to work within the constraints of their schedule to participate must be used. Youth may not have the means to purchase meals or refreshments, so any meetings held over mealtimes should provide refreshments or a meal allowance.[20]

● Organizational Support

Policies and procedures that apply to adults may need to be reviewed (by adults and youth) to determine their applicability or any necessary revisions to make them applicable for youth. Youth must be provided with the same tools and equipment (e.g., e-mail access, office supplies, business cards) as their adult counterparts in order to make it clear that they are equal and valued contributors.[20]

● Transportation

Youth typically do not have the same freedom of mobility that adults may have due to limited access to vehicles or mechanisms of transit. Activities and events should be planned to take this into account in order to maximize accessibility for youth.[20]

● Technology

Youth generally make greater use of technology to support communication compared to adults. Adults may need education or mentoring from youth on how to better use technology that can enhance communication.

Barriers to Using a Youth-Centred Approach

Reflecting on Our Own Practice: Do We Use a Youth-Centred Approach?

To help you reflect on your own practice, this section contains two tools.

The first is a table that compares the characteristics of a youth-friendly approach with those of a youth-centred approach. As you review the table, think about how close you are to the youth-centred end of the continuum and what you might do to move closer to that end.

The second tool is a set of reflective questions to ask yourself about the key elements of a youth-centred approach. Again, as you answer the questions, think about what you might be able to do differently to strengthen your approach to being youth centred.

## Youth Friendly vs. Youth Centred

The following table shows the differences between youth-friendly and youth-centred approaches.

Youth Friendly	Youth Centred
Believes that adults are the experts on identifying and meeting youth needs. Youth can be helpful to the adults.	Sees the youth as the experts on their own health. Youth are active participants in all aspects and decisions regarding their own health.
Feels that youth have information that they can share with adult decision makers.	Feels that youth bring a valued perspective and their own strengths and resources to a working relationship.
Adults are friendly and respectful to youth, and every interaction is an opportunity for youth education.	The relationship is a partnership based on trust, respect, honesty, and open communications. Youth and adults work collaboratively to address everyone's needs/concerns.
The purpose is identified by the adults, and successes are measured by the adults with input from youth.	The purpose is youth empowerment.
Adults decide how and when to engage youth.	Youth-centred relationships start from the first contact between youth and adults.
Youth input is collected, but goals, objectives, and progress are defined by adults.	Youth are equal partners in defining goals and objectives and in measuring progress.
Youth are offered choices from existing options, defined by adults.	A broad-based perspective is used to recognize youth needs in a flexible way that considers various alternative options to achieve outcomes.

Youth Friendly	Youth Centred
Youth involvement is selective, based on the views of adults rather than the abilities of the youth.	Each interaction is an opportunity for youth to use their abilities and strengths or to learn and develop new skills and abilities.
Youth who are traditionally engaged in youth or community activities are invited to participate.	It is recognized that youth who may not have the connections and resources to be engaged in organized activities are important participants, and their participation is actively sought.
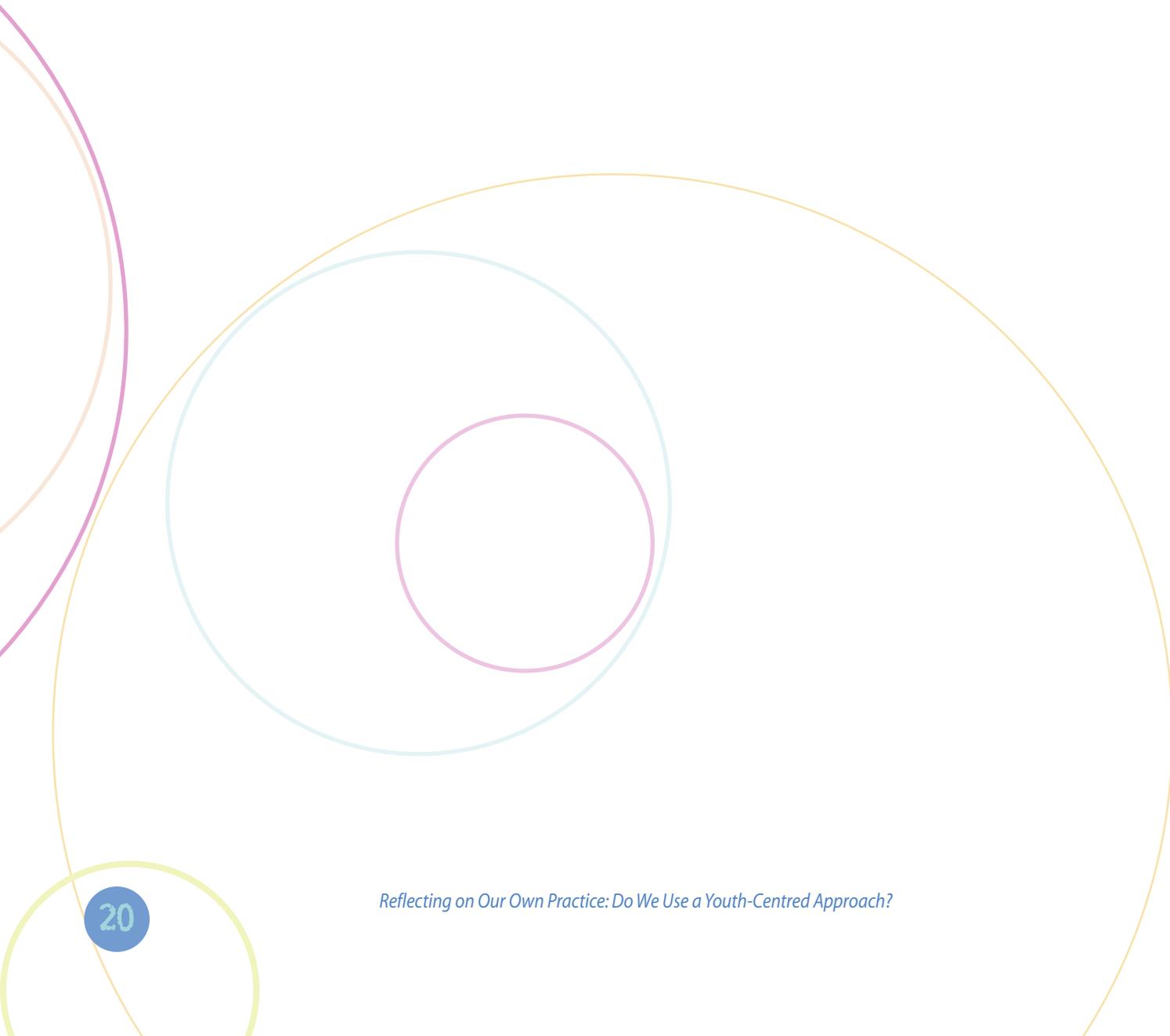
Questions for Reflection for Youth

The questions below are offered as another tool to help you reflect upon your own or your organization's youth-centred approach.

● Using a Strengths-Based Approach

○ When I get to know new adults, do I learn about their strengths?

○ Do the people around me know about the things I am good at and do I let them know these things?

● Focus on Developing Youth-Adult Partnerships

○ Do I work in equal partnership with adults?

○ Do I understand the purpose for working together?

○ Have youth and adults discussed issues of power and what they mean for working together?

○ Do the adults involved in the partnership understand their role and the role of the youth?

○ Do I understand my role and the role of participating adults?

○ Has the youth-adult partnership created written ground rules about participant behaviour?

○ Has the youth-adult partnership created written ground rules for participation?

○ Do youth-adult partnership members participate in education opportunities to help us work together?

○ Is reflection on our partnership an important part of youth-adult partnership meetings?

● Valuing Diversity

○ Have I participated in educational sessions about valuing diversity?

○ Do I involve youth from diverse communities in the work that I do?

○ Do I make sure that I use health promotion materials and programs that are appropriate to meet the diverse needs of youth?

○ Do I know what the dominant groups are in my community?

○ Do I understand the issues faced by people who are different from the dominant groups?

○ Have I spent time developing my understanding about the different groups of youth that I work with?

Questions for Reflection for Adults

The questions below are offered as another tool to help you reflect upon your own or your organization's youth-centred approach.

● Using a Strengths-Based Approach

○ Do I begin my relationships with youth by learning about their strengths?

○ Do I share my knowledge about my strengths with the youth that I work with?

● Valuing a Youth-Centred Approach throughout the Organization

○ Does my organization have an explicitly stated philosophy that values a youth-centred approach?

○ Does my organization include youth and adults as equal partners in

    ○ strategic planning?

    ○ facilities design?

    ○ human resources planning?

    ○ decisions about resource allocation?

    ○ developing organizational policies and procedures?

○ Does my organization support my participation in educational opportunities to further develop my skills in working in partnership with youth?

○ When I am in any meeting with youth, am I careful not to dominate the conversation? Do I ensure that I participate when my skills and expertise can be helpful?

● Focus on Developing Youth-Adult Partnerships

○ Do I promote youth-adult partnerships as an important tool for using a youth centred approach?

○ Do I work in equal partnership with youth?

○ Is the purpose for any youth-adult partnerships in which I am involved clearly stated and agreed upon by all participants?

○ Has the youth-adult partnership frankly discussed issues of power and what they mean for the partnership?

○ Do youth involved in the partnership understand their role and the role of the adults?

◯ Do I understand my role and the role of participating youth?

◯ Has the youth-adult partnership created written ground rules about participant behaviour and ground rules for participation?

◯ Do youth-adult partnership members participate in education opportunities to help us work collaboratively?

◯ Do I support all members of the partnership in acquiring the information they need to fully participate, via a means that best meets their information needs?

◯ Is reflection on our partnership an important part of youth-adult partnership meetings?

● Valuing Diversity

◯ Have I participated in professional development about valuing diversity?

◯ Do I involve youth from diverse communities in the work that I do?

◯ Do I make sure that I use health promotion materials and programs that are appropriate to meet the diverse needs of youth?

◯ Do I know what the dominant groups are in my community?

◯ Do I understand the issues faced by people who are different from the dominant groups?

● Continuous Evaluation

◯ Has the youth-adult partnership defined measures of progress?

◯ Has the youth-adult partnership implemented ways of collecting the data needed to measure progress regularly?

◯ How often are data regularly reported to the youth-adult partnership?

◯ Does the youth-adult partnership regularly reflect on evaluation data and make program adjustments as necessary?

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Endnotes

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Endnotes

Partnerships between youth and adults where decision making, action, and ownership for results are shared are the heart of youth-centred organizations.

Youth-adult partnerships are means through which youth and adults can work on issues that matter to them both.

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