

# Youth Leadership and Development

## Participant Workbook

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### The Development Team

#### Acknowledgements

#### WSTI Youth Leadership Council

<b>First Beat: What is youth leadership and development and why does it matter?</b>	<b>6</b>
Group Activity 1-1	6
Handout 1-1: “Youth Development, Involvement, and Leadership”	7
Group Activity 1-2	8
<b>Second Beat: What are the challenges to youth leadership and development?</b>	<b>9</b>
Group Activity 2-1	9
Group Activity 2-2 *	9
Handout 2-1: “Challenges Facing Many Youth”	10
Handout 2-2: “Adultism”*	12
Handout 2-3: “Common Myths and Stereotypes about People with Disabilities (just to name a FEW!)” *	14
Handout 2-3: “Involving Youth with Significant Disabilities---Strategies & Accommodations” *	15
<b>Third Beat: What are the principles of youth leadership and development?</b>	<b>18</b>
Group Activity 3-1 *	19
Handout 3-1: “The Spectrum of Attitudes” *	21
Group Activity 3-2	23
Group Activity 3-3	24
Handout 3-2: “Asset Mapping”	25
<b>Fourth Beat: How do we practically apply youth leadership and development?</b>	<b>26</b>
Group Activity 4-1 *	28
Handout 4-1: “Mapping Youth Participation” *	29
Handout 4-2: “Practical Application of Youth Leadership Activities” *	31

\*Activities and handouts adopted from the **Youth as Partners: A Trainer’s Guide** developed by Julie Sipchen as part of the Wisconsin Healthy & Ready to Work project.

## The Development Team

**Jonathan Mooney** is a dyslexic writer and activist who did not learn to read until he was 12 years old. He is a graduate of Brown University and holds an honors degree in English Literature. Jonathan is cofounder of Project Eye-To-Eye, a widely duplicated mentoring program for disabled students. He is also a winner of the prestigious Truman Scholarship for graduate studies in creative writing and education and was a national finalist for the Rhodes scholarship. With the publication of Learning Outside the Lines when he was 23, now in its eighth printing, a book that is part memoir and part alternative study skills, Jonathan has established himself as one of the foremost leaders in LD/ADHD, disabilities, and alternative education. In the spring of 2006, Henry Holt will publish Jonathan's second book, *The Short Bus Story*, a work of creative non-fiction.

**LeDerick R. Horne** spent most of his time in school believing he did not have much of a future. A severe learning disability (SLD) combined with low self-esteem led him to doubt he would be able to go to college or pursue a meaningful career. But, in the challenging academic environment at Middlesex County College, and with the support offered for his disability through Project Connections, a Learning Disabilities Resource Program at the college, LeDerick became an outstanding student, compiling a 3.75 grade point average. He transferred to New Jersey City University and graduated with honors from NJCU with a BA in Mathematics. Since graduation LeDerick has become the head of his own real estate investment company called Horne & Associates, LLC; he was appointed the Board Chair of Project Eye-To-Eye, a national nonprofit that provides mentoring programs for students with LD/ADHD; and he is recognized across the country as a speaker and advocate for people with disabilities. LeDerick also works with Communities of Practice, a National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) initiative, to help spread the importance of meaningful youth involvement in the systems that serve them.

## Acknowledgements

The **Youth as Partners: A Trainer's Guide** developed by Julie Sipchen and reviewed by Susan R. Allen as part of the Wisconsin Healthy & Ready to Work project was extremely valuable in putting together the elements of this training. The Wisconsin Statewide Transition Initiative (WSTI) and the development team would like to thank all parties involved with the creation of the Youth as Partners Guide for permitting us to adopt portions of their content for this training.

The symbol “\*” will be used throughout this training to indicate where content and handouts are being used from The Youth as Partners: A Trainer's Guide. To order a copy of the guide or to print a PDF version, please go to <http://www.waisman.wisc.edu:8000/cedd/cifr.html>.

The Wisconsin Healthy & Ready to Work project (HRTW) was a model demonstration project promoting and supporting the transition of adolescents with special health care need from pediatric to adult health care, employment, and independence.

The Waisman Center is dedicated to the advancement of knowledge about human development, developmental disabilities and neurodegenerative diseases. It is one of 9 national centers that encompass both a Mental Retardation/Developmental Disabilities Research Center designated by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, and a University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDD) designated by the Administration on Developmental Disabilities.

The National Communities of Practice provided the inspiration through the networking made available with the Pennsylvania Youth Leadership Network (YLN).

The Wisconsin Statewide Transition Initiative (WSTI), a grant funded project through the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, provided the structure to present the information in this guide on a statewide level. WSTI also promoted youth development by establishing the WSTI Youth Advisory Board. A special thanks to WSTI staff and board members for support of this important endeavor.

## WSTI Youth Leadership Council



The WSTI Youth Advisory Board, established in 2006, will model meaningful youth leadership and advise WSTI on meaningful youth involvement. Youth Advisory Board members will be active in the WSTI project at a local, state and national level. The purpose of the board is to promote youth empowerment through self-advocacy.

### Overview of Training

The Youth Leadership and Development Training for Wisconsin was designed to encourage the professionals who work with youth, with or without disabilities, to support youth in leadership and development activities. The concept of “Nothing About Us, Without Us” is evident throughout this training. The training is designed as a three-hour work session. It is divided into four sections, or *Beats*, which focus on different areas of youth leadership and development. The four Beats are as follows:



**First Beat:**

What is youth leadership and development and why does it matter?



**Second Beat:**

What are the challenges to youth leadership and development and how do we overcome them?



**Third Beat:**

What are the principles of youth leadership and development?



**Fourth Beat:**

How do we practically apply youth leadership and development?

It is important to note that three hours is not a sufficient amount of time to fully discuss the myriad of issues associated with youth leadership and development; however, by the end of this training you should have a working knowledge of youth leadership and development so you may begin to implement it into the ways you service youth.



# First Beat

What is youth leadership and development and why does it matter?

Group Activity 1-1  
Youth Leadership and Development

**What does youth leadership and development mean to you?**

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## Youth Development, Involvement, and Leadership

Research shows that for youth with disabilities to be fully included and empowered as equal members of society, social services systems, including schools, must develop the academic and non-academic capacities of youth with disabilities to be meaningfully involved in their lives, education and communities. The key to empowering youth with disabilities is to develop a multi-faceted, inter-agency and inter-disciplinary approach to developing a youth's skills, creating opportunity for meaningful involvement and ultimately empowering youth with disabilities with leadership opportunities within institutions and their communities.

**Youth leadership** is defined as empowering youth with meaningful opportunities to effect change within their community and within any institutions or systems that concern them. Youth leadership requires skill development in the form of communication, advocacy, and awareness. It also requires that institutions make a sustained commitment to creating meaningful leadership opportunities for youth.

**Youth development** is a term used to broadly categorize activities, approaches, and programs that seek to build the capacity of youth with disabilities to engage in leadership activities. Youth development is both an academic and non-academic approach that takes into account the mental and physical well being of the whole youth. Youth development initiatives seek to provide youth with disabilities concrete skills to ensure they can participate in leadership activities.

**Youth involvement** is an essential component and strategy in the overall development of youth with disabilities. Youth involvement is defined as creating meaningful opportunities for youth with disabilities to participate in their communities and any institutions that are charged with their well-being. It is important to note that all involvement is not necessarily *meaningful* youth involvement. Meaningful youth involvement is defined as youth with disabilities having true responsibility and shared decision-making in events that affect their lives. Meaningful involvement can range from self-directed IEPs to youth representation on important organizations or governing bodies.

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## Group Activity 1-2

### Powerlessness

Youth with disabilities, and youth in general, often feel that they do not have a say in many of the decisions and plans that directly impact their lives.

Break into pairs and talk about a time in your own life when you felt as if you were powerless and did not have a voice in a decision that impacted your life.

**How did it feel to not have a voice in a decision that impacted your life?**

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**What could have been done to give you a meaningful voice in that decision?**

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Do you think that institutions and individuals benefit from allowing the people who will be most impacted to have a voice in the decisions that will shape their lives?

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In Kathleen Cushman's book Sent to the Principal: Students Talk About Making High Schools Better, she reflects on giving youth a voice in their education by stating: "Fortunately what students ask from us is not beyond our power to provide. 'If you don't respect us, we won't collaborate with you' is a message with far deeper meaning than we often give it. It can sound merely sassy, or it can help us reach deeply into what we all require in order to feel members of a community. Are students citizens...or subjects?"



## Second Beat

What are the challenges to youth leadership and development and how do we overcome them?

### Challenges

Before we can begin developing the skills youth need to become leaders or before we place youth in leadership positions, it is important that we begin talking about the challenges that may prevent or hinder our youth leadership and development activities.

### Group Activity 2-1

Imagine a youth and the challenges he/she may face.

Let's hear about your youth and some of the challenges you think may affect them.

- Tell us a little about the youth you work with.
- What are some of the challenges you came up with?

Many of the challenges facing youth leadership and development are based on assumptions held by adults working with youth, the youth's family members, or the youth themselves.

### Group Activity 2-2

Another Word Association \*

## Challenges Facing Many Youth

Here are some of the challenges that may prevent or hinder youth leadership and development activities:

### I. Adult Beliefs and Behavior \*

- General stereotypes about young people: lazy, uneducated, not intelligent, angry, self-absorbed, and silly.
- Young people being left out of decisions being made at home, in the classroom, on school boards, in community agencies, city councils, congressional chambers, etc. Often, those decisions directly affect young people!
- Adults often fail to support young people's development by supporting opportunities for them to learn through experience. Community-based learning often provides experiential learning for students, where they put class work into practice.
- Adults often do not ask young people to reflect on the important connections between people, community institutions, and themselves. What does it mean to youth to be members of their neighborhoods, their faith communities, or their schools?
- The use of traditional methods of teaching where a teacher or expert lectures (usually standing) to a classroom of students (usually sitting). We recognize that at times large enrollment or class set-up necessitates the lecture approach; however, there are always other options that can help the lecturer become what some call the "guide on the side" rather than the "sage on the stage" - including rotating presenters in front of the class, requesting a change in rooms to facilitate smaller group discussions, providing incentives for students to communicate directly with the lecturer and with each other, etc.
- Although it may not be said openly, there are times when adults do not empower youth because these adults are afraid of losing power and/or control. If youth are empowered to the point of self-sufficiency, what does that mean for the job security and/or social status of the adults charged with overseeing or instructing them?

### II. Disability Stereotypes and the Medical Model of Disability

- Throughout history people with disabilities have been seen as helpless, sick, bad, having a lack of focus, etc.
- Parents sometimes think their children need to be so protected that they do not allow their children to participate in experiences that are necessary for their growth.

- Inherent in the medical model of disability is the belief that disability should be cured or fixed, not embraced, empowered and accepted.

### III. System Limitations and/or Logistics

- **Scheduling** - Often youth are not available at the same time as adults for board meetings, conference calls or other leadership activities. Due to the fact that most adults in leadership roles work during the same time that youth are at school, it often takes creative scheduling to meaningfully include youth.
- **Transportation** – Due to a youth’s age and/or the way his/her disability might impair his/her mobility, it is always important to consider the transportation needs associated with leadership activities.
- **Accommodations** – Much like transportation, in order for a youth to participate in a leadership activity to the best of his/her ability, there may be a need to provide accommodations. The type of accommodations will depend entirely on the needs of the youth.

### IV. Learned Helplessness

Learned helplessness is a well-established principle in psychology, a description of the effect of inescapable punishment (such as electrical shock) on animal (and by extension, human) behavior. Learned helplessness may also occur in everyday situations where continued failure may inhibit somebody from experiencing anything in the future, leading to many forms of depression. The theory was developed by Martin Seligman and S.F. Meir through experiments going back to 1965.

Learned helplessness can only be unlearned by removing the other barriers that prevent or hinder a youth’s participation in leadership activities.

## Adultism \*

“Adultism” is a new name for a not-so-new set of behaviors. Barry Checkoway describes these behaviors this way: “Except for prisoners and a few other institutionalized groups, young people’s lives are more controlled than those of any other group in society. In addition, adults may reserve the right to punish, threaten, hit, take away ‘privileges,’ and ostracize young people when they consider it beneficial in controlling them or ‘disciplining’ them. If this were a description of the way a group of adults were treated, society would quickly recognize it as a form of oppression.”<sup>1</sup>

If you have chosen to work with youth as partners, it’s unlikely that you intentionally engage in adultism. But you may not be aware of it. Adults generally do not realize that their behavior can be seen as oppressive. If this is how we were treated as youth, however, the process may have become a set of internalized patterns of association. This way of thinking and acting becomes ingrained without us realizing it.

### “What can I do to defeat adultism?”

Adultism, like sexism, racism, and ageism, marginalizes groups of people and diminishes an individual’s capacity to reach her or his full potential. None of us willingly wants to be guilty of such unfair discrimination against youth. Equally important is the fact that youth can contribute to our communities and our world in important ways. We just can’t afford adultism if it means that the potential contributions of youth will be lost as a result.

In their article, “Adultism is an ‘Ism’ Too,” Candice Swiderski and Stacey Palma share some recommendations to help you purge adultism from your behavior.<sup>2</sup>

#### 1. **Treat young people as partners rather than clients.**

When planning meetings, ask for their input on times, places and agendas. Be flexible and make sure that their concerns are being addressed.

#### 2. **Be willing to share power.**

Allow youth to facilitate or co-facilitate meetings. Sharing power also means sharing responsibility. Let youth share in the meeting set up, activity implementation, logistics, correspondence, etc.

#### 3. **Adults managing an organization or program should share all budgets with teens.**

This is a great learning experience for the teens and it holds the youth and the adults accountable for equitable spending. When budgets and spending choices are shared by the adult allies and youth leaders, everybody wins - the youth learn important budgeting skills and decision-making and the adults learn about what the youth identify as budget priorities.

#### 4. **Be aware of the need for flexible schedules.**

For example, schedule meetings during non-school hours. This goes for conference calls and in-person meetings and activities. There’s no “room” for compromise on this issue. Youth just cannot attend when they should be in school. Consult the school calendar to find days when the youth are not in school.

5. **Adults interested in joining a program must be interviewed by teens.**

This is another example of sharing leadership and responsibility. When youth are involved in the selection process, even if it is to screen volunteers, they learn about the process and they also have a “buy-in” to the proposed candidates. Simply allowing youth to help come up with interview questions and job requirements, and to have a part in the interviews, will help to “sell” the candidate to the rest of the group.

Additionally, the proposed candidate will see, by example, how committed you are to youth leadership and partnership with youth. You are playing the role of an ally.

6. **Youth do not want to be the passive recipients of services or viewed as people who need to be fixed.**

Create opportunities that allow youth to solve problems and bring about change in their community. Help to draw out the gifts and strengths of each person and build on them.

7. **Eliminate patronizing and passive/aggressive language from conversations with teens.**

This may take practice. Throughout your interactions with youth, check in with yourself periodically and think about your language. Don't be overly critical or use terms like “children,” or “boys and girls,” when addressing teens. Maybe even find a trusted youth leader who you can work with - and who will create a way to signal you when your language or behavior may be offensive. Of course, you can also do the same with that youth leader when youth language and/or behavior may not be respectful to adult allies. Have periodic check-ins with the youth to make sure language is understandable and appropriate.

8. **Establish emotionally safe environments for teens by sharing some information about you and allowing youth to have fun.**

Most of the time, you will know a lot more about the youth you work with than they will know about you. It's helpful to build the trust needed to work well together if you can share a bit about yourself with them. This can be about your hobbies and life outside of work or even a little something about your personal experiences as a younger person, especially if you have had experiences they can particularly relate to or learn from.

9. **Look beyond appearances.**

Youth have always had some creative ways of expressing themselves. Sometimes it's very different from what we would choose for ourselves or for our own kids (piercing, tattoos, revealing clothes, etc.). It's important to keep reminding yourself that this is just that - kids expressing themselves. This should not hinder your relationship. There may be times when you need to have a discussion about appropriate dress and appearance for the sake of public meetings or presentations, but youth are still youth first.

<sup>1</sup> Checkoway, B. (1996). *Adults as Allies*. Ann Arbor, MI: W.K. Kellogg Foundation, University of Michigan School of Social Work.

<sup>2</sup> Swiderski, C., & Palma, S. (1999). “Adulthood is an “ism” too”. *The Partnership Press*. Retrieved April 14, 2005 from <http://www.ctassets.org/fall1999/voice.cfm>

## Common Myths and Stereotypes about People with Disabilities (just to name a FEW!)

**MYTH:** A person with a disability is sick, or has something wrong with them.

**FACT:** Disability is a natural part of the human experience, and it is not the same as being sick. Individuals with disabilities have varying degrees of need, and are sometimes sick, just as people without disabilities are sometimes sick. Mistaking a disability for sickness not only fails to respond to a person's needs, it perpetuates a negative stereotype and an assumption that the person can and should be cured.

**MYTH:** People with disabilities have a poor quality of life.

**FACT:** This is one of the most common and damaging stereotypes, because it discourages social interactions and the development of mature relationships. People with disabilities have needs just like those who do not have disabilities, and they strive for a high degree of quality of life, as do other individuals. Society handicaps individuals by building inaccessible schools, theaters, homes, buses, etc. The attitude that disability is a bad thing and that disability means a poor quality of life is often viewed as more disabling than the disability itself.

**MYTH:** People with disabilities are inspirational, brave, and courageous for living successfully with their disability.

**FACT:** A person with a disability is simply carrying out normal activities of living when they drive to work, go shopping, pay their bills, or compete in athletic events. Access to community-based, long-term service (such as attendant care, access to buildings, public transportation, sidewalks, etc.) to quality health care, and to necessary equipment enables them to carry on the same as people without disabilities.

**MYTH:** People with disabilities always need expensive and high-tech assistive devices or services.

**FACT:** Simple inexpensive devices are often the most critical in helping people with a disability live independently. Assistive devices can be as affordable as an eating utensil or Velcro strap.

**MYTH:** People with severe disabilities need to live in nursing homes or rehabilitation hospitals or under constant supervision so that they do not hurt themselves.

**FACT:** Unfortunately, this myth has created a system of long-term care in our nation that relies on institutions such as nursing homes and other facilities. Even those with the most severe disabilities could live in their own home given adequate community-based services, and at the very least, they should be given that choice.

## Involving Youth with “Significant Disabilities” – Strategies & Accommodations

This list is not exhaustive; it is merely to get folks started in thinking about ways that all youth can be included in activities and leadership opportunities. Add your own experiences and ideas to this list.

First, what are “Significant Disabilities”? For our purposes, this refers to youth who are living with any disability or special health care need that significantly inhibits their ability to communicate, to move, or to understand in traditional ways. Also, we include any youth who has limitations on social interactions or on other activities with young people because of their chronic health condition or other “invisible” disability.

- **Inhibited Communication:** This can include youth with cerebral palsy, youth who are Deaf and youth who have other physical barriers to “normal” speech and written communication.  
These youth may use alternative ways to communicate: sign language, computer software and other technology, white or communication boards, interpreters, captioning devices, or other such devices.
- **Inhibited Mobility:** This can include youth with any kind of disability or special health care needs that may require additional equipment (e.g. a wheelchair, walker, cane, dog) or assistance. This includes a person who is visually impaired, a person with limited control over their motor skills, etc.
- **Inhibited Understanding:** This can include youth with varying degrees of cognitive or developmental disabilities, youth for whom spoken or written English is not their first language, youth who may not be familiar with the subject matter you are discussing and others.

### Why include youth with “significant disabilities”?

Why not? Let’s not forget that each of us brings a unique perspective and “flavor” to a conversation or activity. We should always strive to have as many perspectives included in our activities as we can, making a special effort to include those who are traditionally NOT included.

Things to think about when involving youth with significant disabilities.

- **Where you meet**  
-Is the place where you are meeting wheelchair accessible? Do not wait until a participant who uses a wheelchair wants to come and requests it. Sometimes, just knowing the activity is planned for a location that is traditionally inaccessible will prevent people (especially youth) from asking for an accommodation. Where you choose to have your activity says as much about your intent to include as anything. Are buildings, parking areas, workspaces, and communication systems accessible to persons with disabilities? Can those who do not transport

themselves get there via public transportation or ride share? Accessible facilities and services are more useful for everybody.

- **When you meet**

- The day and time you meet should also be considered. Is this a time when youth are in school? If so, you will want to reconsider. It is not fair to expect or request students to take time off school to attend a routine meeting when you are getting paid to be there. In addition to sensitivity to the schedules of students, meeting length should also be considered. Some youth with disabilities have trouble with maintaining stamina and strength for long meetings. Keep meetings short and to the point.

- If you are meeting during or through a mealtime, make sure you feed attendees. If you are eating, make sure youth who need assistance to eat or drink have what they need – their attendants, a straw, a special meal.

- **How you meet**

- If you are convening a meeting with youth for youth, it is important NOT to have parents in the meeting room. However, when you include youth with health care needs or concerns, you should have easy access to someone who is familiar with and can tend to their health care needs. This can be administering medicine, catheterizing, feeding (if necessary), etc.

- Parents (or other assistants) should be nearby and/or have a method for communicating with the youth in a way that respects independence, but does not challenge health.

**It's all in the details—Be aware of general meeting behaviors that can be a problem for some people who have disabilities or special health care needs.**

This does not mean you cannot employ any of these methods, but you should be aware of the need to alter or modify.

- **Visual Cues:** The following may be troublesome for people who have limited eyesight and limited reading skills: name tags & table tents, flip charts, using raised hands to indicate interest.

- **Language:** When working with any youth, we must be careful about the language we use. Stay away from jargon and acronyms, using simple and clear words and phrases. Try to avoid using metaphors or other abstract language.

- **Space:** Use a meeting room that has plenty of space to move around. Youth, like many adults, get restless after a long time of sitting around. It will likely enhance their participation and retention if they can walk or move around while they are listening. If this option is not available, youth may feel like they have to leave the room to stretch their legs or get some air, and the group will lose some valuable contributions. This is especially important when including youth who have Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) or ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) and others with limited attention spans or who have trouble focusing without preoccupation. This is also an issue for youth who use wheelchairs, as they have to be able to move in and around the room.

- **Technology:** Using PowerPoint, overheads, videos, etc. can be problematic for those with visual limitations, cognitive disabilities, sensory integration issues, and more. Make sure that there are translations available—on disk, on audiotape—so those who cannot access the information at the meeting can do so before or after.
- **Others:** Always ask ALL participants, not just those you know have health care needs or disabilities, if they have needs, accommodations or other special concerns for the meeting.

You may find that:

- Someone coming cannot be in the room with fragrances (participants should be asked to refrain from wearing perfume or scented lotion)
- That someone is allergic to latex (cancel that balloon order!)
- There are dietary issues to consider when ordering lunch or any other food for the meeting

**-Attitude:** Be patient, talk directly to the person, not to the helper, be open to trying new ideas and suggestions, admit mistakes, and have fun



## Third Beat

# What are the principles of youth leadership and development?

### The Three Principles

This section states the three principles of youth leadership and development. It is difficult to explore all of the components involved in youth leadership and development. But we can look at the three most relevant areas needed to successfully work with youth with disabilities. They are:

- 1. Partnership with Youth**
- 2. Vision**
- 3. Asset Based Approach**

### Principle One: Partnership with Youth \*

In a partnership, the youth and adults share full and equal participation in group planning, leadership, and the implementation of activities. The result is youth who are more skilled and prepared for adult roles and future leadership positions. Equally important is that the adults and the organizations benefit from the priceless input of youth. Engaging youth and preparing them to be the best of leaders is our responsibility as adults.

Here are some reasons why partnership with youth is important:

- Young people want to help; they develop a sense of worth by helping others.
- Youth who see themselves as competent develop more self-confidence.
- When youth are allowed to take an active part in leadership roles within a group, they receive practical training for valuable leadership skills. Many youth learn best when they can learn by doing.
- When youth are engaged in activities or projects, the quality of the programs and the product is much better and more reflective of what youth value.
- When adults accept youth as partners, mutual respect and trust for one another will be enhanced. Adults learn to value youth and utilize their potential to help institutions and communities.
- Youth who are involved in their communities gain appreciation for their efforts, and may in turn feel more committed to promoting the well-being of those communities.

## Group Activity 3-1

### Write a letter \*

For this activity we would like you to play out a scenario in your mind.

**Sally is involved in a community project. She has skills in writing letters. She volunteers to write a letter to the Mayor asking for permission to do the group project. It's time for the letter to be written. What do you say or do?**

We are going to think about carrying out this activity in several different ways to illustrate William Lofquist's (1989) <sup>1</sup> "Spectrum of Attitudes" that highlights the three approaches adults can take toward working with young people, namely:

- 1) Youth as Objects
- 2) Youth as Recipients, and
- 3) Youth as Partners.

#### **Youth as Objects approach:**

Have Sally sit down and tell her exactly what she should write. "I'll tell you what to write because I've done this before and I know the Mayor, so just do what I say. I know more about what we want from the Mayor than you do. And I know what the Mayor will respond to."

#### **Youth as Recipients approach:**

"I could write this letter, but it will be a good learning experience for you to write a letter to the Mayor. If I help you do it this time, you'll know how to do it next time."

#### **Youth as Partners approach:**

"What do you think should go into the letter? What do you want the Mayor to do? If you don't know the administrative procedure that the Mayor needs to follow, I could help you find that out. How else can I be helpful to you?"

<sup>1</sup> Lofquist, W.L. (Fall, 1989). "The Spectrum of Attitudes: Building a Theory of Youth Development." New Designs for Youth Development. Tucson, AZ: Associates for Youth Development, Inc.

## The Spectrum of Attitudes \*

If we are going to work in true partnership with young people, we need to work differently than most adults did when they worked with us as youth. We need to look at where our attitudes toward partnership with young people came from, what attitudes underlie our actions and think about how that needs to change or stay the same. The attitudes that adults hold toward young people often determine the degree to which they involve them as significant partners in decision making.

William Lofquist (1989) <sup>1</sup> has developed and popularized a “Spectrum of Attitudes” that highlights the three different approaches adults take toward dealing with young people, namely: Youth as Objects, Youth as Recipients, and Youth as Partners.

- **Youth As Objects**

In this approach, the attitude is that young people have little to contribute. Adults may truly believe that they need to protect young people from ‘suffering’ from their mistakes. However, we know that involvement in meaningful roles is essential to positive growth and development of successful young adults. The “youth as objects” approach means that things are being done to and for youth.

**Example:** The adult decides on the fundraiser and tells the youth how to sell the magazines to raise funds.

- **Youth As Recipients**

In this approach, the attitude is that young people need to be guided through their participation in adult society. Adults “allowing” young people to take part in the decision-making process characterize this attitude. The adults believe the experience will be “good for them” and an excellent opportunity for the youth to practice for when they become “real people.”

Consequently, responsibilities and tasks often delegated to young people are either trivial (it won’t matter if they mess up) or those which adults don’t want to do. The result? Youth realize that their role remains trivial and that adults are retaining the position of authority and much of the responsibility.

The “youth as recipients” approach is often confusing. Many adults think they have gotten youth involved or are partners with youth when the youth are really recipients. Services are provided for them and decisions are made for them. Again, they are having things done to and for them, not with and by them.

**Example:** Youth are delegated responsibilities such as cleaning up after an event or handing out flyers instead of co-facilitating the event and designing flyers.

- **Youth As Partners** (or Youth as Resources, as Lofquist originally described this approach)

In this approach, the attitude is that the contributions of young people are welcomed and valued. Adults feel that young people are critical to the success of a program. Adults who view young people as partners are comfortable working with groups that have equal members of youth and adults. As full partners, both youth and adults bring strengths to the table and work in an equitable relationship.

**Example:** The adult asks questions such as “What do you think?” “How should we do this?” The answers are seriously discussed and jointly decided.

<sup>1</sup> Lofquist, W.L. (Fall, 1989). “The Spectrum of Attitudes: Building a Theory of Youth Development.” New Designs for Youth Development. Tucson, AZ: Associates for Youth Development, Inc.

## Principle Two: Vision

One of the major goals of all youth leadership activities is to give youth a meaningful role in the systems that affect them, but it is equally important that this role has meaning. For youth to commit to leadership and development activities it is important to show them the ways that those activities connect to the larger vision they have for their lives. This vision might include postsecondary placement in a college or vocational training program; pursuing a particular track of employment; or just finishing high school with good grades. If we are able to connect a youth's vision for his/her future to his/her participation in a leadership and development activity, the youth will have a much more rewarding experience which will be of benefit to all parties involved.

### **Extracting and Expanding**

Some youth have a very clear vision of their future and they have no problem setting the long and short-term transition goals that are necessary to realize that vision. But for many youth, and particularly for many youth with disabilities, it is difficult to develop a clear vision for their future. "Extracting and Expanding" is one technique that can help clarify a youth's vision for his/her future based on that youth's interest. Below are two examples of how "Extracting and Expanding" can be used to clarify a youth's vision for the future even when that youth is providing very "vague" responses.

#### Example 1

**Adult Question:** What do you want to be when you grow up?

**Youth Answer:** I want to be in the NBA.

**Extracting and Expanding:** There are a variety of professions associated with professional and/or amateur sports that might be of interest to this youth. Apart from being a professional player, the youth might be interested in a career in physical therapy, facility maintenance, coaching, sports advertising, management, etc. If the youth is interested in any of these disciplines, a good leadership and development activity for this youth could be to participate on his/her county's parks and recreation advisory board or helping develop his/her school's physical education curriculum.

#### Example 2

**Adult Question:** What do you like to do?

**Youth Answer:** Play video games.

**Extracting and Expanding:** There are a variety of professions associated with the video game and simulation industry that might be of interest to this youth. Apart from playing video games, the youth might be interested in a career in graphic/digital design, game development, interface development, software engineering, etc. If the youth is interested in any of these disciplines, a good leadership and development activity for this youth could be to participate in the development of his/her school's website or helping to develop his/her school's art or computer education curriculum.

## Group Activity 3-2

### The Big Picture

The Big Picture is an activity that can help youth create a vision for their future. It is designed to create a concrete picture of a youth's plans for housing, employment, recreation, and socializing. With a little creativity the images that come from this activity can be used to create short and long-term transition goals as well as to serve as an indicator of what leadership and development activities will be best suited for each youth.

It is best to do this activity with poster paper and different colored markers, but it can be done with a standard sheet of paper and pencils. It is important to emphasize that drawing ability is not important and stick figures are perfectly acceptable. Instead of just saying "in the future," it may also be necessary to ask the youth to think about a particular time period for this activity such as in "after high school" or "when you are 25 years old."

1. Divide a sheet of paper into four boxes.
2. In the first box draw a picture of where you would like to live in the future.
3. In the second box draw a picture of what you would like to do for work in the future.
4. In the third box draw a picture of what you would like to do for fun in the future.
5. In the fourth box draw a picture of the people you would like to hang out with in the future.

You may also want to ask the youth to draw a picture of the change he/she would like to see in his/her family, school, or community. This picture could be placed in the middle of the page. This part of the activity could help zero in on an advocacy activity the youth might be interested in undertaking.

Once all the pictures have been drawn, ask the youth to explain what each picture is and why he/she drew it as a response to the questions.

### Principle Three: Asset-Based Approach

The word "disability" is made of ten letters. When working with youth that have a disability we tend to focus all our attention on the first three letters of the word that represents what a youth cannot do. If we are interested in empowering young people who have disabilities, then the majority of our efforts must focus on that 70% of the word "disability" which represents what a young person is capable of achieving. Youth leadership and development is pointless if we are operating from a deficit model of disability. Instead of looking at what is wrong with youth, we must adopt an asset-based approach to working with youth that have disabilities.

## Group Activity 3-3

### Asset Mapping

Asset Mapping is a way to identify the strengths and resources that youth will have at their disposal as leaders. It is also an excellent way to shift the focus away from what a youth may struggle with and place greater attention on what that youth has in his/her favor.

Thinking of a youth you are currently working with, answer the following questions:

- 1. What are the youth's gifts of the mind?**  
Example: Good listening skills, creativity, analytical, etc.
- 2. What are the youth's gifts of the heart?**  
Example: Compassion, empathy, tolerance, etc.
- 3. What are the youth's gifts of the hand?**  
Example: Practical skills—building, driving, typing, etc.
- 4. What are the youth's areas of interest?**  
Example: Athletics, computers, art, etc.
- 5. What is the youth passionate about?**  
Example: Helping others, racing cars, robotics, etc.
- 6. What are some of the youth's most powerful relationships?**  
Example: A relationship with a sibling, community member, coach, etc.

## Asset Mapping

**1. What are the youth's gifts of the mind?**

Example: Good listening skills, creativity, analytical, etc.

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**2. What are the youth's gifts of the heart?**

Example: Compassion, empathy, tolerance, etc.

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**3. What are the youth's gifts of the hand?**

Example: Practical skills like building, driving, typing, etc.

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**4. What are the youth's areas of interest?**

Example: Athletics, computers, art, etc.

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**5. What is the youth passionate about?**

Example: Helping others, racing cars, robotics, etc.

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**6. What are some of the youth's most powerful relationships?**

Example: A relationship with a sibling, community member, coach, etc.

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## Fourth Beat

### How do we practically apply youth leadership and development?

In this section we will look at what meaningful involvement in leadership activities truly is and we will look at practical ways that youth can act as leaders.

#### Meaningful Involvement vs. Tokenism \*

The Ladder of Participation<sup>1</sup>, developed by Roger Hart, describes various levels of youth participation with a steady progression to meaningful shared decision-making between adults and youth. While not every project can be youth-led, no projects about youth should be non-participatory and must work toward youth leadership.

#### Non-Participation - the Bottom of Hart's Ladder

##### Manipulation

This happens when adults use youth to support causes and pretend that they inspire the causes, while in actual fact the youth have no understanding of the issues and hence do not understand their actions. This is one form of manipulation. Another form is to consult young people but not provide them with any feedback at all, so they don't know how or if their ideas were used.

Example: A large government agency is criticized for not involving youth in their youth initiatives. The agency creates a "youth council" and uses the youth on the council to provide feedback on agency plans and ideas. The agency also uses the creation of the "youth council" as an opportunity to tout their progressiveness. The youth have no say about how or when they meet, or even if they meet. The agency is always going to the youth and the youth need to respond to the agency. The youth are not given the opportunity to lead or initiate projects or activities. The products and reports that are written from the ideas and suggestions of the youth are credited to the agency. While the youth are not paid to participate, all the adults work on these activities as part of their paying jobs.

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from: Hart, R. (1992). Children's Participation: from Tokenism to Citizenship. Innocenti Essays No.4 New York: UNICEF

## **Decoration**

This happens when young people are used to help or “bolster” a cause in a relatively indirect way, although adults do not pretend that the cause is inspired by youth. The youth have little idea about what the cause is all about and no say in the organizing of the event. The youth may be asked to perform in some way but since they have no real buy-in, they attend for the participation “perks” rather than for the cause.

Example: A mayor announces the opening of a new youth recreation center. The center was designed and paid for by city workers and city funds. Youth were not consulted or otherwise involved in deciding what equipment will be at the center or what classes or activities may be offered. The Mayor invites youth to the press conference and asks them to play on the new equipment and to mill around him at the podium. They are a decoration at a photo opportunity.

## **Tokenism**

This happens when young people appear to be given a voice, but in fact have little or no choice about what they do or how they participate. Commonly, adults justify this by believing the projects are in the best interests of youth.

Example: An organization of adults is interested in expanding their current activities to include youth. They invite a youth to sit on their Board of Directors with the idea that this youth can help them create youth opportunities. Because the youth is under 18, she is not allowed to vote on organizational business (an organizational rule), but she can contribute to discussions. She is also not in a position to propose new business to the group. So she is invited to meetings (at pre-set times) and is able to comment on ideas brought up by the others on the board. Unless there is clear evidence that her comments become part of a real interchange and have an effect on the ideas, she is a token.

## **True Participation - the Top of Hart’s Ladder**

The next three rungs of the ladder are: assigned but informed, consulted and informed, and adult-initiated, shared decisions with young people. These three are pretty self-explanatory. As you move up the ladder, youth are being involved in more and more complex ways and gradually assume more of a decision-making role.

Rungs seven and eight of the ladder are: youth-initiated and directed, and youth-initiated, shared decisions with adults.

There is some debate regarding which of these two levels of participation is most meaningful. Some believe that youth are more empowered when adults are not part of the decision-making, but are around to provide support. Others believe that youth and adults sharing the decision-making leads to more meaningful participation and opportunities for youth and adults to learn from each other. Both of these perspectives are valuable. In any case, it’s important to think about what’s right for your group.

## **Group Activity 4-1 \***

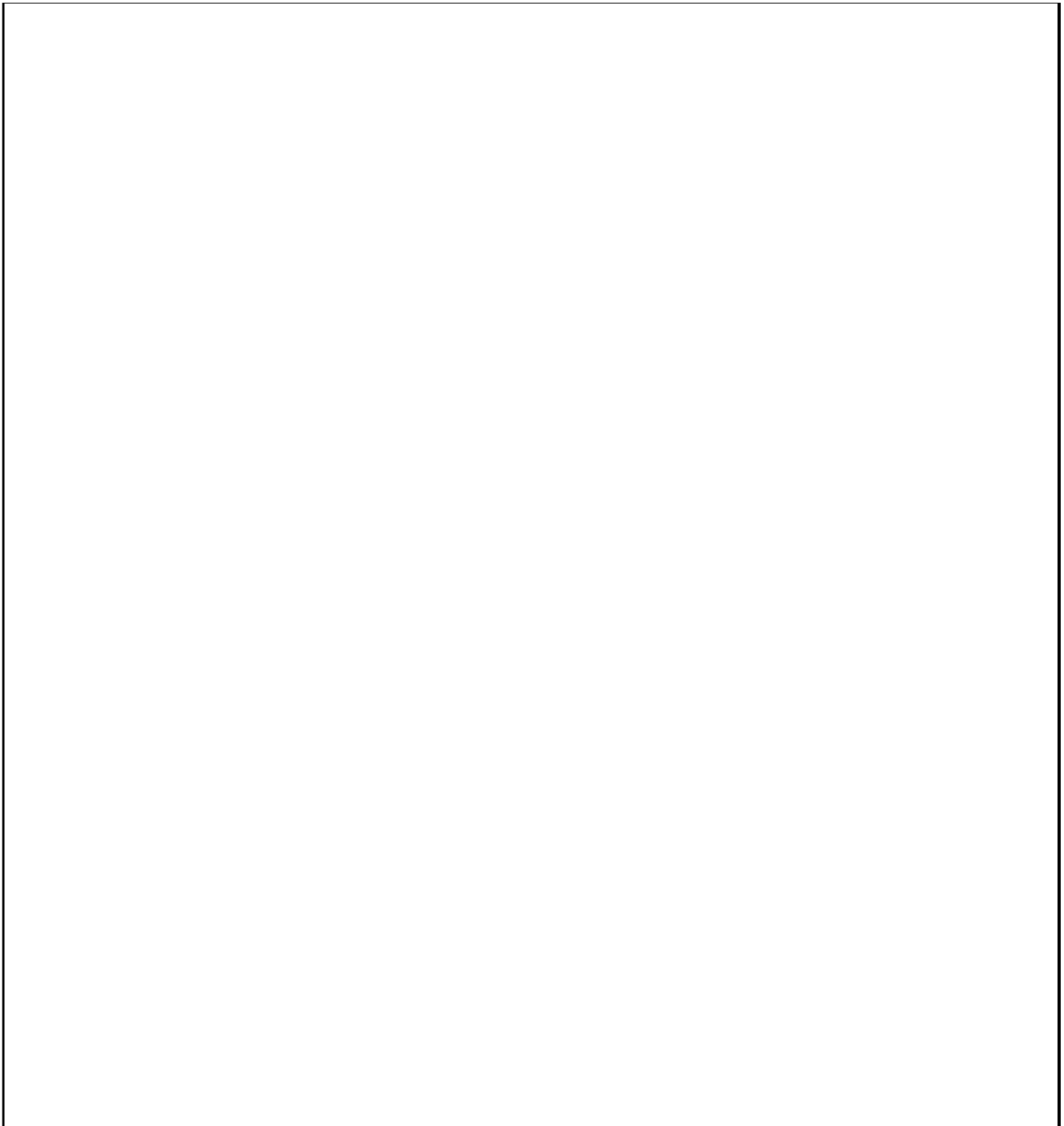
### **Mapping Youth Participation**

#### **Getting to the Top of the Ladder — Meaningful Youth Involvement**

Here are a few tips on how to get to the top of the ladder!

- Start talking to young people as early as possible in the process.
- Tell them your ideas and then ask them about and be open to theirs.
- Be honest with them about your expectations AND limitations.
- Develop roles and responsibilities together.
- Delegate tasks realistically, giving everyone involved an opportunity to feel ownership, take responsibility and hold one another accountable.
- Follow up! Let the young people know what was done with their input and what they can expect to happen next. Also, ask them what they got out of their experience.

## Mapping Youth Participation \*

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for mapping youth participation. It occupies the central portion of the page.

**Directions:**

1. Identify your roles in your work and community activities that are about and for youth.
2. Consider these roles and identify where youth are also involved or not involved, especially where decisions about youth are made.

## **Practical Application of Youth Leadership \***

### **The Importance of Diversity to Practical Application of Youth Leadership**

Before we examine the eight Youth Voice models, we should take a moment to note the importance of diverse youth representation in all leadership activities.

When selecting youth to act in the models, make sure you have as diverse a group as possible. This diversity should encompass race, gender, economic, and of course, levels of ability. There is no hard rule to follow when it comes to embracing the value of diversity. It is prudent to recognize that prejudice and discrimination toward any group, whether direct or subtle, will undermine the sort of systems change that youth leadership is meant to create.

There are a number of practical ways to engage youth in leadership activities in your community. There is no one way. Justinianno and Scherer present eight Youth Voice models in Youth Voice: A Guide for Engaging Youth in Leadership and Decision-Making in Service-Learning Programs.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Justinianno, J., & Scherer, C. (2001). Youth Voice: a guide for Engaging Youth in Leadership and Decision-Making in Service-Learning Programs. Washington, D.C.: Points of Light Foundation and Corporation for National and Community Service.

## **Practical Application of Youth Leadership Activities \***

### **Youth as Planners**

Young people can help plan and implement projects. By having young people help develop the projects, they are invested and are more likely to encourage other youth to participate. They are involved in creating the vision and setting the goals and objectives. They can help identify community needs, develop action plans and timelines, recruit volunteers, conduct community outreach and evaluate outcomes. Working with program staff to design and implement a project gives young people a sense of ownership and accomplishment.

**What steps can you take to involve youth as planners?**

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### **Youth as Trainers**

Young people who are properly trained and supported can determine training needs, design a training program and train both youth and adults, as well as provide the needed training and orientation to a project. Youth learn best from other youth and using youth as trainers for adults also models the trust you have in youth.

**What steps can you take to involve youth as trainers?**

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### **Youth as Evaluators**

Young people can help assess program effectiveness by being involved in the evaluation process. They can develop and implement tools and document findings. These activities help youth develop and refine skills they have learned. It also helps programs and organizations understand if they are meeting their goals and objectives.

**What steps can you take to involve youth as evaluators?**

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## **Youth Summits**

A youth summit is a meeting that brings young people together around a specific issue. A summit provides young people an opportunity to voice their concerns and develop possible solutions. It offers youth the opportunity to work with other youth, learn from each other and gain support from a shared struggle and achievement. It also offers an opportunity for youth and adults to gain a better understanding of each other's viewpoints.

**What steps can you take to organize a youth summit?**

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## **Youth Advisory/Action Councils**

A youth advisory or action council is a group of young people that work with an existing organization to assure that youth are involved in achieving the overall mission of the organization or project.

**What steps can you take to create a youth advisory/action council?**

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## **Youth as Funders**

This refers to the involvement of young people in philanthropy or the raising and giving of money. Young people can raise money, develop requests for proposals, participate in the grant review process and determine who gets the money. This can be especially helpful when it comes to youth-driven or youth-oriented projects.

**What steps can you take to involve youth as fund-raisers?**

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**Youth Governance/Youth on Boards**

When you combine the idea of young people as resources and honor their voices within organizations, it can result in their participation in organization governance. Specifically, youth can serve as full voting members on an organization’s board or governing structure. Young people can be equal stakeholders in decisions related to budget, staff and strategic planning of an organization or project. Youth governance not only provides learning experience for youth, it benefits the organization as well.

**What steps can you take to involve youth in governance or youth boards?**

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**Youth as Policy Makers**

Engaging youth as policy makers can help young people take their service efforts one more step toward meaningful change. Engaging youth as policy makers can also affect the policies that govern an organization or community.

**What steps can you take to engage youth as Policy Makers?**

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## **1. Youth as Planners**

Young people can help plan and implement projects. By having young people help develop the projects, they are “invested” and are more likely to encourage other youth to participate. They are involved in creating the vision and setting the goals and objectives. They can help identify community needs, develop action plans and timelines, recruit volunteers, conduct community outreach, and evaluate outcomes. Working with program staff to design and implement a project gives young people a sense of ownership and accomplishment.

### **What steps can you take to implement this model?**

- Ask young people whom you have identified as willing to get involved in the planning process.
- Clarify the role of youth.
- Define expectations and responsibilities.
- Address logistical details: transportation, communication, access to supplies and equipment, schedules, etc.
- Involve youth to be active in the planning process.
- Integrate tips about youth/adult partnerships.

## **2. Youth as Trainers**

Young people who are properly trained and supported can determine training needs, design a training program and train both youth and adults, as well as provide the needed training and orientation to a project. Youth learn best from other youth and using youth as trainers for adults also models the trust you have in youth.

### **What steps can you take to implement this model?**

- Provide training and orientation.
- Provide youth or adult partners. (If you have youth, find adults. If you have adults, find youth.)
- Rehearse and provide feedback on training.
- Engage multiple youth in training.
- Be prepared.
- Integrate tips about youth/adult partnerships.

## **3. Youth as Evaluators**

Young people can help assess program effectiveness by being involved in the evaluation process. They can develop and implement tools and document findings. These activities help youth develop and refine skills they have learned. It also helps programs and organizations understand if they are meeting their goals and objectives.

### **What steps can you take to implement this model?**

- Identify young people.
- Determine evaluation methods (focus groups, written forms, etc.).
- Develop a plan.
- Provide database or other evaluation method/tool.
- Involve youth in the design of the evaluation tool(s).
- Build a relationship.

- Practice interviews with peers.
- Integrate tips about youth/adult partnerships.

#### **4. Youth Summits**

A youth summit is a meeting that brings young people together around a specific issue. A summit provides young people an opportunity to voice their concerns and develop possible solutions. It offers youth the opportunity to work with other youth, learn from each other and gain support from a shared struggle and achievement. It also offers an opportunity for youth and adults to gain a better understanding of each other's viewpoints.

##### **What steps can you take to implement this model?**

- Create a planning committee.
- Identify resources.
- Develop event goals and agenda.
- Develop a budget.
- Conduct outreach.
- Publicize the event.
- Document the event and conduct an evaluation.
- Identify next steps.
- Integrate tips about youth/adult partnerships.

#### **5. Youth Advisory/Action Councils**

A youth advisory or action council is a group of young people that work with an existing organization to assure that youth are involved in achieving the overall mission of the organization or project.

##### **What steps can you take to implement this model?**

- Assess organization and adult readiness.
- Build a framework. Decide how this Council fits into the larger organization/group.
- Find the resources.
- Identify an adult ally.
- Define roles and responsibilities.
- Recruit broadly.
- Provide orientation and training.
- Develop and implement an action plan.
- Provide opportunities for reflection/evaluation.
- Recognize members.
- Integrate tips about youth/adult partnerships.

#### **6. Youth as Funders**

This refers to the involvement of young people in philanthropy or the raising and giving of money. Young people can raise money, develop requests for proposals, participate in the grant review process and determine who gets the money. This can be especially helpful when it comes to youth-driven or youth-oriented projects.

### **What steps can you take to implement this model?**

- Define purpose and structure.
- Define roles of youth and adults.
- Secure a funding source.
- Offer training.
- Conduct outreach.
- Conduct grant review and select grantees.
- Offer grantee support.
- Conduct evaluation.
- Provide recognition.
- Integrate tips about youth/adult partnerships.

### **7. Youth Governance/Youth on Boards**

When you combine the idea of young people as resources and honor their voices within organizations, it can result in their participation in organization governance. Specifically, youth can serve as full voting members on an organization's board or governing structure. Young people can be equal stakeholders in decisions related to budget, staff and strategic planning of an organization or project. Youth governance not only provides learning experience for youth, it benefits the organization as well.

### **What steps can you take to implement this model?**

- Identify motivations for engaging youth.
- Gain support from organizational leadership.
- Make structural changes.
- Identify resources.
- Identify young people.
- Engage more than one young person.
- Provide clear expectations and roles.
- Provide orientation and training.
- Construct meetings and work differently.
- Provide ongoing support.
- Integrate tips about youth/adult partnerships.

### **8. Youth as Policy Makers**

Engaging youth as policy makers can help young people take their service efforts one more step toward meaningful change. Engaging youth as policy makers can also affect the policies that govern an organization or community.

### **What steps can you take to implement this model?**

- Invite local officials to your activities.
- Involve the media in your activities.
- Offer school credit for service.
- Organize a debate, town hall meeting or youth forum.
- Map community issues and assets.

- Register youth to vote.
- Integrate tips about youth/adult partnerships.