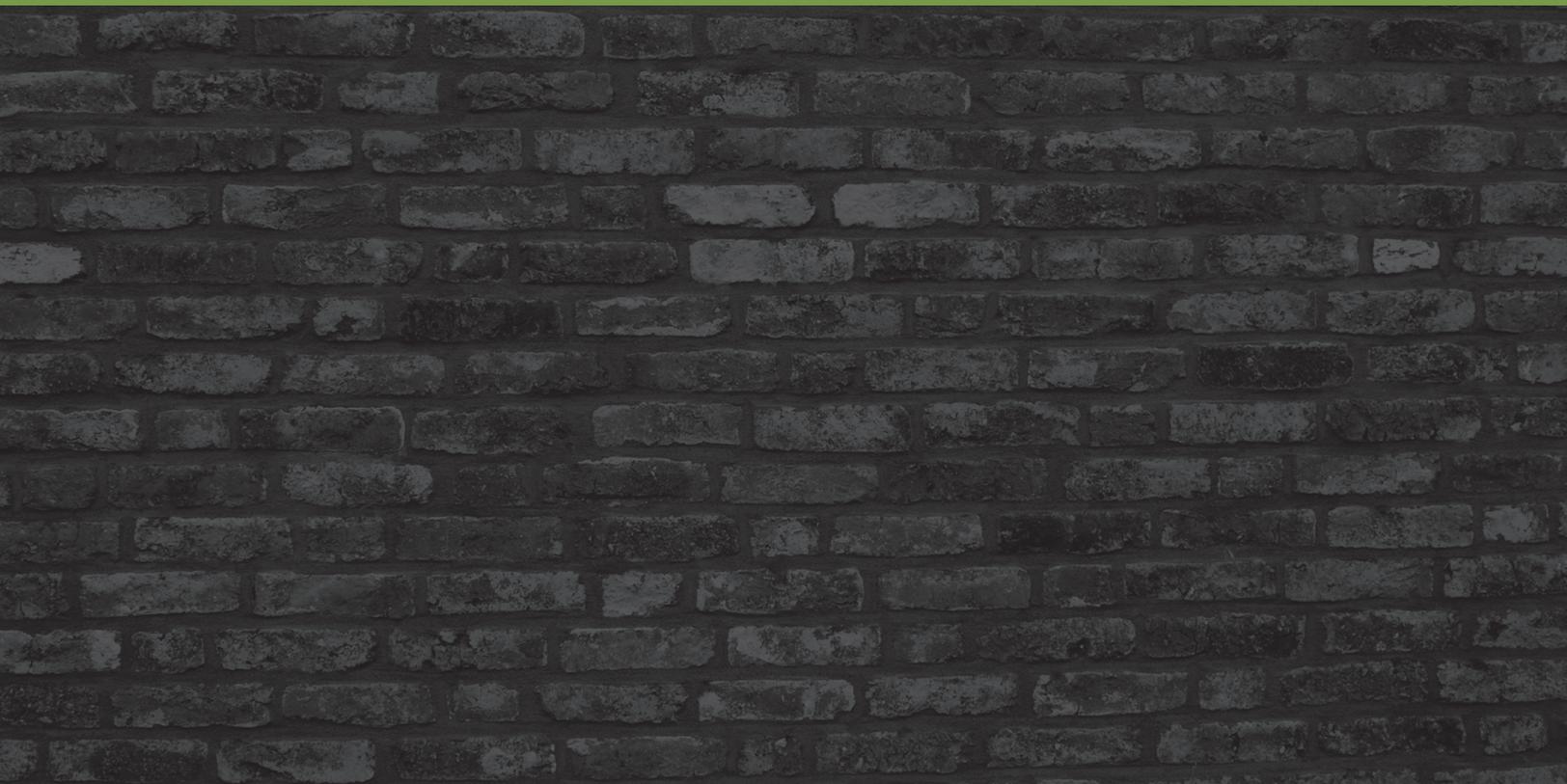


ENGAGING YOUTH IN COMMUNITY DECISION MAKING



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The Annie E. Casey Foundation



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The Annie E. Casey Foundation is a private charitable organization dedicated to helping build better futures for disadvantaged children in the United States. It was established in 1948 by Jim Casey, one of the founders of United Parcel Service, and his siblings, who named the Foundation in honor of their mother. The primary mission of the Foundation is to foster public policies, human-service reforms, and community supports that more effectively meet the needs of today's vulnerable children and families. In pursuit of this goal, the Foundation makes grants that help states, cities, and neighborhoods fashion more innovative, cost-effective responses to these needs. For more information, visit the Foundation's web site at www.aecf.org.

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The Center for the Study of Social Policy, based in Washington, D.C., was established in 1979 with the goal of providing public policy analysis and technical assistance to states and localities. The Center's work is concentrated in the areas of family and children's services, income supports, neighborhood-based services, education reform, family support, community decision-making, human resource innovations, and international learning. The Center also provides support for the Casey Foundation's work to develop international data-based advocacy strategies. For more information, visit the Center's web site at www.hcssp.org.

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INTRODUCTION

Young people are key to effective community decision making and positive outcomes for local residents. This publication explores principles and strategies for engaging youth and young adults in decisions that affect them and the well-being of their communities.

This product reflects the commitment of the International Initiative for Children, Youth and Families to engaging young people. The Initiative—an international network of policy makers, managers, practitioners and researchers—puts the community and its residents at the center of its approach to improving results for children, youth and families. In 2003, recognizing the potential of young people to change their communities, the Initiative began a vital effort to involve youth from its member nations. A group of youth and adults from Israel, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and the United States began working together to plan and conduct an International Learning Exchange focused on youth involvement in community change. In November 2004, young people and adults from eight countries participated in the Learning Exchange. This toolkit grew out of that event, and the Initiative continues its work to promote youth engagement as a cornerstone of strong communities.

visit: www.int-initiative.org

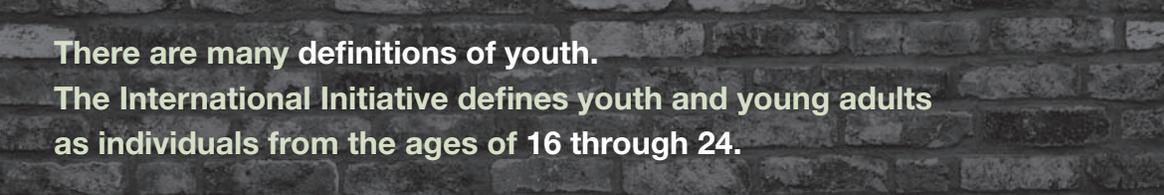
MAKING A DIFFERENCE BY ENGAGING YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULTS

Youth engagement empowers young people to have a voice in decisions that affect them. Getting youth to participate in activities and decisions that adults ultimately control is not true engagement. Authentic youth engagement requires that young people have actual authority and responsibility, as well as opportunities to develop the skills needed to make sound decisions. For programs, community organizations, and policymakers, it means working as partners with youth, instead of making decisions for them or only providing services to them. Young people become agents of change instead of targets to be changed.

Youth engagement is both a road to better community results and a positive result in itself. Youth learn about their communities and how to create better places for themselves and others to live. They develop research, leadership, community organizing, and decision making skills. As young people develop their full civic potential, their lives and the well-being of their communities improve.

Youth engagement is not the same in every community. Sometimes, young people themselves take charge, identify the results they want to achieve, and set about reaching their goals. In other instances, government officials, agencies, schools, and community organizations reach out to youth for their

input and participation in planning and decisions. Often, a variety of youth engagement strategies are at work and young people are involved in many different ways. It is not “all or nothing” for most communities—youth participation is neither completely lacking nor a routine part of all decision making.



**There are many definitions of youth.
The International Initiative defines youth and young adults
as individuals from the ages of 16 through 24.**

WHAT THE TOOLKIT CONTAINS

This toolkit is devoted to the active engagement of youth and young adults in community decision making. It has five parts.

A. Partnering with Youth to Make a Difference.

Youth engagement can accomplish great things—for the young people themselves and for the community as a whole. This section focuses on:

1. What is Youth Engagement?

Several forms of youth engagement are described. Regardless of its form, giving young people an authentic voice in decisions requires a fundamental change in practices.

2. Engaging Youth and Young Adults in Decisions That Improve Community Outcomes.

Research, communities and youth themselves report that youth engagement can have enormous benefits. Included are examples of results that real communities and young people are working to accomplish and how youth can become genuine partners.

3. Working Wisely: Principles for Working Together in New Ways.

Improving communities is about focusing on important outcomes and the path for reaching those results—both the ends and the means. This section describes how meaningful youth engagement changes the way we work together and presents principles for success from young people.

4. Challenges to Youth Engagement: Prejudice, Myth, and Reality.

To include young people as genuine partners, adults must get past some potentially harmful beliefs and myths. The path is one defined by young people themselves.

B. Strategies and Tools for Engaging Youth in Changing Communities.

Youth and adults contributed examples, activities, tools and lessons learned from their communities and nations. Six strategies are presented here along with the underlying vision of each, tools and activities, and tips and pitfalls to avoid. Examples illustrate a choice of steps and activities that young people, adults and communities can fit to their situations. The six strategies are:

1. Putting youth at the heart,
2. Positive youth-adult relationships,
3. Synchronizing youth and adult agendas,
4. Recruiting and retaining young people,
5. Supporting youth organizational development, and
6. Developing support systems for youth engagement.

C. The 2004 International Learning Exchange.

The voices of youth and adult participants, visual images, and written descriptions provide a snapshot of the experience. Planned and conducted by youth and adults, this event was intended to incorporate, practice, and explore what it takes to successfully engage youth and young adults in community change.

D. Resources and Contributors.

A final section provides sources for additional youth engagement information and tools. It also recognizes contributors to this toolkit and to the 2004 International Learning Exchange.



GRAFFITI WALL

Throughout the toolkit, a Graffiti Wall features quotes from youth and adults, including participants in the 2004 Learning Exchange, International Initiative board members, and youth who are leaders in their communities. The graffiti wall also displays musical lyrics and other messages from young people.

A.

PARTNERING WITH YOUTH TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

The idea of including young people in decisions that affect them is gaining acceptance. Increasingly, service providers, public officials, and community leaders recognize that young people themselves have a huge part in improving their lives and their communities. For many nations, the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child (which has been adopted by all nations except the U.S. and Somalia) marked a shift in rhetoric, public policy and day-to-day operations of youth-serving organizations. Even in these nations, however, many young people assert that their involvement remains marginal and tokenistic. How then can youth be ensured an authentic voice and role?



“An alternative way of thinking about children and young people... is to see them as the equal of the adults, who are as knowledgeable as the adults about their lives, and who have a contribution to make which is just as important as the contribution of the adults.”

LIAM CAIRNS - *Investing in Children, U.K.*

“Making policy and solutions for youngsters without engaging them is spilling energy and money.”

THISS MALMBERG - *Ordina, The Netherlands*

“What I have seen and lived is pure potential in youth to make important decisions. They take challenges without regard for obstacles.”

KATHERINE LILIANA - *Cornejo Galleguillos, Chile*

AUTHENTIC YOUTH ENGAGEMENT: A NEW PATH

True youth engagement requires a fundamental shift. Young people must have an authentic voice in the design, development and day-to-day functions of activities. It is impossible to overstate the importance of this shift from adult-directed to youth-owned.

The best way for adults to engage young people is to ask for their views, opinions and direction—and to listen carefully to their answers. Young people recognize the difference between token participation and authentic engagement. Roles that may seem subtle to adults are often very clear to youth.

“Adults engaging youths is useless unfortunately. It’s adults dictating or trying to reason with young people, saying that this is what you need. You must get out and ask young people, ‘What do you need?’”

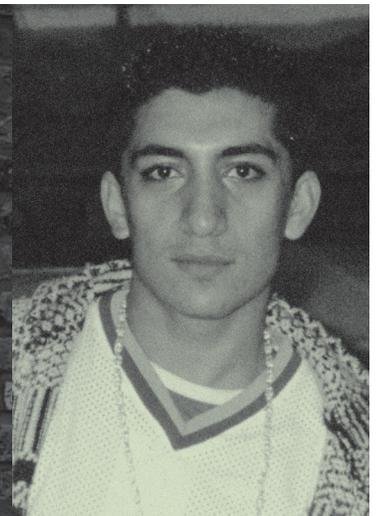
DAVID HOPKINS - *Ireland*

“Young people are residents like all others. Therefore their involvement is equal to that of the grownup residents.”

MEIR ROZALIS - *Israel*

“It is no longer a question of whether we involve young people in matters that concern them but how we do it most effectively. Young people will probably have the answer to this question as well.”

ROB HUTCHINSON - *Chair, International Initiative Board,
U.K.*



1. WHAT IS YOUTH ENGAGEMENT?

Youth participation takes many forms, and those forms are developing as practices, experiences and understanding evolve. The most common activities for young people in many communities are youth-focused services that provide education, treatment, assistance and preventive resources to young people. These services define youth as clients more often than participants. However, as young people, communities and nations work to strengthen youth voices, skills, and participation, many are developing a broader range of resources to engage and support youth.

Figure 1 presents a youth engagement pyramid that is adapted from a “Continuum of Youth Engagement” by Listen, Inc. (Local Initiative Support Training and Education Network, www.lisn.org). In this model, each type of youth engagement builds on the strengths of other activities. For example, researchers hypothesize that youth leadership and civic activism both contribute to and derive from positive youth development and that positive youth development leads to the ability of young people to contribute to the community.

Activities, initiatives, and organizations are seldom contained by one layer of the pyramid. As the following examples illustrate, most combine different types of youth engagement.

Figure 1

Forms of Youth Engagement



YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

Youth Development activities emphasize positive self-identity and outcomes through opportunities for growth and development of individual capacities. The focus is on promoting personal and social assets, not treating or preventing negative outcomes. Features include age appropriate supports, access to caring adults and safe spaces, and activities that meet young people where they are.

In Chile, 209 Community Centers for Children's and Adolescents' Rights (CIJ) have opened since 2001. Located mostly in distressed communities, the centers are operated by private agencies with public funding. The overall goals are to increase self esteem of children and youth, improve parental skills, and create a protective network of peers who share positive family and community participation experiences. Children and youth are encouraged to express their opinions, interests and ideas. Groups of young people meet one to three times per week guided by a tutor who in turn is supported by professionals. The children and young people identify the goals they want to accomplish and develop strategies. Many activities benefit the community. For example, groups of adolescents have created community newspapers, participated in radio programs, and started musical groups, ecological groups, and more. As young people identify their communities' needs and strengths and make the case for improvement to local authorities, they build a foundation for the future within their own lives and their communities.

COMMUNITY SERVICE

Community service activities involve young people in community improvement through volunteerism, research, “service learning,” and other hands-on activities. Community research helps youth develop deeper historical, cultural and social understanding of their experiences and community issues. Volunteer activities that improve the quality of life for residents may be youth-driven, sponsored by community organizations or humanitarian groups, or projects of the community-at-large.

The mission of Boston's MYTOWN (Multicultural Youth Tour of What's Now) is to use the process of sharing local history to empower young people and build appreciation of urban neighborhoods. In its nine years, MYTOWN has hired and trained more than 200 teenagers from low and moderate-income homes to learn about the history of their families, neighborhoods, and city. The young people have developed skills to create and lead historical walking tours and presentations for more than 8,000 Boston residents and visitors. (www.mytowninc.org/)



YOUTH LEADERSHIP

Youth leadership development activities further youth development and community service by building individuals' skills and capacities to be problem solvers and decision makers. Opportunities for youth leadership may be developed within:

- existing organizations that serve youth, such as schools and public child welfare agencies,
- community decision making bodies, such as municipal councils or community collaboratives, or
- other organizations that work to improve the lives of local residents.

Youth leaders may serve in an advisory capacity or as full participants in decision making. Although participation is often through elected or chosen representatives, some initiatives reach out to all youth with opportunities for leadership training, skill development, and direct participation.

Many nations, regions and communities around the world have developed various types of youth councils. These thousands of groups differ enormously in their mission, authority, organizational auspices, and activities. In many Norwegian municipalities, a children and young people's municipal council is composed of two representatives from each primary, lower and secondary school. The youth council identifies priorities and considers funding proposals from each school for short-term projects that address these priorities. Some councils have successfully presented their concerns and ideas to local politicians, who have responded with concrete actions.



CIVIC ACTIVISM

Civic activism takes youth development and leadership another step by helping young people build their own political and social capacity to accomplish results. These efforts focus on developing the identities and skills of young people within the political context of their communities and beyond. Activities build political understanding, advocacy and negotiation skills, and capacity to make decisions regarding use of resources. The work focuses on issues that young people themselves identify as priorities.

Project 321 was developed in Blanchardstown, Ireland in response to youth's concerns about not being part of the democratic process. Prior to the 2004 local and European elections, the local youth service (Foroige) invited young people to a consultation day to examine issues affecting them and decide what steps they wanted to take. The youth formed sub-committees to examine and present specific issues. One group made a video, another group developed an information sheet, and a third organized an open forum to which all candidates in the elections were invited. This forum was extremely successful with 70 percent of the candidates participating. Using a "speed dating" format, each candidate spent 10 minutes with each sub-group discussing the issues raised and what they were willing to do to address youth concerns if elected. Young people felt that the candidates heard their voices and concerns but did not believe that this activity alone would change anything.

FULL PARTICIPATION IN COMMUNITY DECISION MAKING

Full participation in community decision making allows, encourages and assists young people to use their skills and interests as direct agents of community change. Youth participate directly in organizational management and community governance decisions. They mobilize other youth and residents, build partnerships and coalitions, and develop strategies to achieve results they identify. They are able to influence the use of public assets or have direct control of resources.

“Keeping the Family in Mind” is a project run by Barnados in Liverpool, U.K. to support children and young people living in families affected by adult mental health issues. The project created space for the young people to express themselves, and they decided to use a video to raise awareness of some of the issues children and youth face when their parents have mental health problems. They negotiated access to appropriate technical expertise and produced a video called “Telling It Like It Is.” Adults were partners in the venture, but young people were in charge.

Their efforts led to significant change both locally and nationally. According to Barnados’ audit and inspection unit, the young people found “a voice that influences and affects professional practice.” The local mental health system adopted training and protocols that include the needs of young caregivers and their parents, developed family visit rooms in treatment facilities, and involved young people in monitoring and evaluating adult mental health services and in providing training regarding child and adolescent mental health services. At a national level, the project raised the importance of family visiting facilities and led to their inclusion in a national action plan. It influenced the formation of a national group for implementing better supports for children and parents and contributed to a nationwide network. The project has received recognition as an “organizational case study” and is currently lead local coordinator for two national studies, one about young caregivers’ assessments in mental health settings and the other about care pathways and service response.



2. ENGAGING YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULTS IN DECISIONS THAT IMPROVE COMMUNITY OUTCOMES

Many leaders and residents are adopting a results-focused approach to community decision making. Authentically engaging youth in this approach requires deliberate dialogue and consideration of their role at each step.

ASK YOUNG PEOPLE!

The first step is identifying desired results. Everyone involved must be clear about what exactly they want to accomplish. Each young person, resident, and individual with a stake in the community has his or her own vision—what conditions they want and how they want to go about creating those conditions. Adults cannot assume that their agendas will engage youth or will satisfy young residents. Being clear about individual and shared goals requires honest dialogue—an important first step and an ongoing ingredient of both successful youth engagement and results-based decision making.

In Chile, 31 offices of Children’s Rights surveyed more than 20,000 youngsters in third to eighth years of school. The children identified their three least respected rights: being free from physical and psychological mistreatment (24.9%); the right to live in a pollution-free environment (16.1%), and the right to be listened to (14.2%).

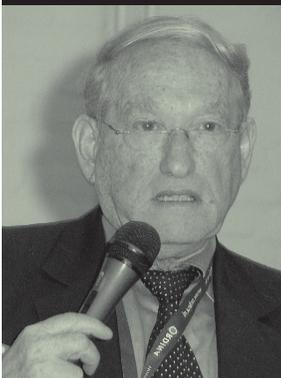


Table 1

Authentic Youth Engagement to Achieve Results

To ensure that decision making improves results that will make a difference for young people, they must be involved at every step. Table 1 compares this to more common types of youth participation. It builds on a comparison by the Institute for Youth Research and Public Policy.

Results-Based Decisions	Typical Youth Participation	Authentic Youth Engagement
Overall Role of Youth	"Participants" who are invited to take part in a defined process, activity or specific decision.	"Partners" who decide how they want to be engaged.
The Ultimate Decision Makers	Government representatives; agency officials, administrators or staff; community adults; "collaboratives" composed of adult partners.	Youth report that they have a voice in decisions and are able to influence the decisions of others.
Identifying Desired Outcomes & Priorities	Youth are informed about community priorities already identified and may be asked their opinion.	Youth identify and promote results that are important to them. They research issues and contributing factors. They negotiate priorities with other local stakeholders.
Strategies for Achieving Results	Youth are limited to commenting on already developed strategies and plans. May have input in a prescribed set of strategies or activities for young people.	Youth are involved from the beginning in shaping plans, researching strategies that might work, selecting strategies to try and implementing them.
Determining Progress Toward Results	Progress is measured by others and may or may not be reported to youth. Often no follow-up regarding outcomes.	Youth actively measure and report progress. Involved in determining if and when results are achieved.
Accountability	None or inadequate. Often no information is provided regarding how youth and resident input is used. No mechanisms for determining if/how youth participation made a difference.	Decision making is transparent and accountable throughout. Youth and other partners see their views reflected in the work.

YOUTH AND COMMUNITY VISION

Each community and each group of residents is unique. The outcomes that are important are their own. The following list shows results that have been the focus for groups of young people and communities. Some of these goals are very broad and ambitious. Others are more targeted.

- A healthier community with reduced alcohol abuse (*Latino Health Access, Santa Ana, California, U.S.A.*)
- Better outcomes for children transitioning from foster care to life on their own (*Norway*)
- Better lives for youth supported by more comprehensive and effective services for young people (*County Durham, U.K.*)
- A safe community free of gang activity and with opportunities for all youth to succeed (*The Bronze Triangle, San Diego, California, U.S.A.*)
- A cinema theater where young people and other residents can spend leisure time. (*Jerusalem, Israel*)



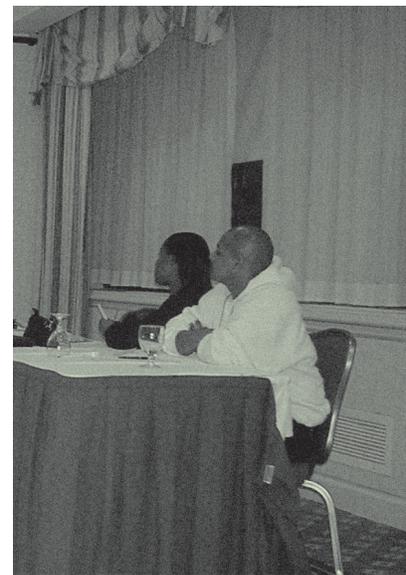
MAKING DREAMS COME TRUE FOR ALL

De Kruidenbuurt is a neighborhood of 7,000 residents in the Netherlands city of Tilburg. Home to many recent immigrants and their children, De Kruidenbuurt is one of the most ethnically and culturally diverse communities in the Netherlands. Residents have joined together to identify their common dreams and find ways to achieve them. The following are the results this richly diverse neighborhood identified for all children and youth:

- Sufficient financial means to participate in society,
- A suitable job for all youth who are allowed to work and who want to earn money in addition to pursuing an education,
- Good health and sufficient medical treatment,
- Adequate education and support to employment,
- A safe living environment, and
- Participation in sports and positive leisure time activities.

POSITIVE OUTCOMES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES

Involving young people as active community participants helps improve outcomes for youth themselves, for adults, for place-based and youth-serving organizations, and for the community as a whole. And a cycle begins—positive outcomes and strong skills for youth today contribute to positive results for the children, youth, adults and communities of the future. Below are some of the benefits identified by research, youth, and other residents.



Better Lives for Young People: Positive Health and Social Outcomes

The transition from childhood to adulthood is a time of enormous learning, growth and development. It is also a time when individuals experience unique risks. Community engagement can help counteract those risks as young people forge positive relationships with others in the community, develop a sense of belonging, and feel valued as individuals. Research shows a link between youth engagement and positive health and social outcomes. Young people who participate in civic affairs and are involved in community service are less likely to engage in risky behaviors or get into trouble.

Young people themselves report that active participation with adults in community activities benefits them in the following ways:

- A greater sense of control over their own lives,
- More comfortable interacting with people of different ages and backgrounds,
- Opportunities to exercise responsibility,
- Experiencing the consequences of decisions and accountability for actions,
- Experimentation with other roles and identities,
- Time spent in socially meaningful activities,
- Exposure to the world of work,
- More knowledge and understanding of the community, and
- More compassion for others.

Strong Personal and Civic Decision-Making Skills: Brighter Futures

Social awareness—making sense of social and political realities—is a core part of individual development. Participating in decisions helps young people build the capacity to understand and shape their communities. It provides opportunities to ask critical questions about decisions and decision making processes, to gain feedback and to bring forward creative insights. Engagement in community decision making can help youth learn the essential skills of teamwork and democracy, including negotiation, accountability and appreciation of diversity. It fosters cooperative problem-solving skills, a sense of social responsibility, and constructive use of political resources.

These new abilities are likely to be transferred to other aspects of young people’s lives. Youth learn to recognize their power to shape the future—to change their own lives and to influence their communities.

Adult Enrichment

When young people are engaged, adults report that they become more aware of the needs and concerns of youth in their communities. Adults come to see and appreciate young people as competent contributors and decision makers. They often feel more confident relating to young people and develop a stronger commitment to organizations and actions that benefit youth. Adults also report that they are re-energized by the fresh perspectives, enthusiasm and desire of young people to try new things.

As adults recognize the capacities as youth and young adults, “adulthood” (an insidious and harmful pattern of behavior and attitudes based on the assumption that adults are better than young people) may be reduced and eliminated.

More Effective Community and Youth-Serving Organizations

Both community-based organizations and youth-serving agencies can benefit from youth activism, particularly from involving youth in program design, implementation and evaluation. Young people are the ultimate experts regarding their experiences, needs and the effectiveness of organizations intended to help them. When these organizations listen to the voices of young people, they gain a clearer picture of their own impact and their potential. They become more responsive to youth and the community priorities that young people identify, and they place greater value on resident participation overall. With youth feedback, buy-in and support, programs and agencies are likely to develop more effective projects and strategies. Young people are more willing to accept services and the assistance offered is more relevant to their priorities. Instead of focusing only on remediation or prevention, youth-serving organizations often recognize that they must operate differently if they want things to be different for youth. In the process, their credibility and performance improve.



The combination of immediacy and long term perspective that youth often bring to the table can help organizations broaden and clarify their missions. As agencies reflect on their purposes from the perspective of young people, they confront important questions about what they are creating and whether their efforts are lasting, visible and important. According to one study of youth decision making, principles and practices of youth engagement became embedded in the participating organizations.

Stronger Communities

Youth are experts on their communities. They know the assets and strategies that contribute positively to their lives, as well as needs that are going unmet due to lack of attention, understanding or resources. When community members listen and respond, they take advantage of youth as powerful assets for achieving better results. Dialogue with young people brings a fresh, firsthand perspective that helps local leaders gain insight into issues that concern all residents.

Youth re-weave the social fabric of their communities. Youth-infused communities benefit from the dynamic energy, imagination and enthusiasm of young residents. Their readiness to take on challenges that others may hesitate to tackle strengthens community spirit and can improve the quality of life for all residents.

Youth volunteerism is another way that young people contribute to their communities. The direct contribution of youth in the U.S. alone has been valued at more than \$30 billion in volunteer time. The more young people get involved, the better the outcomes for everyone.

Technological Tools for Enhanced Communication

Young people are at the forefront of the information society, spearheading new development and uses of technology and media. Their pioneering use of web-based technology has expanded communication and access to information in previously unimagined ways. Their approach to technology creates new networks, partnerships for the future, and strategies for change. As youth learn effective strategies for achieving results within their communities, they develop common ground with far-off strangers engaged in similar efforts. The inventiveness of young people helps them connect with others' cultures, issues and viewpoints. Organizations and neighborhoods can capitalize on their dialogue concerning the issues youth face and strategies for improvement.



Human Rights

When youth are able to influence decisions that affect them, they assert a fundamental human right. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child recognizes the right of all children and young people to freely express their views on all matters that affect them and to have their views given due weight and consideration.

Young people represent all sectors and cultures of our communities and our nations. When all youth experience personal recognition and the right to participate in decision making, they bring with them the interests and concerns of others. People of all ethnic, racial, gender, class, educational, and geographic backgrounds and groups gain recognition and sufficient support to contribute to community and youth development.

Access and inclusion of youth can have an impact of all forms of intolerance and exclusion. Youth who are engaged in decision making bring hope to others. They demonstrate to other individuals who may feel alienated or disenfranchised that full participation is possible and that it produces results. The promise that young people demonstrate is the promise of a better future for everyone.

Effective Democracies Now and In the Future

The health of democracy depends as the active engagement of youth in local decision making. As communities strengthen the role of youth, they are learning that young people can be bold civic innovators. Likewise, as youth develop social and political understanding and decision making skills, they contribute to community organizations and future outcomes. Youth who are active community participants are likely to extend their activism to adulthood.

“If you can inspire hope in people, put hope in people’s lives and into their spirit, they become very different people than if you suck that hope away.”

WESTLEY MOORE - U.S.A.

“Small or large, we’re all part of the rhythm. We’re all in charge of this garden we’re given.”

SWEATSHOP UNION - Song: “Labour Pains” Album: Local 607

“If the people who are supposed to be the beneficiaries of change do not know it is happening... then it probably is not happening.”

LORD HERMAN OUSLEY - U.K.

YOUTH MOBILIZING AN IMMIGRANT COMMUNITY

Latino Health Access (LHA) is a community-based organization dedicated to improving the health and well-being of recent immigrant families in Santa Ana, California. From 1995 to 2000, LHA recruited, hired and trained 12 “at-risk” youth to work as promotores—change agents within their own community who research and describe local life experiences, report to residents, and stimulate dialogue about community improvement. The 12 youth promotores worked intensively with 120 additional young people organized as a youth council. Together, their activities reached 2,000 more community residents, 20 percent of whom were adults.

The promotores identified alcohol abuse as a major community problem affecting the health and well-being of residents. Using LHA as a bridge to resources and decision makers, the youth council designed informational campaigns, developed community outreach activities and mobilized residents. An outside evaluation identified positive outcomes for individual young people and the community as a whole:

- With youth leadership, residents blocked approval of two conditional alcohol permits that would have expanded the sale of alcohol in a neighborhood that was already saturated with liquor stores, bars, and other outlets.
- The number of residents who participated in an activity to improve the neighborhood more than doubled.
- Youth reported that their parents helped more with their homework and visited their schools more often.
- More youth reported the importance of becoming leaders in school or the community.
- All 12 promotores completed some community college. All but two were expected to transfer to state universities for additional education.

Lydee Knox, et. al., Youth as Change Agents in Distressed Immigrant Communities, Community Youth Development Journal (Fall 2005).

3. WORKING WISELY: PRINCIPLES FOR WORKING TOGETHER IN NEW WAYS

In addition to focusing on accomplishing measurable results, many communities and organizations are interested in working together in ways that are more respectful, empowering and effective. The process matters as well as the outcomes. All along the path to better outcomes, it is critical to consider: Are we working together in ways that contribute to better outcomes and reflect how we want to treat each other?



The following chart compares typical ways that young people participate in adult-dominated decision making and characteristics of community change processes when youth are authentically engaged.

Table 2

Walking the Talk

Working together in ways that respect and empower young people usually requires a fundamental shift. This table compares typical youth participation with deeper youth engagement. It builds on a comparison developed by Institute for Youth Research and Public Policy.

The Process of Working Together	Typical Youth Participation	Authentic Youth Engagement
Level of Involvement	Youth may have token positions on decision making bodies or serve in advisory positions only. When asked, they often report that they are token participants without real power.	Youth have equal positions and roles on decision making bodies. They report that they are full partners with equal opportunities and capacity to influence decisions. They have both authority and responsibility.
Adult-Youth Relationships	Communication is often one-sided with adults doing much of the talking and planning. Trust and mutual understanding are lacking or not built. Age-based stereotypes are common. Participants may blame or sabotage each other.	Relationships are nurtured and trust is built from the beginning. Youth and adults listen to each other with respect, encourage, challenge and learn from each other. Everyone takes responsibility for his/her own actions and shares credit for achievements.
Length, Frequency of Youth Involvement	Short-term or one-time. Youth involvement is requested or included when adults decide.	Longer term. Youth have a recurring, ongoing role. They determine how long they will be involved.
Diversity	Often only a few dominant, well-organized perspectives are represented. Insufficient time and attention is invested in exploring diversity, which may be viewed as a "problem."	The views and perspectives of all youth and community members are sought and honored. Diversity is viewed as a strength and vital to decision making.
Ongoing Input and Feedback	Input from participants is ignored, sporadic, or inadequate. Youth views are not heard or adequately considered.	Youth and others have ongoing and frequent opportunities to express their views about decision making processes. Efforts continue until all perspectives are heard and recognized.



“One of the ideas that really hit me was the distinction between youths engaging youths and adults engaging youth.”

DAVID HOPKINS - *Ireland*

“All of us have to be committed to what we’re doing. And that’s more than just talking about it. We have to ... engage young people not just as tokens but as real people who have a voice and who have something to say.

DR. P. THANDI HICKS-HARPER - *The Youth Popular Culture Institute, U.S.A.*

“Looking for dialogue is the hardest thing to do, but you get the most results from it.”

HARRY PEPPINCK - *International Initiative Board Member, The Netherlands*

ORGANIZING TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

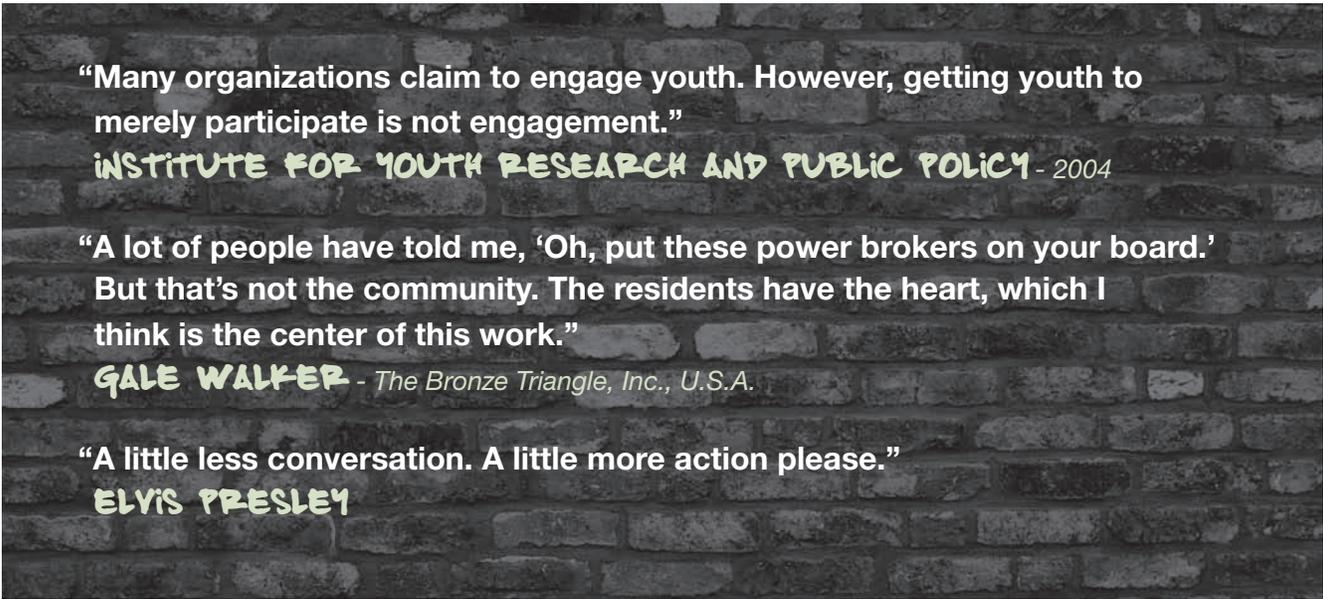
Youth engagement can take root within or outside any organization. As communities work to improve the lives of residents and work together in new ways, many form new decision making collaboratives or overhaul existing organizations. Regardless of the structure, champions of youth engagement are asking themselves: Are we engaging young people in ways that are authentic and effective?

Table 3

Organizational Strategies for Authentic Youth Engagement

To support new ways of working together with young people, we must rethink how our organizations operate. This table builds on a comparison developed by Institute for Youth Research and Public Policy.

Organizational Characteristics	Typical Youth Participation	Authentic Youth Engagement
Structures	Youth participation occurs through existing or new organizations designed by adults.	Young people decide whether they want to use existing structures, create new ones or participate without formal organizations. Youth have a voice in designing structures.
Leadership	Leadership opportunities may be lacking, tokenistic, or limited to specific “trainings” or situations.	Youth have opportunities to lead meetings, participate in staff hiring, and learn other organizational skills.
Expectations	Adults may expect too little or too much. Adults step in and “rescue” young people when they make mistakes.	Mistakes are viewed as a natural part of learning. Adults acknowledge their own mistakes and allow youth to make mistakes.
Flexibility	Very limited. Decision making is often rigid, with comments and participation limited to specific formats, times, and methods.	Flexibility is required, even demanded by partners to get a clear picture of all perspectives.
Accessibility	Often limited to those who know the right people, understand political/issue “code” language, have intimate knowledge of the issue, or are judged by adults as “positive” representatives.	Open to all with an interest or concern. Everyone is given a safe space to actively become engaged. Youth plan and lead activities. Barriers that exclude participants such as scheduling, transportation, and rules are addressed.
Collaboration	May be limited to existing partnerships. New relationships are defined or determined by existing organizations or adult leaders.	Youth have a voice in identifying partners that need to be engaged. Partnerships are often expanded to new groups. Partners may be asked to work together in new ways.
Support Systems	Supports for youth participation in decision making are weak, missing or sporadic. Youth lack needed skills and opportunities to be full partners.	Ongoing supports are in place to encourage youth participation. Skill development, leadership experiences and capacity-building are ongoing and considered as a core function.



PRINCIPLES FOR SUCCESS

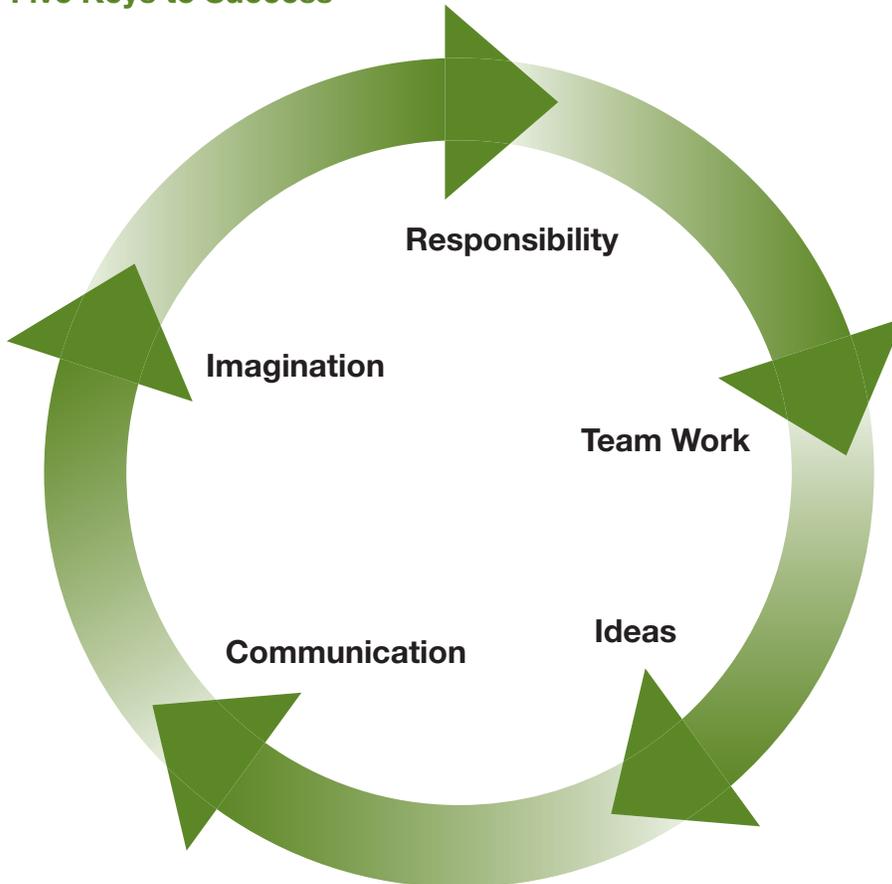
Youth planners of the 2004 International Learning Exchange identified some essential principles for successful youth engagement. They did not start by looking at what they expect from adults. Instead, they began by examining the assets that youth contribute to planning and decision making—what they can offer and what others can learn from them.

Together, young people from Israel, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and the United States distilled the many assets that youth contribute into five key principles for success. These principles are consistent with the values the International Initiative has identified for engaging all residents to improve results for children, youth, families and their communities.



Figure 2

Five Keys to Success



Responsibility

There is an expectation that everyone will do what they say they will do. Youth want to make sure that adults share responsibility with them, and adults look to youth to be active participants. Both youth and adults have a responsibility to speak up when things are getting off track.

Team Work

Working together to achieve shared goals requires teamwork. It does not mean having a youth board and an adult board that work separately, but combining to work toward common objectives, to share ideas and to accomplish results.

Ideas

New ideas are essential for community change and for a better future. Just because things have always been done in a certain way is no reason to assume that it is the right way. Honoring ideas and creativity is part of the empowerment process.

Communication

We come together as separate individuals with our own understanding. Then, by communicating, we get on the same page. We better understand each other and we develop a shared understanding of the results we want to accomplish. Communication involves listening carefully and being sure that everyone is heard. We are not communicating effectively if we use code language that not everyone can understand.

Imagination

We have to visualize the results we want to accomplish. By using imagination, we can increase our “aha” experiences—moments of understanding and inspiration. Adults can get stuck in a rut, but youth can help them think in new ways.

These principles are interconnected. No single principle stands alone. Each contributes to the other, and together they are a self-enhancing whole. Success in one area helps build success in other areas. The youth planning team gave this example:

Team work requires communication and responsibility. Ideas are fueled by imagination, and must be communicated effectively. Often, working as a team sparks ideas and imagination. This encourages people, who then are interested in taking responsibility to do more.

For the International Initiative, the underlying principle is that engaged residents acting in their own right, on their own behalf, and in coordination with others can improve their lives and their communities. Young people are fellow citizens, who share with other residents a common desire for better lives and a better community.

“For youth and adults to come together there has to be communication and respect—from the youth and the adults—not to see each other as youth and adults, but as people working together for a common goal.”

LIAM CAIRNS - *Investing in Children, U.K.*

“The only people who can give a real idea about what works for them are the young men or women themselves.”

THIJS MALMBERG - *Ordina, The Netherlands*

“Youth is the engine of the world.”

MATISYAHU - *Song: Youth, Album: YOUTH*

4. CHALLENGES TO YOUTH ENGAGEMENT: PREJUDICE, MYTH, AND REALITY

When young people are engaged in community decisions that affect them, better decisions are made and everyone benefits. When communities involve youth in ways that are meaningful, they tap new energy, knowledge and leadership. And yet, too often, young people do not participate in civic activities—especially the traditional, public decision making process of governments.

There are many prejudices regarding the interests and capacity of youth. These beliefs contribute to feelings of alienation and disempowerment, predispose youth engagement efforts to failure, and can lead directly to individual harm. Individuals are hurt further when people and policies write off disengaged youth as impossible to reach or even as trouble-makers.

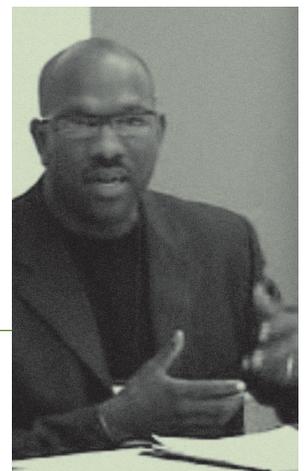
THE BARRIER OF ADULTISM

“Adultism” is a harmful and pervasive pattern of adult behaviors and attitudes toward children and young people. It is based on adults’ beliefs that they are better, more advanced, and more highly developed than children and youth. A 1997 survey found that the majority of U.S. adults believed the next generation would make the country worse. The effect of this mindset on youth was evident in other surveys during the same period, which showed that:

- Three-quarters of America’s youth believed that adults did not value their ideas and opinions, and
- Over 80 percent of youth believed themselves to be unfairly and negatively stereotyped.

Sociologists, educators, anthropologists, psychologists and child advocates note that many child development theories, parenting approaches, cultural practices, social institutions, and laws promote and perpetuate adultism. Some claim that adultism is the first form of oppression that all people experience. Like fish in water, most of us are so surrounded by adultism that we fail to notice the phenomenon or its impact. Yet, adultism can be an underlying component of child abuse and neglect, bullying, manipulation, and exclusion. Young people describe some of the negative consequences of adultism that they experience:

- an undermining of self-confidence and self-esteem,
- an increasing sense of worthlessness,
- an increasing feeling of powerlessness,
- a consistent experience of not being taken seriously,
- a diminishing ability to function well in the world,
- a growing negative self-concept,
- increasing destructive acting out,



- increasing self-destructive acting “in” (getting sick frequently, developing health conditions, attempting suicide, depression, etc.),
- feeling unloved or unwanted.

Closely related to adultism is ephibiphobia—the fear of youth. Based on negative stereotypes, ephibiphobia is often perpetuated by media. Young people in many communities and countries report that suspicious shopkeepers follow them as soon they enter a store, residents cross the street to avoid passing groups of young people, and municipalities prohibit youth gatherings or enact unwarranted curfews. The way that young people talk, dress, or wear their hair can evoke wide-ranging and sometimes negative reactions from many adults. Differences in background, language, and culture can also lead to or heighten these reactions.



IMPLICATIONS FOR YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

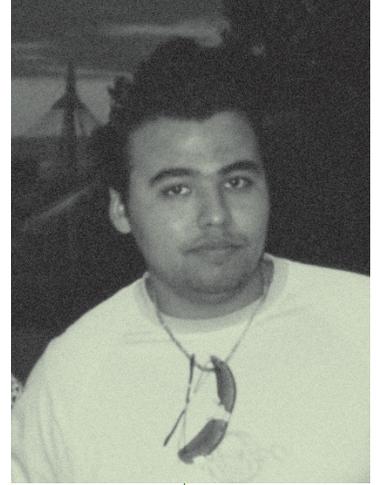
Adultism is an enormous barrier to youth engagement that must not be taken for granted or under-estimated. Forms of adultism that prevent authentic youth engagement include:

- withholding information and access to benefits or rights with the belief that children and youth are too immature or incapable or using them properly,
- acting on behalf of a child or young person without the individual’s informed consent,
- making judgments and decisions based on generalizations and stereotypes instead of dialogue and response to individuals and actual situations, and
- providing barriers to the participation and voices of children and young people as individuals or as a group.

In addition to the more obvious effects, young people may become so guarded against adultism that they assume all adults harbor deep-seated and unconscious prejudices against youth. They may perceive well-intentioned adults as patronizing, co-opting, or currying favor.

In their zeal to treat young people as equals, adults actually may pander to or over-identify with youth. Some adopt an overly permissive attitude and assume that anything young people want to do is acceptable. At the same time, adults often continue to overlook or under-value the supports and help that young people need to become full decision making partners.

Acknowledging adultism is not enough to eliminate it. Like racism and sexism, its pervasive influence must be countered with a range of strategies, including intentional training and consciousness raising, rethinking organizational and service strategies, and reconsidering public policies.



THE MYTH OF APATHETIC YOUTH

Among the harmful stereotypes is the label of young people in their teens and twenties as apathetic, self-indulgent and cynically detached from civic activities and interests. Reports from the “mature” democracies of western Europe and the U.S. as well as the younger governments of South Africa and beyond document decreasing participation of young voters. Many young people are disillusioned with the traditional political and civic engagement process. They report little patience for decision making processes that seem to exclude and ignore them. However, this does not mean that young people are disinterested in public well-being and decision making.

Reality:

Youth are engaged by firsthand experiences of pressing social problems.

Research suggests that while many youth view traditional political and civic decision making as largely futile, they are attracted to local, face-to-face problem-solving related to issues they experience personally. Young people report a preference for hands-on community improvement efforts that yield an immediate and practical value, such as tutoring, working in homeless shelters and other volunteerism. They want to see changes in problems and issues they encounter daily.

Reality:

Youth are engaged by honesty and genuine sharing of authority. Although they feel excluded and ignored by the political process, many young people say they are attracted to organizations and decision making approaches that are honest about power and willing to genuinely share authority. Many are drawn to participation only if adults and community partners acknowledge the dynamics of power and resources within the community and are willing to negotiate how these forces will be used.

Reality:

Youth who have the most to lose are often the least engaged. Disaffected youth and their communities—those facing the greatest risk to well-being—are the most likely to be disengaged from activities and decision making processes that affect them.

- Disengaged youth who do not participate in formal group activities tend to be older, more challenged, or members of minority groups.
- Developmental psychologists in the U.S. report that youth from low income families and youth of color feel more alienated from their communities than young people from middle income, white families.
- Research has documented a political “participation gap” between youth of high and low socio-economic status.

Reality:

Distressed communities are likely to offer few opportunities for youth to get involved. U.S. studies indicate that communities at risk—those that have experienced job losses and with large gaps between the rich and poor—have

few points of connection with youth. Aside from connection with their families, peers and schools, there are few opportunities for youth involvement in the community as a whole.

WHY DON'T THEY GET INVOLVED? WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE SAY

The greatest challenges to youth engagement come not from young people, but from business-as-usual—the traditional attitudes, expectations and decision-making approaches of organizations, governments, and communities. Participants in one forum on youth engagement identified the following obstacles:

- resistance of institutions, funders, and youth professionals to rethink their purposes and to restructure the way they work;
- cultural attitudes and economic structures that limit what people believe youth and adults are capable of and can actually accomplish;
- difficulty turning the concept of youth engagement into meaningful action and then bringing that action to scale until it becomes the accepted way of working;
- the need for community leadership and leadership development on a scale that is large and ongoing; and
- difficulty sustaining bold and effective action over a long period of time.

Youth who are older and more “challenged” report that they are often attracted to civic activism groups rather than traditional, youth-serving organizations. They prefer to participate in groups that provide:

- opportunities to focus on identity, including culture, background, or sexual identity;
- a forum to address their day-to-day challenges; and
- leadership opportunities that allow them to develop practical skills in decision-making and managing change.

The views of young people reflect opportunities for communities and organizations. They can successfully engage young people if they are willing to listen, engage in honest dialogue, and work with youth as partners to develop meaningful strategies for change.

“The first difficulty in getting young people involved doesn’t derive from youth... it derives from us guys—the adults.”

MICHAEL O’ KENNEDY - Ireland

“The ‘default setting’ is that children are ignorant and need to be controlled. But youth are citizens and have something to offer.”

- From discussion at the 2004 International Learning Exchange Seminar

“Change has to take place where I live my life.”

CLAIRE TROMAN, LOUISE WRIGHT AND KARL OWEN

- Investing in Children, U.K.

CONCLUSION: WHAT ADULTS CAN DO

The path to authentic youth engagement is not easy. Believing in the capacities of young people is not enough. Adultism, other prejudices, and myths about young people must be overcome. Empowering youth to make decisions and take actions that will change their communities is a fundamental change for adults, organizations and decision makers.

Ironically, without the help of adults, genuine youth engagement cannot happen. As adults, we must not even attempt to partner with young people unless we are willing to give control to them. We must share our power, knowledge, and resources. We must be willing to listen when it’s difficult to hear what they have to say. Recognizing that we all learn by making mistakes, we must be willing to let them falter without withdrawing our support or trust. We must give them credit along with responsibility. We must allow them to use the resources that we have worked to develop.

This is our first challenge. If we are willing to truly share our power, there are strategies that young people advise us will work. The next section outlines those steps and provides examples of communities and people who are giving youth a real voice.

**“I never fought for a cause I did not believe in.
Especially if the cause did not believe in me.”**

MACLETHAL - Song: Pass the Ammo, Album: The Love Potion Collection

“Everything begins with trust.”

“How much do you release control to let power and influence grow?”

- From discussion at the 2004 International Learning Exchange Seminar

B.

STRATEGIES AND TOOLS FOR ENGAGING YOUTH IN CHANGING COMMUNITIES

This “toolbox” presents seven types of strategies identified by international young people for successfully engaging youth in community change. The strategies represent the consensus of a group of youth from four countries who drew on their own diverse experiences, ideas and imagination. A growing body of research and community experience supports their consensus. A set of tools and activities, most of them tested in communities around the world, also supports these strategies. Examples illustrate the efforts of youth and community partners as they work to improve their lives.

There is no magic formula for engaging youth in community change. Every young person is a unique being with individual views and experiences, and every community has its own culture, history, strengths and needs. Like the principles for success identified by international planning committee youth, these strategies and tools are self-enhancing and not easily separated. Focusing on one is likely to contribute to others. That synergy compounds their effectiveness.

At the same time, all else depends on putting youth at the heart. It is the first and foremost step to youth engagement. When young people have a genuine voice, they let adults know what they need to thrive.



Strategies for Engaging Youth in Community Decision Making	Tools and Activities
Youth at the Heart—No Tokenism	1) Forums for Hearing Young People's Views 2) Youth and Young Adults at the Decision Making Table 3) Youth Making Decisions About Money 4) A Place of Their Own
Positive Adult-Youth Relationships	1) Skill-Building Activities 2) Reaching Consensus: Principles and Expectations for Working Together 3) The Promise and Potential of Mentoring Identifying Champions for Youth: A Checklist to Consider
Synchronizing Youth and Adult Agendas	1) Youth-Led Community Research: Three Approaches 2) Learning Exchanges: Sharing Good Ideas 3) Negotiating Win-Win Solutions
Recruiting and Retaining Youth Participants in Community Decision Making	1) Doors to Fit Every Young Person 2) Opportunities to Learn What Young People Want to Know 3) Youth Popular Culture as the Hook 4) Room to Grow Guidelines for Making Participation Accessible and Appealing
Supporting Youth Organizational Development	1) Ideas and Action Over Formal Organization 2) Organizational Strength and Capacity 3) Meaningful Compensation 4) Young People Making Organizational and Management Decisions Youth Councils That Put Youth at the Heart: Organizational Guidelines to Consider
Support Systems for Youth Decision Making	1) Continuous Leadership Development 2) Collaborative Community Partnerships 3) Multi-Dimensional Networks Implanted in the Community



1. YOUTH AT THE HEART—NO TOKENISM!

To involve youth in meaningful ways, communities must put youth at the center of their efforts. If done well, it is a revolutionary practice. However, young people tell us and experience shows that too often people and organizations go through the motions without working to engage youth in a genuine, meaningful way. For example, they may involve youth in order to check off a box on a funding application or list of requirements. Or they may be eager to nurture a dialogue with young people only as long as what they hear supports their own agenda. This is not genuine participation.

Young people say that tokenism actually does more harm than good. It sends the wrong message: That adults are not sincere, that they give lip service to the idea of empowerment, that adults are not willing to do what it takes to really give young people a voice in the decisions that affect them.

Defining the Vision:

How Does It Look When Youth are at the Heart?

Youth determine the discussion.

Young people from the U.K.'s Investing in Children say, "What is needed is dialogue, not consultation." Youth input is not the same as genuine dialogue. Young people need opportunities to shape the discussion, to talk about what they think is important rather than respond to the topics that adults choose.

Dialogue goes deeper than consultation. It requires listening with respect to the views and ideas of young residents and responding honestly. The voices of young people must be heard even when they are not saying what others want to hear and when their opinions are unexpected, painful to hear, or difficult to understand. They deserve and require a forum for free expression.

The expertise and assets of young people are recognized.

Putting young people at the heart acknowledges them as valuable community resources with important information and skills to contribute. Youth know, as adults cannot, exactly what it's like to be a young person in their community. They know what kind of information other youth need and how best to communicate it. They may recognize community assets and strengths that others overlook. When people in authority listen to them and act upon their input, youth can see that they are a valued part of the community.



Everyone has a voice.

Putting youth at the heart means reaching out to all young people, regardless of their background, culture, race, gender, sexual orientation, family income or other characteristics. At the same time, to ensure access and inclusion, due regard must be given to differences in language, customs, perspectives and concerns. Having young people involved makes it less intimidating for other community residents to become involved—even those who have not participated in the past. Often, youth can engage others—children, the elderly, disenfranchised residents—in ways that adults cannot.

Youth have both power and responsibility.

When youth are at the heart, they are able to influence decisions that affect them and in ways that are meaningful to them. In addition to the power to influence decisions, youth are responsible for contributing to better results. Instead of passive observers, they share genuine responsibility for making changes. When youth are at the heart, they become part of the solution.

Talk is backed by action.

Although putting youth at the heart does not guarantee they will get what they want, people and organizations must be prepared to act differently in response to their concerns. Youth engagement is not an exercise in listening or involving young people in activities, decisions, or committees only when it is easy or convenient. It requires that individuals and organizations be prepared to act differently—to devote adequate time and to take real risks.

Tools and Activities

■ 1. Forums for Hearing Young People's Views

Youth summits and other community gatherings provide opportunities for young people to voice their views, opinions and perspectives. These convenings are venues for self expression that often feature music, dance, spoken word and other performances or creative activities. In addition to a great way to initiate youth engagement, community-wide events also can renew energy, reach additional young people, and provide an opportunity to report on work in progress.

Climbing the wall between youth and adult decision makers in the Netherlands. In 1999, the city council in Tilburg (a city of 200,000 residents) sponsored an event called “Climb the Wall.” The slogan for this historic gathering was “Climb your way into politics.” With music, dance, food, youth-led activities, and a willingness to listen, the city leaders attracted 500 young people from all neighborhoods and backgrounds. Out of the event came the idea of youth ambassadors—a city initiative that provides funds for young people to realize their good ideas.

Creating a movement: The Los Angeles Youth Engagement Task Force. In 2003, two local planning groups in this California county of 9 million residents convened a youth task force with the hope of creating “a movement and a new way of thinking.” The group worked several months to identify best practices and opportunities for a countywide youth engagement effort that would increase the number of youth actively engaged in civic and community matters that affect them. It researched best practices, held a series of focus groups with youth and youth workers, and began an asset mapping process. The group reached agreement on a definition of youth engagement, identified a set of shared values and principles, and issued a call to action with 15 specific recommendations for the county.

■ 2. Youth and Young Adults at the Decision Making Table

To put youth at the heart, there is no substitute for making them full participants in allocating resources, developing policies, and implementing strategies. While youth advisory boards are increasingly common, few communities or organizations include young people on policymaking bodies.

Youth at the heart of local and national policy. As a foundation for developing national youth policies, Chile’s National Institute of Youth is partnering with other organizations to help nine municipalities create local plans for youth. The main objectives of the local plans are:

- to incorporate young people’s opinions and interests in community decisions,
- to learn about strategic planning as tools for community organization, and
- to incorporate a perspective of rights to strengthen the civic engagement of young people.

Each participating community is required to conduct a youth assessment and to reach negotiated solutions between policy “designers” and young people who are both part of existing organizations and not participants in organized services.

Youth at the table. In Waupaca, Wisconsin, young people serve as voting members of city council—the official local governing body that makes laws and allocates resources. Youth active in the town’s Healthy Communities-Healthy Youth Initiative see this as a victory and a turning point for youth. The Initiative can claim credit for a number of other accomplishments, including: a new skateboard park for the town, volunteer opportunities with community organizations for 6th graders, and a youth-led grant-making committee that offers foundation funding for local organizations’ projects involving youth.

■ 3. Youth Making Decisions about Use of Money

A little money can be a beginning step to give young people a voice in how public resources are used. Many communities are allocating relatively small grants for young people to determine how to improve the lives of youth and other residents. While they are not a substitute for influencing overall spending for youth, the small grants go a long way toward engaging young people in decisions about improving community conditions.

Money for good ideas. In the Netherlands city of Tilburg, youth ambassadors are described as “young people with ideas who want to encourage other youth’s ideas.” Any young person can become a youth ambassador. The city aids the germination of their good ideas with a budget of approximately 40,000 euros per year to support proposals made by youngsters. A young person can present an idea on paper and receive up to 2,000 euros to implement his or her plan. The youth ambassadors invite other young people to talk about their plans and then decide which proposals to fund. Each year, young people present more than 50 ideas, such as a debate, an indoor soccer tournament, a film they want to make, an event they want to organize. The kind of activity does not matter as much as the amount of youth participation it will generate. If a proposal is expensive or addresses large issues, the ambassadors forward it to the local council, the city’s highest governance body.

■ 4. A Place of Their Own

It seems to be a universal truth that youth value a place they can call their own—where they can spend time with friends, meet new people, and pursue activities and interests they enjoy. The place may have even more significance if it is a space that young people claim for themselves and that reflects their own creativity and energy. Youth develop a sense of ownership and belonging that goes far beyond the often-modest physical space.

In Nazareth, young Israelis organized to reopen a cinema theater that had recently closed. In Tilburg, Dutch young adults converted an abandoned factory building into a dynamic space for leisure activities, sports, the arts and other creative projects. In County Durham in the U.K., young people turn the local community center into a disco called Club Idol every Friday evening.

Tips and Pitfalls to Avoid

Avoid tokenism: Include young people in meaningful numbers.

Too often, people or organizations go through the motions of engaging youth by asking a few individuals their opinions, adding a token number of young people to decision making boards, or including a few youth in select activities. Young people see through tokenistic efforts. They must be included in adequate number and genuine roles to be authentic participants.

Involve youth from the beginning.

Bringing young people in at the last minute can sink an initiative. Not only is it likely to look like tokenism, it fails to obtain their valuable input. When youth are engaged from the start, mistakes can be avoided, more successful strategies can be developed, and youth ownership and support can be developed. Young people are far more likely to stay involved and be positive about the work that is accomplished.

Take the time to fully engage involve young people.

Sometimes organizations, officials and communities—often working under a funding or administrative deadline—rush to get a project up and running. Going through the steps to engage youth people in meaningful ways and to keep them involved can be time-consuming.



“Nothing about us without us.”

-A slogan from a 2002 European youth conference held in Porsgrunn, Norway

“Would adults, in an equivalent situation, find this or that provision acceptable?”

JENNY COOKE AND OTHER YOUNG PEOPLE - *Investing in Children, U.K.*

TILBURG HALL OF FAME: YOUNG PEOPLE DOING IT FOR THEMSELVES

A group of entrepreneurial young adults are realizing their dreams in an empty factory building in the heart of Tilburg, the Netherlands. The Hall of Fame is a youth-run building—a place where young people can gather, participate in a variety of youth-organized activities, or create their own projects. The huge space is itself a creative act—a work in progress that reflects the energy, talent and persistence of young adults.

The Hall of Fame is a home for classes, performances, lessons, individual projects, and other creative activities. Graffiti-covered walls hold an enormous indoor skateboard park, a dance studio, a drumming studio, a theatre and performance space, a painting studio, an exhibition hall, a cantina and small coffee bar, and other ever-developing uses. A recording studio and a climbing wall are currently under construction. The building bustles with bus loads of school students coming for activities, individuals attending after-school lessons, and others working to make their own ideas real.

Everyone adds to the learning—both formal and informal. Bob Caarels, a young drummer, has devoted himself full time to the place. Another young man who has been involved with Hall of Fame for two years is finishing university research on creative industries by focusing on how to make the project more systematic. A university drama student currently is offering workshops for youth and developing an annual theatre festival.

Turning Unused Space Into A Community Asset For Youth

Owned by the city government, the cavernous factory building (worth an estimated 5.5 million euros) is located in a prime downtown area. It was slated for conversion to housing but standing empty several years ago. At the same time, young skaters in Tilburg were looking for a safe place to skateboard, and a group of young drummers and a dance teacher were looking for spaces to perform and teach classes. The groups joined forces and approached city officials, candidates for local board elections, and civil servants to request a space for their activities.

The young people found the empty factory building and submitted a proposal to city council to allow them to use it. Before their proposal could be considered, someone gave the order to disconnect the water and electricity. The youth “squatted” in (or occupied) the building, a practice that is legal in the Netherlands. After lots of media attention, the mayor and city council approved the proposal.



Meeting The Challenges.

The challenges did not end with initial approval. The young people had to convince many people to support a space operated by youth—neighbors, city civil servants, elected officials, budget staff, and others.

Convincing public officials and civil servants. Bob Caarels reports that dealing with local politics and bureaucracy was a huge challenge. For example, fire safety inspectors approved use of only a portion of the building. The government paid for needed insulation, and more space was usable. But repairs went far over budget—from 100,000 euros to 200,000. Still the young people wanted to have a performance, the fire department required them to cut their invitation list from 150 people to 75.

Getting along with neighbors. Because of noise complaints from a single neighbor, the Hall of Fame is permitted to hold only 12 events per year and must limit noise to a certain level. Current sound-proofing efforts within the building will expand the options.

Money to occupy, repair and create. Money is an ongoing challenge. Bob has quit university to devote himself full time to the Hall of Fame. Pay for him has been sporadic, but a recent grant from the European Social Fund will allow him to continue tending the space. To help pay the rent charged by the city, an export company leases a portion of the building away from the public area.

An uncertain future. The city has agreed to allow use of the building as the Hall of Fame until 2008. At that time, houses will be built there, and the young people must leave. However, city officials have agreed that if enough youth use the building and it becomes a recognized community asset, another space will be found for them. This promise has kept the young and the “famous” determined to make the most of the opportunity.

2. STRONG YOUTH-ADULT RELATIONSHIPS

Change comes out of relationships, not programs. The relationships that adults and young people build are at the crux of improvements in youth outcomes. Neither youth nor adults can improve the lives of young people or their communities' outcomes by acting alone. Each needs the other, and each strengthens the other.

At the same time, adults and young people are likely to come to the decision making table unprepared to work as partners. Both may lack the experiences, skills and tools they need. Both youth and adults experience the effects of adultism. The behaviors of young people are shaped by experiences with adults who are often in positions of authority “over” them. They are unaccustomed to being treated as equal partners whose perspectives, opinions, and ideas receive respectful consideration. As participants in community decision making, the expectations, responsibilities, and accountability are likely to be much greater than they usually experience.

Adults involved in community decision making may be accustomed to working exclusively with other adults. Their behaviors are shaped by their own experiences as youth or by their family, work, and community roles. Professional service providers and administrators often have highly specialized perspectives and deep wells of experience that may limit or even damage working partnerships, rather than empowering them.

For most young people and adults, working together as partners in community decision making is a new arrangement that requires each individual to overcome deeply ingrained habits, attitudes, and behaviors. To grow beyond existing comfort zones to meet each other as equals, each person must be willing to stretch.

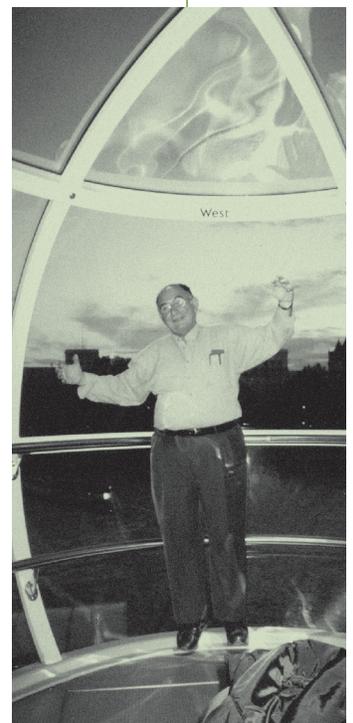
Defining the Vision:

How Do Positive Youth-Adult Relationships Look?

Each individual listens respectfully and engages in thoughtful and considerate exchange.

The foundation for positive relationships, respectful and mutual communication paves the way for youth and adults to work together effectively. Each must value the others' contributions, experiences, and differences. On this, all strategies depend.

But communication goes beyond what is necessary to conduct activities. Youth and adults who provide maximum benefit to each other are willing to actively explore ideas. They question each other, honestly respond, and constructively contribute to debate. To communicate effectively, all must work to understand and appreciate their differences.



Youth and adults encourage each other.

Adults have a responsibility to explore ways to nurture young people as they take on new challenges and develop new skills. Initially, youth are usually in positions of less authority and recognition within their communities. They may need more encouragement to speak up and step forward with their ideas and views. But encouragement is not one-way. Adults are likely to need encouragement to try new strategies, to risk hard-won gains, and to challenge business-as-usual.

Participants learn from each other.

To work as partners, youth and adults must find ways to value the expertise each brings to the relationship and to constructively learn from each other. They each offer knowledge and understanding. Young people know how the community looks from their perspective—the strengths and the problems they experience, where and from whom young people draw nourishment, and where they face difficulties. Youth know a lot about what works to engage young people and to improve their lives.

Likewise, given their years, adults have depth of experience that youth lack. They have knowledge about the power and resource dynamics of their communities that are often not obvious. They are likely to understand how decisions are really made and how to influence those decisions. Elders have a perspective of the community change process over time—what has been tried, promising strategies and possibilities for implementing them, pitfalls to avoid. They are likely to have skills honed with experience that can benefit young people.

Participants challenge each other.

The most effective partnerships go beyond simply lending encouragement. Positive partnerships mean challenging each other to think hard and to reach far. Youth and adults must do this in ways that are positive and supportive rather than harmful, demeaning, or defeating.

Youth can challenge adults to think outside the box—to approach community issues with fresh perspectives, imagination, and willingness to do things differently. Young people may need to challenge adults to give up the control and leadership they sometimes view as their right.

Adults can challenge youth to expand their vision beyond the direct experiences of their lives, to consider factors and influences that may not be obvious, and to develop effective skills for changing their communities. They may need to challenge young people to give up any distrust of their parents' peers.

Individuals take responsibility for their own actions.

Although partnerships mean working together to accomplish common goals, positive relationships require that all partners accept responsibility for their own behavior. Instead of blaming each other, both partners must be willing to look within, own up to their mistakes, and take steps to improve.

Tools and Activities

■ 1. Skill-Building Activities

Training and other skill-building sessions can help level the playing field and build positive relationships. Participating together may help prevent problems, strengthen individuals' capacities, and develop effective group practices. Team building exercises can help build trust and effective group practices. A number of organizations have developed curricula for youth-adult partnerships, and others provide direct training.

Young people as trainers. Dr. P. Thandi Hicks Harper, author of *Hip-Hop Development, Exploring Hip-Hop Culture as a Youth Engagement Tool for Successful Community Building*, suggests allocating funds to empower and train youth to teach adults. This approach would help prepare young people to present ideas to adults and broaden the impact to other adults in their lives. It also will help build capacity and resources for future adult-youth decision making efforts.

■ 2. Reaching Consensus: Principles and Expectations for Working Together

It is essential that youth and adults are clear about (1) how they want to work together and (2) what they expect of each other within the partnership. Brainstorming, sharing perspectives about what is most important, and drawing up a list of agreed upon guidelines or expectations can help ensure shared understanding. Each group should discuss what is important and reach its own consensus about how participants want to work together. The agreement provides a guidepost that participants can check periodically to be sure they remain on track or to discuss changes they want to make as new learning occurs.

Clear intent to change. Investing in Children was created in the mid-1990s when public agency managers came together in County Durham in northeastern England. Their initial motivations were to counteract negative media stereotypes of children and young people, to develop a more integrated approach to local services, and to pay more attention to what children and young people themselves had to say about things. In the past decade, the partnership has grown as new organizations join. Most recently, the Investing in Children Development Agency has formed to "franchise" the project to other public service organizations. All this has grown out of Investing in Children's clear statement of intent:

- Adults don't always know best. We must listen to and learn from what children and young people have to say. This means creating opportunities for children and young people to have a voice in all decisions that affect them.



- Different organizations must be prepared to work together to do what's best. We need to break down professional and political barriers.
- We have to think hard to make sure that all children and young people get a fair chance and we won't make it difficult for some groups to get the best from the services available.
- We must think carefully about issues which don't seem directly to be about children and young people, but which might affect them.

visit: www.iic-uk.org

Guidelines for participation. John Bell, a sociologist who has studied adultism, has developed a few guidelines for improving adult relationships with young people. These may provide a useful tool for generating discussion and considering adult behaviors. Groups also may want to expand the guidelines to include youth behaviors. A few of Bell's guidelines for adults are:

- Lie back. Curb the inclination to take over. Support the initiatives of young people.
- Change the power relationships wherever appropriate. Consider when adults can refrain from using authority, from making the final decision, from being the "real power" behind youth leadership.
- At the same time, do not thrust young people into decision-making and leadership positions without training, practice and understanding of their responsibilities.
- Give young people accurate information about the way the world works and issues that interest them. Never lie to them.

visit: freechild.org/bell.htm

■ 3. The Promise and Potential of Mentoring

Mentoring is one form of relationship that provides support, friendship and growth. Mentoring has been a meaningful experience for countless children, youth and adults. Although few mentoring programs intentionally target youth participation in community decision making as a goal, young people engaged in community change often consider the adults who support their efforts to be their mentors.

It may be possible to build on existing models and experiences to rethink mentoring as a strategy for community change. It offers promise as an intentional strategy:

- For youth and adults to find reciprocal ways to practice new behaviors and to learn from each other,
- For older youth to mentor younger people interested in community change, and
- For adult decision makers to work closely with emerging youth leaders.

Shadowing. Terrie Williams, author of *Stay Strong—Simple Lessons for Youth* and a presenter at the International Initiative’s 2004 Learning Exchange seminar, suggests that adult decision makers take a young person along as they do their work.

Tips and Pitfalls to Avoid

Be prepared for complex interpersonal dynamics.

In intergenerational relationships, the delicate balance between appreciation and critical scrutiny can be difficult to strike. The first can be seen as pandering, while the second can seem hostile. Commitment to shared goals does not make people immune to conflict. Results require that both youth and adults take the time and put forth the effort to work through difficulties and to renegotiate the terms of their relationships as needed.

Avoid language barriers.

Youth and adults alike must be careful to avoid language that excludes others. Adults often use abbreviations or professional jargon that young people and even other adults do not know. Young people may keep adults and other youth distant by using slang and new expressions.



“For youth and adults to come together, there’s gotta be communication and respect from the youth and the adults—not to see each other as youth and adults, but as people working together for a common goal.”

BLANCA TREJO - *Denver Making Connections, U.S.A.*

“For a woman whose age I’m not going to give you ... to be told by a 16 year old, ‘OK, this is what you to do. Sit down. Listen to me. I’ll tell you what to do.’ She did this four or five times, and then finally I did it.”

ANNE O’DONNELL - *National Children’s House, Ireland*

“There is a huge gap between the daily world of youngsters and grownups; if we do not bridge this gap, making policy for them is useless and without results.”

THIJS MALMBERG - *Ordina, The Netherlands*

IDENTIFYING CHAMPIONS FOR YOUTH: A CHECKLIST TO CONSIDER

Young people need all forms of champions—adults who provide personal support and assistance at many levels. Many young activists report that to promote their community improvement efforts, young people initially need at least one enthusiastic adult in the neighborhood, a community organization, a youth development agency, or local government. Other champions can be developed as efforts evolve. Champions must be honest and open individuals that young people trust. They are able to listen and provide focused attention without taking over. In short, they epitomize positive youth-adult relationships. Other considerations include:

- ❑ **The champion’s “home.”** A city staff person (civil servant) is the liaison for the Tilburg Youth Ambassadors. He is able to communicate with both the young people and local government. In San Diego’s Bronze Triangle, local resident/staff within the community development corporation support young people’s efforts to reduce crime and improve their neighborhoods, including outreach to other champions such as business leaders and elected officials.
- ❑ **Ability to connect with other partners.** To help young people achieve community improvements, champions engage other adults and organizations. They may have existing relationships, be willing to develop them, or help young people convene the right people.
- ❑ **Time and availability.** Champions must have adequate time to listen and respond to young people’s concerns and interests. Usually, this means being available evenings and weekends. All other considerations being equal, the more accessible an adult is, the stronger role he or she is likely to play.
- ❑ **Ability to make or influence community decisions.** As young people begin putting their ideas into action, they need some champions who can help them develop and implement strategies. Savvy champions can help young people learn to affect how resources are used within the community.

3. SYNCHRONIZING YOUTH AND ADULT AGENDAS

An important part of community change is identifying the results that residents want to accomplish. This requires aligning the priorities that youth identify with the issues that adults believe are most important. Often, communities find when they dig deeply enough that people—youth and adult alike—want many of the same outcomes.

This provides a strong basis for negotiation and for developing win-win approaches to improve the community. No one—young or old—is guaranteed to get everything he or she wants. Consensus is reached when each person can support and live with a decision, even if it is not exactly what he or she wants.

Defining the Vision

How Does Synchronization of Youth and Adult Agendas Look?

Participants negotiate respectfully.

To negotiate an agenda for community change that satisfies both youth and adults, everyone tries to understand each person's views. Successful negotiators listen to and consider all viewpoints. Instead of focusing on a "right or wrong" approach or a "youth side" and "an adult side," serious participants work to shape an agenda that will create a stronger community for all residents.

All voices are heard.

Seeking out all the voices of the community's youth and adults brings depth to the discussion, helps to identify the hopes and fears of all residents, and enhances the ideas being considered. Ultimately, engaging all members of the community helps to identify the true priorities, clarifies them for everyone, and serves as a powerful antidote to polarization. Listening with respect to community partners whose voices are not usually heard can help diffuse control of decision making, which may be in the hands of a few people or established interests.

Participants dig deeply to get an accurate understanding of the community and possible strategies for change.

Learning more about the community can help youth and adults develop common understanding. Exploring community strengths and challenges helps both young people and adults understand the conditions of residents' lives, the root causes of current conditions, as well as resources and assets that may not be obvious. Greater understanding of all the factors contributing to community outcomes helps everyone make better decisions.

Individuals and groups find common ground among different interests and concerns.

Often, reaching out to all members of the community for their views and thoroughly exploring community conditions changes the discussion.

New information and awareness put existing agendas in a new light. As individuals get a better sense of their own interests in the context of the community as a whole, finding common ground is sometimes more feasible.



Tools and Activities

■ 1. Youth-Led Community Research: Three Approaches

To get the facts, figures and opinions they need to improve their communities and their own lives, young people are becoming a new force in community research. Putting young people in charge while providing the support they need yields multiple benefits:

- It engages youth in learning about their communities, the conditions and the contributing factors.
- It produces useful information about local assets and needs that can be used to devise strategies for improvement.
- It helps youth develop valuable research, planning and community development skills.

Through grassroots initiatives, young people are exploring many approaches to community research. Three models are described here.

Surveying and consultation. In 2002, the Junior Youth Forum in Blanchardstown (a town outside Dublin, Ireland) initiated a research report to identify the issues facing young people in their community. The Forum drew up a list of issues and consulted with 100 young people to rank them in importance. After pinpointing the top three priorities (drugs, tobacco and alcohol; crime; racism and discrimination), the young people worked with a professional researcher to design and administer a questionnaire to over 500 young residents ages 12 to 18. This questionnaire was followed by a consultative weekend with 60 young people to further explore the research findings and to identify desired improvements. The young people then presented their report to the community, and it has been influential in informing local policy.

Neighborhood scanning. Cityscan is a local organization in Hartford, Connecticut, that provides tools for citizens to document problems in their community using video cameras and other technological resources. After working primarily with adult residents, Cityscan expanded to develop a youth leadership program. Young people working with Cityscan created a survey to find out why many youth and recreation centers are not being used and to develop strategies for increasing their use.

Community youth mapping. Community youth mapping is a way of gathering information about neighborhood resources. Young people find and provide the information about assets that benefit them, and adults

help by training the young mappers. The youngsters collect information about local assets with interviews and surveys. Youth-friendly resources are people, activities, and places that help young people improve their lives. They might include places to study after school, the basketball court or skateboard park, organized after-school activities, employment centers, drug and alcohol treatment centers, youth-friendly businesses and organizations. In addition to a paper map, youth mappers put information into a computer so it's available to residents and to people who provide services in the neighborhood. Sometimes mappers describe the available resources and rate each asset on its youth friendliness, accessibility to individuals who are disabled, and languages that are spoken.

Baltimore's Community Youth Mapping was aimed at mobilizing communities across the city. To organize the effort, maps of local youth resources were developed for each of the city's nine Police Districts over a six-month period. Each district identified a local community-based organization to take the lead for day-to-day management of the project. Approximately 20 young people per district mapped the resources for youth within the entire city in 2½ weeks. At the end of the mapping process, young people shared their findings at street corner "Speakouts" and at Baltimore's Promise Summit, a citywide meeting of 7,000 people where each citizen could vote on five priority goals for the city's youth.



■ 2. Learning Exchanges: Sharing Good Ideas

Young people get good ideas from each other. Within their communities, youth groups and summits bring young people together to share experiences and views. Regional, national, and international gatherings help young people exchange ideas and learn new strategies. Web-based forums, podcasts and email list serves are other vehicles for learning. Young people say they get the most from activities in which they feel ownership and have input, instead of events or media activities staged by adults for their own purposes.

Cabildos: Meetings of young people. As Chile forges national public policy for youth, a number of forums are being held to exchange information and ideas. In addition to local plans for youth, regional plans are being developed using cabildos, one day meetings of young women and men between 15 and 24 years of age. Young people identify issues that are not being addressed in their respective communities, prioritize needs, share ideas for improvement, and suggest policies.

Crossing borders to solve common problems. In 2001, a pediatrician in County Durham asked Investing in Children to help develop a dialogue among young people who attended the local diabetes clinic. The goal was to help these youngsters better manage their treatment. A group of the young people spent the summer interviewing other clinic users and researching treatment options. After learning that Sweden was leading the world in treatment of diabetes, they visited a Swedish clinic and talked with young people and professionals there. The British youth then issued a report comparing treatment in the two countries and making

recommendations. At a subsequent session that included local health agency officials, three Swedish youth joined the youngsters to make a case for funding insulin pumps, a state-of-the-art diabetes management tool not available to the U.K. group. Immediate changes include:

- A bright and airy space exclusively for young people in the new clinic being built,
- Development of a local support network of young people with diabetes,
- Distribution to all young clinic users of information on diabetes and treatment that the youthful researchers identified as helpful, and
- Policy and financing proposals for making insulin pumps available to young people with diabetes in County Durham.

■ 3. Negotiating Win-Win Solutions

Information gathered by community research projects is critical for developing strategies that will achieve the desired results and that will be acceptable to both youth and adults. The information becomes a tool for synchronizing youth and adult agendas. It allows young people to document their needs, interests and goals within the broader arena of community-wide interests. Concrete information helps identify strategies that might work and makes a convincing case to community decision makers.

Meeting the needs of youth and adults. In Peterlee, a new town in the U. K.'s County Durham, a group of three young women and four young men between the ages of 16 and 19 formed a research team in 2001. Their goals were to find out what was important to young people and to influence the development of a local “youth strategy” that a multi-agency Community Safety Partnership was developing. The group put together a questionnaire, distributed it to more than 100 local young people, and conducted 60 interviews. They followed this research with an “Agenda Day,” a one-day meeting with 24 young people to discuss and confirm the findings. One finding was that young people needed a place to go on weekends. When they presented their report and recommendations to the Safety Partnership, they received a lukewarm response.

Determined to address the problems they had identified, the young people themselves organized a meeting with local police and managers of local leisure services and youth services. They proposed starting a disco for young people in the local Leisure Center on Friday nights. This time, the young people met with acceptance and began the work of planning and running the disco. Other issues, such as staffing and pricing had to be settled, but the group had the information they needed to negotiate. The project was a win-win for young people and the community as a whole:

- Young people had a place to go on Friday nights that they felt ownership of, and
- The police and adult residents were glad that young people were safe and were not hanging out on the streets.

Tips and Pitfalls to Avoid

Avoid letting participants become polarized.

When individual youth and adults or groups start out in an “us versus them” posture, special efforts are necessary to identify common interests and concerns. When inevitable disagreements occur, participants must avoid defining the issues in polarizing terms.

Avoid discounting others’ views.

Neither youth nor adults can afford to under-value the others’ perspectives. Failing to fairly consider everyone’s interests prevents decisions that produce results.

Present interests instead of defending positions.

Negotiations stall when either side locks itself into defending a position, instead of describing its interests to each other. Rather than identifying a position and defending it to the exclusion of others’ interests, the goal is to find areas of agreement and common interests.

“Adults need to realize that young people are not all alike, young people are not static, and each youth has different skills and needs. These differences should be understood and appreciated.”

SARATH SUONG - Providence Making Connections, Providence, Rhode Island, U.S.A.

“It’s nice to know that what we say is important. I definitely think the stereotype is going in certain areas...The council is taking on board what we are saying.”

LENA JEHA - South Norfolk, U.K.

**“The old say it’s the youth, but the youth say it’s the old
The truth is rarely told, unaware we’re out of control”**

SWEATSHOP UNION - Song: Dirty Work, Album: Local 604



4. RECRUITING AND RETAINING YOUTH PARTICIPANTS IN COMMUNITY DECISION MAKING

Again and again, young people say that the best way to engage them is to make them authentic partners in decisions that affect their lives—to give them hands-on ownership of the work. When young people are making decisions about issues that interest them in their community and can see outcomes, they stay involved. If the groundwork has been laid—especially putting youth at the heart and building positive adult-youth relationships—young people want to participate.

At the same time, recruitment and retention of youth in community improvement efforts have unique challenges. Often people think the work is over after the initial effort. However, keeping young people engaged can be far more difficult. Both youth and adults have busy and demanding lives. During this time in their lives, most young people want to explore many directions and options, and they may move on quickly to other concerns and interests. Recruiting and retaining young participants requires a strong plan with specific strategies and tools, as well as flexibility and ability to change.

Defining the Vision

How Does Successful Youth Recruitment and Retention Look?

Young people get something they want.

Research indicates that youth get involved in community activities, such as volunteering and civic actions, for one of three primary reasons:

1. They want to get something out of it that will meet their personal goals and needs, such as opportunities to meet people, having fun, better job opportunities, or learning new skills.
2. They are motivated by their values or beliefs, such as a sense of social justice or responsibility to others.
3. Someone important to them encouraged their involvement, such as a friend or mentor.

Participants make friendships and personal connections that they value.

Some young community activists stress the value of the connectedness they experience and the feeling of belonging with other youth and with adults they value. They derive inspiration and motivation from each other along with a sense of membership and investment.

Participation makes a difference that young people can see.

Youth get involved because they believe they can make an important difference in their own lives and in their community. They stay engaged when they

experience the power to make decisions about things that are important to them and they see results.

Participation is fun and accessible.

When activities are fun, young people want to be involved. They know what makes things fun, and it is not long meetings and speeches. Participation is easy when locations and scheduling are convenient and when needed help is available.

Retention efforts are deliberate and ongoing.

Although recruitment poses challenges, keeping young people engaged is critical. To keep enthusiasm from waning and to avoid what one young man called “consultation fatigue” requires intentional effort. Here again, research reveals that sustained involvement in community activities is linked to the support of family, friends and others and to experiencing positive, valued outcomes.

Sustainability is planned, not taken for granted.

Young people age quickly. To keep community change moving ahead, new youth must become involved. As young adults move on to fulfill their personal goals, younger members of the community need opportunities to raise new issues and pursue new directions for change. Older youth activists provide valuable pointers, support and examples for the next generation. Hopefully, older youth will remain involved in their communities or take their spirit of activism with them to new places.

Tools and Activities

1. Doors to Fit Every Young Person

The best way to recruit young people is to ask youth themselves what will work. It is important to provide multiple opportunities and ways for people to get involved. Young people can figure out how to get others involved. As one young man at the 2004 Learning Exchange said,

“Other youth are the best recruiters. We know how to talk to each other. We know what’s important to them. We’ll be honest and be ourselves.”

Opening all doors. Adults in one Vermont community struggled to find a cross-section of young people willing to share their opinions and goals. Finally they found a talented, out-of-school 16 year old who wanted to talk. He was able to persuade other teens to join discussions. Soon, they were hearing from youth on furlough from juvenile detention as well as honor students.



■ 2. Opportunities to Learn What Young People Want to Know

Many young people are attracted by opportunities to learn new skills and broaden their experience in other ways. Providing extended access to resources that help young people master their interests keeps them engaged.

Learning high tech skills while organizing the community. Llano Grande Center for Research and Development is a community-based organization in a predominantly Mexican American, rural area of southern Texas. Rejecting the notion that one's origins should limit anyone's expectations, the founders started with informal efforts to counteract poverty and increase educational opportunities. Working with local schools and other partners for more than a decade, the Center has provided encouragement and support for many local youngsters to attend the top U.S. universities. A number of these youth have returned to the community and the Center's work.

In 1998, the Center set out to capture the oral histories of local residents. To make this dream possible, they invested in digital cameras, microphones and an editing station. Next, the Center began to document community seminars. Since, a growing group of young people have been trained to use the equipment to document seminars, conferences and a range of public forums throughout the U.S.

One young videographer described Llano Grande's appeal: "What attracted me was they asked my opinion—'What do you want to change?'"

■ 3. Youth Popular Culture as the Hook

Youth culture takes different shapes in different places, and everywhere it can be a powerful tool for engaging young people. Dr. P. Thandi Hicks Harper has coined the term Hip-Hop Development™ to describe using hip-hop culture to improve outcomes for youth. Although many adults see only the negative aspects that are boosted by commercial media, hip-hop music, spoken word, dance and graffiti can take many forms.

It is an empowering and positive means of personal expression for a growing number of young people around the world. According to Dr. Hicks Harper, adults must develop their own hip-hop cultural competence instead of stereotyping young people, hip-hop, or its use.

Using hip-hop to promote positive messages. Local Initiative Training and Education Network (LISTEN) is a U.S. organization committed to developing young leaders to improve urban communities. The organization reaches out to young leaders where they are—"on street corners, in crowded classrooms, in juvenile detention centers, in youth development organizations, in street organizations..." In Washington, D.C., the organization incorporated hip-hop into a project aimed at improving the public school system. Students involved in this Youth Education Alliance

learned about the school system, strategies for improvement, and youth organizing strategies. To get out their message, they created their own hip-hop musical CD and developed a marketing and distribution strategy for reaching other students, teachers, and school administrators.

■ 4. Room to Grow

The roles and activities that appeal to individuals may change as young people grow, as their situations change, and as they develop new interests and abilities. When young people get involved, many develop an interest in increasing levels of responsibility and leadership. They need opportunities to master new roles and skills.

Growing into leadership. Each community in Israel has a youth council composed of young people who are elected by their peers and receive leadership training. Nitzan Friedlander, one of the young planners of the 2004 International Initiative Learning Exchange, served on her local youth council. She received training provided by the Youth Department within the Ministry of Education and started out working with younger children aged ten to 11 in her community. Then she worked with slightly older youngsters. Next, she served as the head of the local youth council until she left to work in other areas of the country as an organizer of the youth movement. There were many ways for Nitzan to get involved, and she was able to explore them as she grew.

Tips and Pitfalls to Avoid

Follow up to make sure people don't feel like they wasted their time.

Keeping in touch lets people know their time and participation is valued. Following up with information about activities and community developments helps to keep participants in the loop.

There's no substitute for personal contact.

Many things compete for the time and attention of young people and adults alike. Email bulletins, web forums, news groups, and podcasts are a few high-tech ways to stay in touch, but they may lack a personal connection. Maintaining direct, personal relationships may be the best retention strategy.

“The best way to get youth involved in the city and in local government is to make them feel like they are going to make a difference.”

MATT MILLER - Loveland, Colorado, youth delegate to the National League of Cities Council on Youth, Education and Families

“It’s not where you are, but who you are with that influences what youth choose to do.”

YOUTH PARTICIPANT - *Seattle Project Lift Off*

“In distressed communities, young people can often see where their lives are headed. If they see that they can change that course, that getting involved will make a difference for them, they are more likely to come to a meeting.”

YOUTH PARTICIPANT - *International Initiative 2004 Learning Exchange*

GUIDELINES FOR MAKING PARTICIPATION ACCESSIBLE AND APPEALING

Young people are the best resources for designing activities that are fun, convenient and welcoming. Putting youth in charge helps to ensure that young people will want to participate in meetings and other events. Here are some initial factors to consider:

- Locations that are welcoming and convenient.** It makes sense to go to places where young people gather. Although school is an obvious site for consideration, some young people may not see school as a welcoming place, and others may want a change of scene.
- Transportation.** Holding activities in places where young people can walk or bike also helps to make participation easy. When this is not possible, providing access to public transportation can facilitate youth involvement. Young people in County Durham succeeded in getting a travel card that provides a reduced fare for young people using buses. Indianapolis, Indiana city officials offer bus passes for young people.
- Timing.** Evening or weekend activities may avoid conflicts with school and other obligations. Some suggest negotiating with schools when scheduling large, community wide meetings.
- Format for meeting and events.** It is not surprising that long, tedious meetings with long, tedious speeches do not interest young people (or other participants). Young people themselves can set guidelines for conducting activities. For example, the young planners of the 2004 International Initiative Learning Exchange proposed that all seminar presentations and comments be limited to ten minutes per person, that all sessions include hands-on activities, and that every activity include humor.
- Roles and how they will be shared.** Often young people are interested in rotating or sharing roles and responsibilities, such as planning agendas, chairing meetings, recording proceedings, or other functions they identify.
- Accessible language.** Terms and jargon that only adults or professionals understand are a sure way to turn off young people. In addition, all communication needs to be accessible and friendly to individuals of all cultural backgrounds and languages within the community.
- Refreshments.** Many young people report that snacks, food, and drinks help people relax, break boundaries, and avoid the distraction of hunger.
- Personal expression.** Freedom of expression, especially in a fun, participatory, creative environment, is a sure-fire strategy for engaging young people. Music is a great convener.

5. SUPPORTING YOUTH ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

There is no blueprint for organizing youth participation. For many young people, the question of an organizational “home” and how it is structured is not only inconclusive; it may be irrelevant. The more important question is whether organizations support the values and outcomes that are important to young people. Organizational decision making processes, policies and operating procedures must support authentic youth participation in decisions that affect them.

Organizational support can take many forms—or be completely absent. The key is to work in partnership with young people to create a blueprint.

Defining the Vision

How Does Successful Organizational Development Look?

Youth have a voice in designing strategies.

Young people interested in improving their lives and their communities may choose to participate without formal organizations, use existing structures, or create new ones. For existing or emerging organizations to be meaningful vehicles for youth engagement, young people must feel that they can influence the structure, design and day-to-day operations.

Existing or new organizations model the changes they are trying to make.

Organizations or initiatives that successfully engage youth reflect the values and principles that young participants believe are important. As youth and other community partners identify how they want to work together, these values must be put into practice. To be effective, strategies and organizations incorporate respect for young people’s opinions and views, engage all young people, encourage and honor diversity, share control and resources, and empower participants.

Participation, learning and creativity are priorities.

Staff and other organizational resources are invested in ways that build decision making capacity. Young people have opportunities to participate in organizational decision making and operations.

Structures and procedures do not get in the way.

Successful organizations are vehicles for facilitating and supporting youth participation, rather than barriers to change. Rules are limited to ensure protection of individual rights, promote participation, and encourage responsible innovation. Flexibility allows young people to contribute in ways that are relevant, meaningful and convenient to them.

Tools and Activities

■ 1. Ideas and Action Over Formal Organization

Some leaders urge against creating formal structures. They suggest keeping efforts down-to-earth and adaptable—like youth themselves. Young people often maintain that the idea of a formal organization is an adult concept. They note that maintaining the organization may take precedence over the priorities of young people. The key “structure” is a network where young people find mutual respect and support, not an organization.

(Lack of) Structure follows strategy. Youth Ambassadors in the Netherlands city of Tilburg are not elected or appointed. They are young people who have ideas they want to actualize. They also approve small grants for other young people to implement their own “good ideas.” In the beginning, meetings were held in the city hall and only about ten young people attended. They formed work groups focusing on discrimination against youth of color, a building of their own, and other issues. Gradually, the work took shape. It took a year or more before most civil servants supported the concept.

When describing their structure, the ambassadors said: “We are 30 young people. Fifteen are active, and the other 15 are not.” This is in fact the structure.

Peter Broere, one of the Tilburg city council aldermen who is a champion for youth engagement, recommends organic development without formal organizations. He suggests simply starting with activities and asking young people what they want to change. “The structure has to be fluid to cope with youngsters and their ideas. Tomorrow there will be something new. Foremost it has to be fun and it has to do with contemporary youth culture: ‘This is a good idea, let’s do it!’ ”

visit: www.jongerenambassadeurs.nl

■ 2. Organizational Strength and Capacity

In other situations, a formal organization may be essential for developing the capacity needed to achieve young people’s goals. An organizational home can increase visibility within the community, provide a base for implementing results-focused strategies, and give young people an important sense of belonging. An effective organization can also help with fundraising and sustaining efforts over time.

OUTRIGHT empowered. OUTRIGHT is a community organization in Portland, Maine, that creates a safe place for youth who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and questioning (GLBTQ) and promotes a safer world on their behalf. Guided by a youth-adult board, OUTRIGHT provides



support, education, advocacy and social activities. Organizational capacity helps to support a range of ongoing activities, including a hotline, weekly support groups and a drop-in center, educational and social events, and advising community decision makers. For example, youth participants:

- Organized a prom attended by 190 GLBTQ youth,
- Told their stories to 300 teachers and students who filled a high school auditorium and produced visible changes in attitudes,
- Advised a high school official about handling an anti-gay harassment incident and improving the school environment.

The group has raised money through community events and grants submitted to government agencies and private foundations. As part of a loosely affiliated group of organizations throughout the New England area, Portland's OUTRIGHT organizes an annual statewide youth summit attended by over 100 young people.

visit: www.outright.org

■ 3. Meaningful Compensation

Some organizations see young people as free labor. Others try to cut corners anyway they can, and youth are the ones most likely to come up short. Some young people say they are more engaged and they stay involved if they view the work as a job. They may be more motivated and likely to follow through on their commitments. In addition, when young people are seen as integral to the work, instead of add-ons to it, their contributions may be taken more seriously by decision makers.

Paying for time. Hartford, Connecticut's Cityscan began as a citizen engagement effort and provides tools for residents to document community problems. To find out why many youth and recreation centers were not being used, young people working with Cityscan created a survey and developed solutions for increasing use. Cityscan pays youth who average 20 hours of work per week. Boston's MYTOWN also pays young people for their time spent conducting community research and leading tours.

Time dollars. Time dollars are an alternative type of exchange that has captured the interest of people in the U.K., Japan, the U.S. and communities beyond. Instead of using money, people use their time as purchasing power. No money changes hands. Instead, one hour of contribution = one time dollar. A young person contributing an hour of time in a community project can receive an hour of time from someone else in the community. Offers are limited only by the creativity, availability and interest of residents, and examples include time repairing a vehicle, building a website, teaching a musical instrument, or writing a grant proposal. In a well-known Chicago peer tutoring program, both tutors and those being tutored earn refurbished internet-ready computers.

In San Antonio, Texas, Time Dollar Community Connections created a computer system for banking neighbors' time dollars. Not only will the computer bank keep track of the hours people earn and spend, it will match the kind of work that individuals are available to do with the requests for help needed.

■ 4. Young People Making Organizational and Management Decisions

Involving youth in selecting staff and determining staff roles and responsibilities helps to put them at the heart of organizations intended to support youth engagement, serve youth, or strengthen their communities. Having young people sit on recruitment panels for volunteers and interview panels for staff may help to ensure that job candidates recognize the role of youth and the organizational priorities. Those who are hired are more likely to have a positive rapport with young people. Youth also might contribute to the development of job descriptions and design of key tasks.

Connexions that make a difference. There are 47 Connexions Partnerships throughout the U.K. that provide an array of services for all young people between the ages of 13 and 19 (and up to age 25 for young adults who have learning difficulties and disabilities). Local activities vary, but a core set of services is offered everywhere. Each partnership employs personal advisors who give information, advice and practical help to youth, or can refer individuals to a specialist. A variety of organizational strategies put youth at the heart of Connexions:

- **Youth management boards.** Each area has a youth management board. Most hold meetings every six months in the evening. Local and partnership-wide issues are discussed, and pizza is served. These meetings usually lead to more opportunities to get involved.
- **Interviewing staff.** All Connexions job applicants have a young person on their interview panel.
- **Mystery shopping.** Young people visit the centers to test out the service and provide feedback about how things can be improved.
- **Speaking at conferences.** Youth and young adults speak at Connexions conferences and talk about what is important to young people.
- **Setting up new local Connexions youth boards.** Young people who think that youth voices are not being heard in their neighborhood can set up a group to encourage involvement and find local solutions.
- **Working for Connexions.** Young people are employed by the local partnerships.
- **Online information, suggestions and feedback.** Each Connexions Partnership has a website that provides a way for youth to submit questions, suggestions and ideas. Some conduct online polls about local and national issues affecting youth, how to make Connexions' services more effective, and personal experiences of young people.

visit: www.connexions-direct.com

Tips and Pitfalls to Avoid

Focus on results and participants' values and principles for working together.

Don't let the organization (or lack of it) take over.

Check in periodically with other participants to make sure things are on track.

Routinely reassessing progress, strategies, and how participants are working together helps to keep everyone engaged.



“Take young people to boring meetings and watch the changes happen.”

PETER BOERE - Alderman, Tilburg The Netherlands

“A lot of activities and groups were planned for youth, but there wasn't anything that involved youth in the planning.”

CAROLYN EDELBECK - Waupaca, Wisconsin, U.S.A.

“Youth have so much to offer and we are not letting them give what they have, we are not providing the opportunities in our society.”

ANNE O'DONNELL - National Children's House, Ireland

YOUTH COUNCILS THAT PUT YOUTH AT THE HEART: ORGANIZATIONAL GUIDELINES TO CONSIDER

Approximately 100 countries around the world have governmentally recognized national youth councils. Thousands of communities and local jurisdictions have developed local youth councils or boards. Many of these bodies have given young people a voice where previously they had no way to express their opinions, needs, or desires. Youth councils have a variety of purposes, such as:

- providing information and advice to community decision making boards or to local or national officials;
- leading projects intended to benefit young people;
- conducting research about community assets, needs and youth perspectives; and
- encouraging other young people to participate in community activities.

Who is Really in Charge?

Although youth councils and boards are intended to give youth a say, many young people complain that they often operate in ways that are determined by adults. These adults are the ones who are really in charge. The topics of discussion and types of activities may be decided or limited by adults. For example, in the U.K. a local youth council was charged with choosing school uniforms—not determining whether schools should have uniforms, a topic that may be more important to students. Youth in one U.S. city complained that the youth council was merely a publicity stunt intended to make public officials look good.

Who is at the Table?

Youth participants may be selected by adult-determined criteria—those who look and behave in certain ways or who share the views of the adults. Often representatives are selected by their peers in contests intended to mirror adult elections. Yet, the young people who are not direct participants do not have a voice. They lack practical or effective mechanisms for regularly obtaining information or expressing their views to their representatives or to adults.

From the perspective of many young people, the result is that the voices most likely to be heard are those that say what the adults want to hear. Rather than providing early lessons in the benefits of democracy, these experiences can have the opposite effect. They can convince young people that their voices are not heard or do not make a difference.

Initial Steps to Consider.

Instead of rigid structures or empty promises, all youth councils can be vital forums shaped by young people and their ideas for the future. Here are three steps for ensuring that youth councils are vehicles for authentic youth engagement. As these steps are put in place, the energy and creativity of young people will come to the table. Other strategies described in this toolkit

can also contribute to youth councils and boards that give young people an authentic voice in decisions.

- ❑ **Put young people in charge of setting the agenda.** Encourage young people to choose the issues, concerns and interests they want to focus on. They may need tools and resources to identify the goals they want to achieve, but the goals should be owned by the community's youth.
- ❑ **Ask youth to design the council.** Rather than imposing an adult model or design, ask young people how the council should operate including its purposes, roles and responsibilities. They are likely to develop creative models, try things that adults would not attempt, and learn firsthand what works and what does not.
- ❑ **Provide tools and mechanisms for engaging all young people.** Regardless of the design and the focus, specific steps must be taken to ensure that all youth have a voice.



6. BUILDING SUPPORT SYSTEMS FOR YOUTH DECISION MAKING

Although communities lack adequate support systems for youth engagement, some countries and communities have made enormous progress. Building on the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child, nations are developing policy frameworks to support youth consultation and safeguard the rights of young people to participate in decisions that affect them.

With or without this framework, young people and their adult champions are working in their own neighborhoods to build better lives. They are learning about the supports that are required and how to ensure that effective supports are in place. Often, these individuals are working day-to-day in the face of insufficient resources, fragile alliances, and political vacuums. We owe them our gratitude. These struggling frontline groups are contributing to greater understanding that hopefully will benefit their own efforts and others. We have only glimpsed the potential of young people when they are fully engaged in improving their own lives and communities and empowered to make a difference. Emerging developments are informing the vision of strong supports and strong communities.

Defining the Vision:

How Do Effective Support Systems Look?

An emerging vision.

The ability to describe or even envision a strong support system for fully engaged youth is limited by our lack of experience. This is an emerging area with much knowledge and expertise to be developed. We lack adequate understanding of what benefits youth engagement can produce, what factors contribute to positive outcomes, what the challenges are, and what supports are needed to achieve better results. We are only beginning to examine and understand what constitutes strong support systems and what it takes to build them.

“Built in, not bolted on.”

This slogan describes the U.K.’s official vision of support for youth engagement. Youth participation is seen as a necessary, core component of all local and national organizations that provide services to young people or impact their lives. Since adopting the U.N. Convention, policymakers and administrators have been re-examining and strengthening policies, agencies, and programs as they work to put youth at the heart.

Communities infused with supports.

Another slogan that rings true is from a 2002 European gathering in Norway: “Nothing about us, without us.” The vision is of communities where young people have an authentic voice in everything that affects them and they feel supported in every aspect of their daily lives. Supports go beyond particular

programs or agencies. They are not limited to decision making in schools, public youth-serving agencies, mission-driven non-governmental organizations, youth advocacy groups, or community-based organizations. Regardless of their focus, all organizations and programs foster youth engagement and empower young people to improve their lives and communities. Young people have many options and resources for assistance, skill development, mentoring, and support.

Support tailored to individual development, interests, needs and capacities.

Strong support systems will have the capacity to respond to individuals' strengths, interests, needs and levels of development. There will be sufficient understanding and resources to ensure that each young person has an array of appropriate opportunities to participate in community decision making. A network of supports will enhance participation throughout childhood and adolescence and will fit the changing capacity and needs of young people as they grow and develop. Specific efforts will be in place to help young people as they make the transition to active, involved adults.

Sustainability.

Youth engagement efforts will no longer struggle from one campaign to the next. Strong communities facilitate ongoing work to improve outcomes. To keep community change moving ahead, community organizations will have the capacity to continuously engage new participants and to support experienced youth as their involvement evolves. Because young people age quickly, ongoing efforts focus on engaging new and younger participants. At the same time, as young adults move on to fulfill their personal goals, they are encouraged to remain involved in their communities and to support the next generation of activists.

Research contributing to a continuous cycle of improvement.

Instead of hit-or-miss projects, research will be recognized as an essential component of systemic youth engagement. Integrated into youth engagement initiatives, youth-led research will contribute to continuous learning about what it takes to accomplish desired results. Youth engagement strategies will be informed by well-constructed research, enhancing policies, practice developments, and progress toward better outcomes in the lives of young people.



Tools and Activities

■ 1. Continuous Leadership and Community Development

Routinely offered leadership training and skill development can boost the capacity of individual young people and youth participation as a whole. When youth contribute to ongoing community development and essential community functions, they are embedded as local assets.

Building leadership skills. Israel's youth leadership training program helps young people learn how to lead a group, identify priorities, develop strategies for achieving results, and participate effectively in democratic decision making. The youth council members from each community participate in training provided by the Youth Department in the Ministry of Education.

Improving community outcomes and accountability: Youth inspectors. In many nations, public agencies employ inspectors or auditors to monitor government effectiveness and make recommendations for improvement. In the Netherlands, new approaches are being developed for handling this important accountability function. First, multiple government agencies are working together to respond to community crises involving children, youth and families with a single cross-cutting inspection, in-depth examination of contributing factors and community perspectives, and coordinated recommendations and actions for change. Second, young people in Amsterdam are being engaged to serve as Youth Inspectors to inform, reflect, advise, and inspect from their own perspectives. Not only do Youth Inspection Teams receive guidance, coaching and support to work in this capacity; local youth professionals and government officials also must be able, willing, and supported to work with the youth. Youth Inspections have become a method for citizen dialogue and democratic development as well as an important research and accountability strategy.

■ 2. Collaborative Community Partnerships

Achieving results requires many partners working together. In collaboration, community organizations that touch the lives of young people in any way can overcome their isolation and improve their effectiveness. By sharing expertise and perspectives, collaborative networks enhance staff capacity.

Connections with community decision makers and stakeholders. The Bronze Triangle Community Development Corporation was established to empower the residents of three San Diego, California, communities to improve and develop their neighborhoods. The youth in the neighborhoods are in crisis due to violence and gang activity. In 2004, juvenile victims of violent crime increased 21 percent. Six youth were murdered, 11 were raped, and 98 were victims of aggravated assault.

Because young people are the ones being adversely affected, they took the lead in a three-stage process to produce a strategic plan for preventing community violence and youth gang involvement.

- 1. Youth Summit.** First, Bronze Triangle youth, parents and residents gathered to discuss what young people felt they needed to improve their lives and community. Ex-gang members talked about their former lives and set the tone for open and honest discussion. Data were collected to document the issues discussed.
- 2. Youth Stakeholders Luncheon.** The second phase was a meeting with 45 business, civic and political leaders where youth presented the data and community concerns in a powerpoint they had created. Impressed with the discussion and youth ownership of the effort, the majority of the adult leaders pledged their support and assistance.
- 3. Youth Charette.** Next, 150 community residents and stakeholders (including youth, parents, police officers, probation staff, school administrators, architects, judges, and civic leaders) met to discuss problems and brainstorm solutions.

Out of this engagement process, the community is developing a strategic plan for making the community a place where all young people thrive.

■ 3. Networks of Support Implanted in the Community

Systems of support are firmly established within the structure of the community, and the effect is multi-dimensional. These networks are both deeply entrenched in daily life and widely extending beyond a single program or agency. They have ongoing capacity to:

- coach and support all youth to find their voices and achieve their goals;
- encourage, assist and advocate for young people to be an ongoing and effective force in community decision making;
- nurture strong, ongoing adult-youth relationships;
- build and expand collaborative partnerships to form a strong network of policies, practices, and resources for youth engagement.

Multiple dimensions of youth empowerment. Investing in Children, located in the English County Durham, describes itself as “an organization concerned with the human rights of children and young people,” but this understates its capacity and its impact. It is:

- **A partnership of about three dozen organizations** that have signed onto a common set of principles (see Strategies and Tools for Building Strong Adult-Youth Relationships) and, in many cases, provide funding.

- **A hands-on supporter of youth-driven change** that funds and encourages youth-led research and facilitates negotiation of youth and adult agendas.
- **An information and education resource** that raises awareness of the community at large, professionals, and policymakers; empowers them with training; and then gives them credit for positive efforts.
- **An advocacy campaign** that encourages staff and community leaders to empower young people and advises policymakers to shape policies today that will achieve better outcomes in the future.
- **A continually growing network of support** for the rights of young people locally, regionally, nationally and internationally that freely spreads its “lessons learned” and encourages others.

visit: www.iic-uk.org

EMPOWERING YOUNG PEOPLE TO INJECT NEW IDEAS

An upcoming conference sponsored by Investing in Children is typical of its approach. The conference, called “Injecting Fresh Ideas into NHS (the National Health Service),” culminates three years of work with the regional public health authority. The work has included a series of leadership seminars for local health boards and an “Action Learning” staff development program for workers—all focused on actively engaging children and young people. Young residents themselves have been centrally involved throughout the work, and the conference will bring together the key lessons.

This is a conference with a difference. It is not just about young people’s views- it is also led and presented by young people. A young person will chair the day-long meeting and most of the time will be spent in interactive workshops led by young people with the support of adults. The workshops will focus on the findings of research that was conducted by young people as well as policy development and how to put ideas into action.

“Empowering youth, enriching communities” on a national scale.

This is the slogan of Foroige, an Irish youth development organization founded more than 50 years ago. Deeply rooted in the principles of individual empowerment and “learning by doing,” Foroige has supported generations of young people through the transition from a largely agricultural society to the dynamic possibilities of the present day.

In a nation of 4 million, Foroige sponsors 420 youth clubs for 12 to 18 year olds. Club members democratically choose their leaders and priorities with assistance from volunteer adult mentors, regional staff and development programs. Clubs in each region hold conferences and choose representatives

to a reference panel that provides input into running the national organization. Four reference panel members sit on the organization's governing board, and a 16 year old is currently serving as executive.

More than 5,000 adult volunteers work with 400 full and part-time staff to provide other Foroige-sponsored resources, including:

- 90 local youth development projects that embrace a variety of youth leadership and community work.
- Local youth services developed in collaboration with other groups to enrich the lives and support development of young people in marginalized communities.
- Four information centers that serve as one stop shops for local youth and
- Big Brother/Big Sister programs throughout the country.

visit: www.foroige.ie

YOUTH GOVERNANCE

Foroige also provides training and preparation for members of the Irish Youth Parliament, 200 representatives elected at local gatherings. Created by national legislation, the goal of the Youth Parliament is to interact with and advise all government departments. At present, members consult with the Department of Children and the Department of the Prime Minister. Parallel local youth parliaments are planned to provide formal youth input into local government.

“It takes a village to raise a child—a very simple philosophy. The only thing that makes it complicated is the adults.”

YOUTH PARTICIPANT - 2004 International Initiative Learning Exchange Seminar

**“Green light: Now begin, No more of that sittin’ in a slump
No more of that coulda, woulda, shoulda junk
No more of that waitin’ for the inspiration, innovation...
It’s time to expand..., It’s time to begin.”**

BLACKALICIOUS - Song: Green Light: Now Begin, Album: Blazing Arrow

The young people “explain their work as their passion. They see themselves as valuable in this community and know they have the power to make change happen.”

SUSAN JENNINGS - Oxford Hills, Maine, Quoted in *Creating Change*, The Innovation Center, www.theinnovationcenter.org/r_ic_matls.asp



THE 2004 INTERNATIONAL LEARNING EXCHANGE ON YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

In November 2004, the International Initiative for Children, Youth and Families conducted a Learning Exchange on Effective Resident Engagement and Leadership that focused on involving youth in changing their communities. The event culminated more than a year of planning by youth and adults and continued the Initiative's agenda of promoting strong communities through resident engagement.

The Learning Exchange had two parts:

1. Study tour

Participants spent two days (1-3 November) in one of eight U.S. communities with a strong track record of engaging youth and other residents to build strong neighborhoods. International youth and adults interacted with residents and leaders of the hosting community to share experiences, lessons learned and strategies for resident engagement.

2. Seminar

Following the study tour, international participants and representatives from the U.S. study tour communities gathered in Washington, D.C. to share their collective experiences of youth engagement. Held from 3 to 5 November, the seminar provided an opportunity for youth and adults to “dig deeply” into principles, goals, challenges and strategies. Together, they explored ways to involve youth in community change.

1. LEARNING EXCHANGE GOALS

The International Initiative identified the following goals for the 2004 Learning Exchange:

- Examine the roles youth play in community-based agendas to improve results and define ways to support their efforts;
- Listen to youth who have organized themselves to change a result or condition that mattered to them;
- Stimulate action between youth and adults to build upon the community change work in their countries;
- Provide a forum for youth to offer their perspectives—on these and other strategies to improve results—to public agency partners and policymakers;
- Create opportunities for youth to explore how they might adapt results-accountability, community decision-making, asset-mapping, and mobilization tools to support their change efforts.



In addition, youth planners identified results they wanted the Learning Exchange to accomplish:

- Learn what it is like to grow up in different nations and communities;
- Develop dialogue between youth and adults, including policymakers;
- Explore innovative and promising practices for engaging youth and young adults in community decision making;
- Go home with an action plan developed by each country to engage young adults in improving the outcomes of children, youth, families and communities.

2. THE PARTICIPANTS

More than 150 people from eight countries (Chile, Ireland, Israel, the Netherlands, Norway, Ukraine, United Kingdom, and United States) participated in the seminar. Study tour participants included 53 international delegates in addition to large numbers of community residents—dozens in some of the eight sites.

The Initiative encouraged participating countries to send teams of delegates including young adults, public agency partners, and policy makers. The goal was for each delegation to be composed of at least one-third youth members. For maximum exposure to a variety of communities and resident engagement approaches, members of each national delegation were encouraged to visit different study tour sites.

For the seminar, international delegates were joined by youth and adults from the study tour sites as well as other U.S. communities and organizations.

3. YOUTH IN CHARGE

From the beginning, the Initiative intended the Learning Exchange as an opportunity to put into practice its principles of resident engagement. The Initiative's planning committee met in September 2003 to map out a plan for the Exchange. An international planning committee consisting of both youth and adults was formed and took over many responsibilities for designing the event.

Designing the Learning Exchange

Youth and young adults were full partners in planning and conducting the Exchange. The international planning committee represented Israel, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and the United States, and the majority of its members were young people. In addition to committee meetings in

February and July 2004, the youth worked independently and as teams within their own countries. They created the foundation for the Exchange by identifying the principles for successful youth participation in community change and the tools described in this toolkit.

The youth planners worked to ensure that the Learning Exchange would be conducted in a way that would:

- incorporate the principles for successful youth engagement they had identified (responsibility, teamwork, ideas, communication and imagination); and
- encourage and facilitate full participation of young people.

The group developed guidelines for the seminar workshops and other sessions:

- Sessions should be no longer than 1.5 hours.
- Sessions should have youth and adult co-facilitators.
- Everyone should have an opportunity to speak. To allow for this, there should be a ten-minute time limit for each person participating in a session.
- Presentations should be interactive and use humor.

To provide an opportunity for youth to learn about growing up in different communities and nations, the young planners promoted an “international marketplace” as part of the seminar. They consistently advocated for hands-on learning and opportunities for youth to voice their opinions and ideas.

“We want the Learning Exchange to be different, to reflect the imagination and creativity of the youth—not just the same old kind of meetings.”

“We want to be able to communicate the understanding we gained when we return to our own countries.”

“Youth can be leaders, and demonstrating that can be a powerful experience.”

—Comments of youth members of the International Planning Committee

Making It Happen

While the international planning committee provided the vision for the Learning Exchange, much of the day-to-day planning was assigned to a U.S. study tour and seminar planning committee. The international planners and other youth continued their active roles throughout the Learning Exchange. Youth involvement was encouraged in the study tour communities, and many activities highlighted the role of young people in their neighborhoods. At the seminar, youth co-facilitated sessions, participated in panels, and led discussions. Throughout the program young people recited their poetry, expressed their perspectives, and described their experiences.

Youth members of the international planning committee were responsible for leading sessions that focused on the “toolkit” they had identified. They challenged themselves to conduct these sessions in ways that would demonstrate youth engagement principles.

4. THE STUDY TOUR

Goals

The study tour allowed international youth and adults to interact directly with residents who are working to make a difference in their communities. With small groups averaging seven international delegates per site, the study tour immersed youth and adults in firsthand exploration of communities at work. Through a range of activities that varied from site to site, delegates experienced firsthand the cultures and conditions of the communities and the strategies residents are using to improve their neighborhoods. All the participating communities put a priority on resident-driven decision making, and each tried to highlight strategies used to engage youth in these efforts,

The study tour offered an opportunity for international and local participants to find common ground. Participants shared their hopes, exchanged stories about their experiences, and compared their perspectives. Despite differences in culture, language, background and, of course, geographic origins, many found that they share more similarities than differences. We all want to live in strong communities where residents thrive.



The Sites

All but one of the communities visited by international study tour participants were part of the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Making Connections Initiative. The Making Connections study sites were neighborhoods located in the following cities:

- Boston, Massachusetts (The Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative)
- Denver, Colorado
- Hartford, Connecticut
- Indianapolis, Indiana
- Oakland, California (Lower San Antonio neighborhood)
- San Antonio, Texas (The West Side)
- San Diego, California (The Bronze Triangle)

In addition to the Making Connections neighborhoods, Atlanta, Georgia was a study tour site. Atlanta is a place where the Foundation has a unique, long-term commitment, presence and set of connections. In five inner-city Atlanta neighborhoods, a variety of efforts are underway to build family economic success using results-based planning and investment strategies.

WHAT IS "MAKING CONNECTIONS?"

The Annie E. Casey Foundation is a private charitable organization dedicated to helping build better futures for disadvantaged children in the United States. The primary mission of the Foundation is to foster public policies, human service reforms, and community supports that more effectively meet the needs of today's vulnerable children and families.

The Foundation's research has shown that children do better when their families are strong, and families do better when they live in communities that help them to succeed. Starting in 1999, the Foundation made a ten-year investment to improve the outcomes for families and children in tough or isolated neighborhoods.

With help and guidance from the Foundation, residents in each of the participating neighborhoods are sharing their experience, know-how and ideas about what works. Grassroots efforts are defining the neighborhoods and helping them rebuild and revitalize as vibrant communities. The goal is to help support and connect a range of formal and informal efforts that promote family success.

Efforts are concentrated around three premises that the Foundation believes are essential to successful outcomes for families:

1. Creating the opportunity to earn a decent living and build assets;
2. Building close ties with family, neighbors, kin, faith communities and civic groups;
3. Having reliable services close to home.

For more information on the Making Connections Initiative, visit:
www.aecf.org/initiatives/mc

CORE RESULTS FOR MAKING CONNECTIONS COMMUNITIES

The Annie E. Casey Foundation is using a set of six core results to help guide its work in the Making Connections sites. Each community works to define areas of common ground between the Foundation's core results and local priorities.

The following six result areas were distilled from a broad range of research. Likewise, research-based indicators are used to quantify each result and to monitor community progress.

1. Families have increased earnings and income.
2. Families have increased levels of financial assets.
3. Children are healthy and ready to succeed in school.
4. Families, youth and neighborhoods increase their civic participation.
5. Families and neighborhoods have strong informal supports and networks.
6. Families have access to quality services and supports that work for them.

For more information on the core results, indicators and the underlying research, visit: **www.aecf.org/initiatives/mc/core_results/index.htm**

5. THE SEMINAR

When they gathered for the seminar in Washington, D.C., participants experienced a larger forum with opportunities for a rich range of interaction, exposure, and discussion. The seminar was in many ways a “melting pot”—an international bazaar of ideas and strategies all focused on a single result: engaging youth as full participants in improving their communities and the world. The fast-paced program examined youth engagement issues and tools in a range of contexts and from many perspectives, including youth culture, media, ethnic and cultural diversity, results-based planning and accountability, community decision making, electoral politics, policymaking, youth organizational strategies, democratic principles, and others.

In addition to international delegates and residents of the U. S. study tour communities, other participants and presenters represented communities and organizations absorbed in the engagement of youth and other residents:

- The Annie E. Casey Foundation** *of Baltimore, Maryland*
- Catoosa County Family Collaborative** *of Ringgold, Georgia*
- Center for the Study of Social Policy** *of Washington, D.C.*
- Children and Youth Investment Trust Corporation** *of Washington, D.C.*
- Connexus, Inc.** *of Durango, Colorado*
- Extreme Exposure Media** *of Bridgewater, Virginia*
- Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative** *of Atlanta, Georgia*
- Latin American Youth Center** *of Washington, D.C.*
- Llano Grande Center for Research and Development** *of Hidalgo County, Texas*
- Local Investment Commission** *of Kansas City, Missouri*
- Perry School Community Services, Inc.** *of Washington, D.C.*
- Sol y Soul** *of Washington, D.C.*
- Stay Strong Foundation** *of New York, New York*
- The Valley, Inc.** *of New York, New York*
- Wisdom Works** *of Washington, D.C.*
- Youth Popular Culture Institute, Inc.** *of Clinton, Maryland*

SEMINAR HIGHLIGHTS

Undoubtedly, the seminar resonated differently for each participant. With the broad range of backgrounds and experiences represented, it is likely that no two individuals would describe the event in the same way or value specific sessions the same. The following provides some highlights.

Political Timing

In the world of politics, timing is everything. Convening in a hotel just blocks from the White House the day after the U.S. presidential election contributed to the unique experience of the seminar. A special, pre-seminar session took advantage of this opportunity to learn about the U.S. electoral process and to discuss the implications of the election. A distinguished panel offering their insights included Valerie Strauss, a veteran Washington Post reporter; John Willis, a professor of public affairs and former Maryland Secretary of State; and Westley Moore, a former White House intern and Rhode Scholar.

Setting the Stage

The opening session set the tone for the seminar with a thought-provoking performance by Spoken Resistance, a group of up-and-coming Washington performers and poets. A lively blend of poetry, monologues, music, and rap, the performance was both touchingly personal and socially astute. The performance was produced by Sol y Soul, a D.C.-based arts organization that acts as an incubator for established and emerging artists of conscience.

The International Marketplace

Each of the participating countries was invited to prepare a display or presentation describing the experience of growing up in their communities and country. Together, these displays allowed participants to learn about each other's lives. Exhibits reflected the creativity of participants, especially given space and equipment limitations. Interactive displays ruled with DVD and video presentations, music, collages, books and scrapbooks, photos, displays of clothing and other youth "artifacts."

Taking the Pulse of Participants

Throughout the seminar, young people from the Llano Grande Center for Research and Development videotaped proceedings and conducted on-the-spot interviews with participants. Llano Grande, a long term experiment in educational research and community development in south Texas, leads its community in a growing and successful array of strategies to improve opportunities for youth. Digital storytelling started as a way to capture the oral histories of community residents has expanded to documentation of seminars, conferences, and a range of public forums.

Study Tour Highlights

One goal of the seminar was to allow individuals to reflect on their experiences in the study tour visits. Brief presentations and discussion by representatives and visitors of each study tour community helped participants to compare strategies and tools for engaging residents and to synthesize the lessons learned and implications for youth engagement.



Question Time: Youth and Adult Perspectives.

Modeled on a British television show, the format of this session facilitated dialogue among youth and adults and contributed to greater mutual understanding. A panel of young adults and a panel of adult policymakers and public agency representatives responded to questions submitted by seminar participants. Questions focused on what it takes for youth and policymakers to work together to improve results, how youth can impact decision making that affects them, and the differences and common elements of youth and adult perspectives.

The International Toolbox: Strategies for Engaging Youth

Youth members of the international planning committee facilitated workshops on key engagement strategies: youth at the heart—no tokenism, synchronization of youth and adult agendas, recruiting and retaining youth, supporting youth organizational development, developing collaborative partnerships, and building support systems.

Skill-Building

A series of workshops helped participants hone the skills needed to impact their communities and society. Sessions focused on resident and youth facilitation skills, youth advocacy and community entrepreneurship, helping youth in foster care make successful transitions to adulthood, and using results to track progress toward stronger communities.

Documentary Screening and Discussion with the Producer

The film “Tutu and Franklin—A Journey Toward Peace,” documented the first encounter between Nobel Peace Prizewinner Archbishop Desmond Tutu and renowned historian Dr. John Hope Franklin and their work with youth from around the world to explore and overcome racism. After screening the documentary, seminar participants engaged in discussion with the producer, Renee Poussaint.

Inspiration

An inspiring panel including poet and columnist Reggie Hatchett and record producer Xavier Artis urged youth not to throw their dreams away. Author and public relations success Terrie Williams told her personal story.

Hip Hop as a Medium for Positive Youth Engagement

As the dominant culture for a growing number of young people around the world, hip hop offers opportunities to engage and empower youth. Dr. P. Thandi Harper focused on increasing the “hip hop culture competence” of adults who work with or on behalf of youth. A panel of hip hop artists and youth activists discussed hip hop culture as a positive force for change.

Personal Expression

Along with voicing their opinions and contributing to seminar discussions, youth had special time for making more personal or creative expressions. Guests from Washington’s Perry School Community Services and several youth delegates read their poetry. On the final evening, seminar participants relaxed with an evening of hip hop, music, and dance.

“The message should be that youth have power and make youth the policy makers, that is the mechanism for real change and true youth empowerment.”

LORNE FRANCIS - U.S.A.

“The reality is that no issue that is being addressed in any one of our countries is going to be fully understood unless we see it in the context of the issue being addressed globally.”

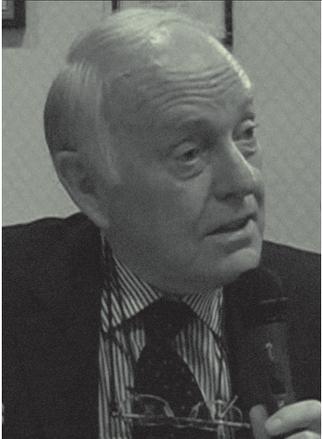
MICHAEL O' KENNEDY - Former Member of Parliament, Ireland

“This opportunity to come together was designed so that it's not just about youth learning about being involved in communities. It's about all of us—policy makers and advocates and practitioners and government officials—learning about the added value that we can all have when we take the time to engage youth and residents in this really critical work.”

PHYLLIS BRUNSON - International Initiative Board Member,
Center for the Study of Social Policy, U.S.A.

“It's about the inspiration within this room. It's about of the inspiration of this whole week. ...Please carry on with these organizations, carry on with what we started here.”

EMA EDEN - Youth Member of the planning committee, U.K.





RESOURCES AND CONTRIBUTORS

1. Acknowledgements

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Others directly contributed good ideas and sound suggestions; examples of youth engagement strategies in their communities and nations; and their experiences and lessons learned. Many thanks to:

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The 2004 International Learning Exchange Planners

The members of the international planning committee turned good ideas into reality. They provided the thoughts and action necessary to plan, coordinate and conduct this milestone event.

The leadership of the youth planners was essential for both the 2004 Learning Exchange and the toolkit. The principles and strategies they identified for engaging young people in decision-making provided the foundation for all the work that has followed. The youth members of the planning committee took initiative in both planning and conducting the Learning Exchange seminar by co-facilitating general sessions, leading concurrent sessions, and all the while sharing their views, ideas and leadership. Adult members of the team facilitated the planning process, but the young people were at the heart.

	Israel	The Netherlands	The United Kingdom	The United States
Youth	Biader Blal Nitzan Friedlander Meir Rozalis	Kashif Amin Ali Hutak	Jenny Cooke Ema Eden Karl Owen	Luciano Gonzalez Aaron Williams
Adults	Aliya Kedem Svi Salzman	Thea Meinema	Liam Cairns Nicky Porter	Phyllis Brunson Debra Delgado Susan Robison Gale Walker

2004 Learning Exchange Study Tour

U.S. Study Tour Coordinators, Audrey Jordan and Nonet Sykes of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, were instrumental in planning the study tour component of the Exchange and bridging the study tour with the seminar.

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The Initiative Board volunteered their scarce time and committed their vast energy to making the Learning Exchange a success.

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Phyllis Brunson, *U.S.A.*

Marit Bergum Hansen, *Norway*

Aliya Kedem, *Israel*

Harry Peppinck, *the Netherlands*

Gloria Maria Devia Sepulveda, *Chile*

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3. RESOURCES: ORGANIZATIONS, INITIATIVES AND WEBSITES (English language resources only)

The Annie E. Casey Foundation
www.aecf.org

At the Table
www.atthetable.org/

Center for the Study of Social Policy
www.cssp.org

Connexions, U.K.
www.connexions-direct.com/
www.connexions-southcentral.org/index.htm

Council of Europe, Directorate of Youth and Sport
coe.int
alldifferent-allequal.info/

Dream Now, Canada
www.dreamnow.ca/about/org.html

EAIKY, European Association for Leisure Time Institutions of Children and Youth. www.eaicy.org

Foroige: Empowering Youth, Enriching Communities, Ireland
www.foroige.ie

Forum for Youth Investment, Moving Ideas to Impact
www.forumforyouthinvestment.org

The Free Child Project, Connecting Young People and Social Change
www.freechild.org/

Global Youth Action Network and takingITglobal
www.TakingITGlobal.org

Hear by Right, The National Youth Agency, United Kingdom
www.nya.org.uk/hearbyright/home.asp?cid=180&cats=215

The Innovation Center for Community and Youth Development
www.theinnovationcenter.org/

International Initiative for Children, Youth and Families
www.int-initiative.org/

Investing in Children

www.iic-uk.org

The Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, Helping Youth in Foster Care Make Successful Transitions to Adulthood

www.jimcaseyouth.org/

Listen, Inc. (Local Initiative Support Training and Education Network)

www.lisn.org

Llano Grande Center for Research and Development

www.llanogrande.org

MYTOWN (Multicultural Youth Tour of What's Now)

www.mytowninc.org/

The National Youth Agency, United Kingdom

www.nya.org.uk/

Netherlands Youth Ambassadors

www.jongerenambassadeurs.nl

Sol y Soul, Arts for Social Change

www.solysoul.com/

Time Banking, Time Dollars

www.timebanks.org/

U.K. Youth Parliament

www.ukyouthparliament.org.uk/

Youth Popular Culture Institute

www.ypci.org

Youth on Board

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