**HANDOUT FOR:**

**The Role of Adults in Youth-Led Initiatives   
The Evidence behind Adult Practices**

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**Dilemma C. Youth Want to Try a Different Approach to Reach a Youth Audience**

The core group of 6 teens at Unified Youth were excited to be asked to prepare a presentation on drug prevention for the students at their high school. This outreach effort was instigated by a state funding agency, which provided them a slideshow filled with facts and figures. But as the youth began preparing, they worried that students would be bored by a traditional lecture format.

Deborah, a youth who seldom spoke up, explained that it would need to be more “alive” and “action-oriented” than the funding agency’s slideshow. Youth wanted to develop their own approach for the presentation.

**If you were the leader of Unified Youth, what would you do?**

**Dilemma A. How to Give Advice on Family Nutrition**

Nutrition Rocks is a youth-led program in which high-school youth plan and run an educational summer day camp for elementary-school children. The aim of the camp is to promote children’s healthy eating through activities led by older youth.

During the spring, youth in the program are starting to pilot games, trying them out on 4th and 5th grade children at local schools. The youth developed a game called “Choose My Plate,” in which children in a group each serve simulated food from one of five different food groups (e.g., vegetables, grains, protein). The children’s task is to serve helpings to each family member, acted out by other children. The parents, teenaged athlete, and infant each have different appetites, dietary needs, and favorite foods. The goal of the game is for each group to make sure each family member gets a plate with appropriate nutrition. There is a reward for groups that do this successfully.

However the activity does not go well at the first of four schools. The children had difficulty coordinating portions from the food groups to meet each person’s needs, especially when the actors got into character and requested an unhealthy meal!

Afterwards the youth come to the reflection session discouraged. The youth sit in a circle with their program leader, Pamela West. The youth talk and joke about how badly the game went, but they don’t seem to have ideas on how to fix it for the next practice session.

Ms. Pamela, has ideas about how to improve the game, but she wants to make sure youth maintain ownership of its design.

**Imagine you are in Ms. Pamela’s place. What would your goals be in this situation?**

**If you decided to help the youth, how would you go about doing it?**

**Dilemma B: Boundaries Needed for the Fourth of July?**

The Station is a youth-led program in which teenagers in an ethnically and economically diverse suburb plan events for other youth. It has a positive reputation in the community for organizing successful, well-attended events.

The youth have been asked to plan the youth recreation center’s Fourth of July celebration for about 300 high-schoolers. In the brainstorming session at the first planning meeting youth get excited about inviting several local rappers. Cliff Sullivan, the leader of the program for the last 13 years, is concerned because some of the rappers they want to invite have a reputation for not always showing up and questionable lyrics. The youth also were generating ideas for the event that are more ambitious then youth realize, and that might be so costly that they will need to dip into The Station’s funds to cover them.

Cliff knows and trusts many of veterans on the planning committee and they trust him. But he recognizes risks in some of their ideas.

**Imagine you are Cliff Sullivan in this situation. What would you do?**

**ACTION STEPS**

**1. Relationship Building**

* Mutual trust and open communication is the foundation for everything else.

**2. Managing Authority**

* Respect the wide range of knowledge, skills and assets youth bring to the table.
* Figure out what assets you can contribute and how you can share them in ways that are supportive of youth’s agency and empowerment.
* Be deliberate and intentional in your use of authority. Know when and what issues you need to be firm about.
* Find ways to achieve multiple goals simultaneously.

**3. Reflective Practice**

* Adjust your actions to the situation.
* Make time to reflect on your past and future decision-making. What worked? What didn’t? Under what circumstances?
* Find a colleague or group with whom you can discuss youth work.
* Experiment with different ways to approach situations. Build your repertoire.

**More Guidelines for Adults Facilitating Youth-led Programs**



From: Hilfinger et al., 2005, Adult Roles in Community-Based Youth Empowerment Programs. *Family Community Health.*