

Youth-Led Initiatives in Practice:

Lessons Learned from Adult Facilitators and Youth Leaders

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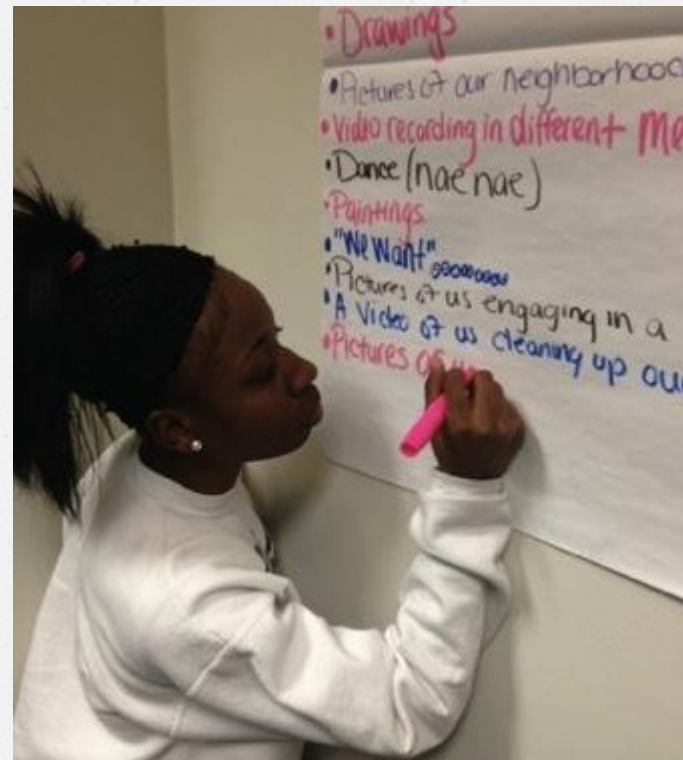


Overview

- ◎ Explore “Youth-Led Initiatives”: What are they? What are examples?
- ◎ Examine the Role of Adults as Facilitators and “Allies”
- ◎ Share Top Tips from Practice: What are the Lessons Learned?
- ◎ Explore Practical Strategies
- ◎ Discuss: What will you do with what you learn?

Youth-Led Initiatives...

...Focus on the process and impact of young people engaging in and influencing the institutions that impact their lives.



Core Concepts



Youth are **strengths** in the community

Youth are **experts** in their lives

Youth have the **capacity** to create change

Participation is authentic and **meaningful**, not **token**

Youth- Led Strategies for Environmental Impact

Advocacy or Public Policy Engagement

Participatory Action Research and
Evaluation

Community Organizing



Levels of Change



“ If we don’t allow young people to be partners in solving the issues that affect them we miss an enormous opportunity to teach them how to take responsibility for their lives, how to exercise their voice, and how to become engaged citizens and community members”

-Maureen Sedonaen, Founder and Former CEO Youth Leadership Institute

Example: Metropolitan Youth Policy Fellows



Timeline

Team
Building

Exploring
Youth
Role in
the
Region

Creating
Survey &
Gathering
Information

Making
Sense of
Information
& Developing
Ideas

Sharing
Information
& Engaging
Others

Taking
Action

Building the
capacity of youth

What's the Role of Adults in Youth-Led Initiatives?

THINK:

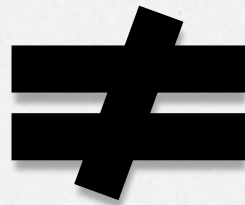
Two young people are about to plan a meeting to discuss the issue of substance abuse in the community with the principals of the two high schools. The meeting is going to be held next week.

What would you, as an adult, think about? What support would you provide?

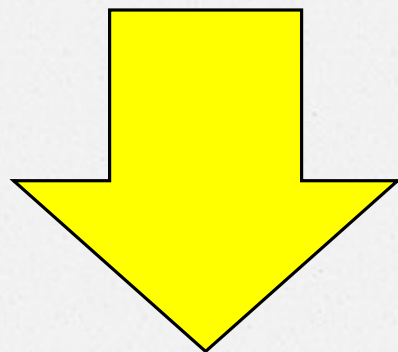
Roles of Adults

- ★ Coach
- ★ Supporter
- ★ Organizer
- ★ Coordinator
- ★ Ally
- ★ Nurturer
- ★ Capacity Builder
- ★ Educator
- ★ Challenger
- ★ Bridger
- ★ Mentor
- ★ Resource-Provider
- ★ “Legitimater”
- ★ “Snack-Buyer/Copy Maker”
- ★ Transporter
- ★ Perspective-Taker

Youth-
Led



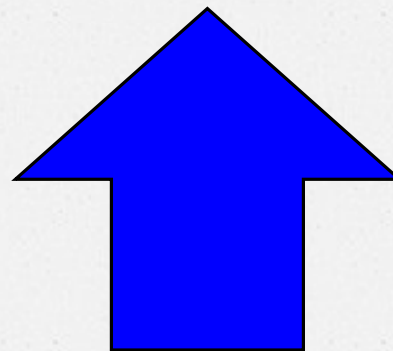
Adults
“getting
out of
the way”



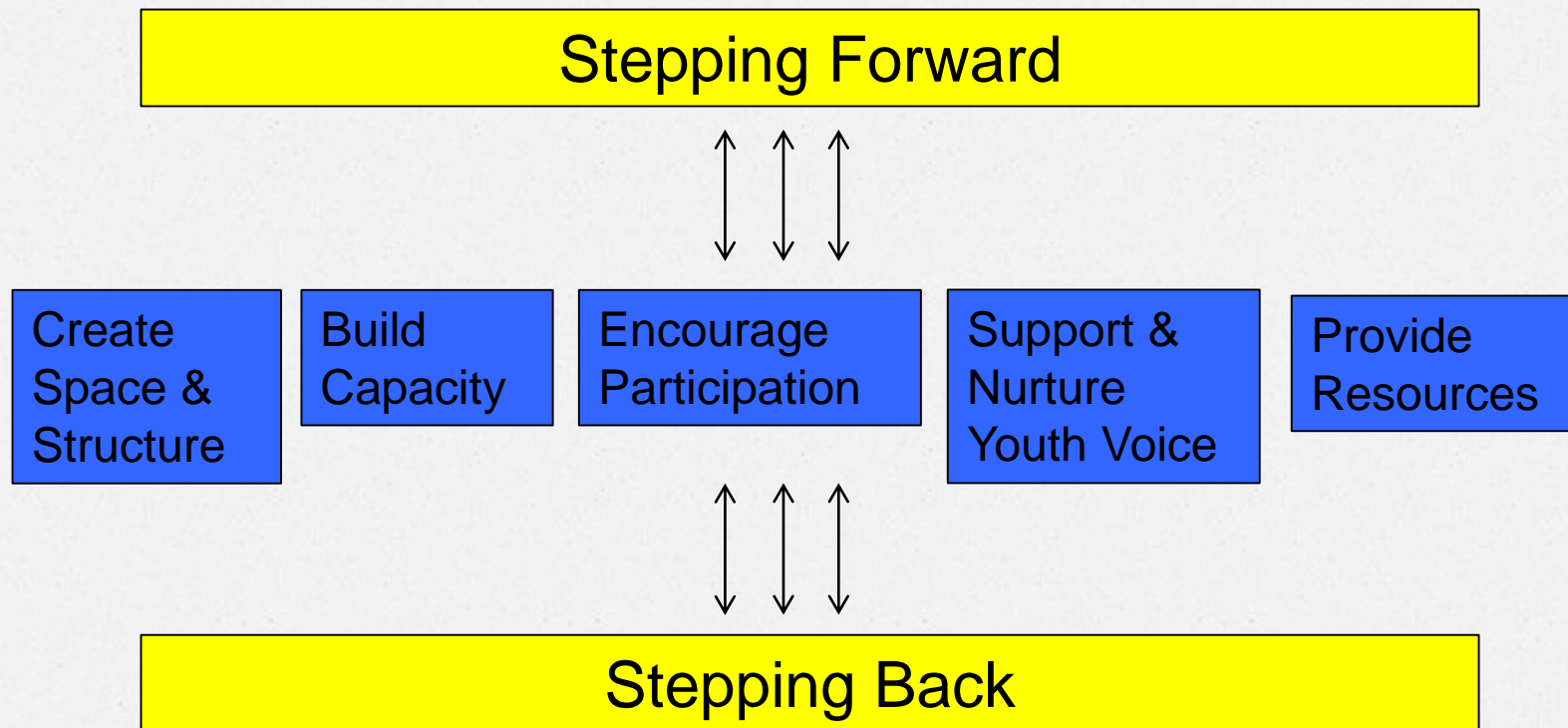
Adults
Stepping
Forward
& Back



Youth
Stepping
Forward



Adults in Youth-Led Work: Stepping Forward & Back



Adults as Allies: Definition

“Recognize youth as valuable resources with a right to participate and a responsibility to serve the community. They help bring people together, provide resources for activities, deal with bureaucracies, and overcome obstacles. They respect youth ideas, give group encouragement, and build mutual support”

(Checkoway, *Young People Creating Community Change*)



Tips from Practice: Learning From the Field

Best Practice Advice from
Youth & Adults

Tip #1 : Make Connections & Build Relationships

“She connected with us as a person- getting to know us.” - Youth Leader

“Learn as much as you can about youth culture. Show interest without poking fun.” –Adult Ally

“To appreciate even the smallest thing- we feel appreciated even when we don’t talk more and say something.” –Youth Leader

Tip #2 :Help Youth Build Capacity

“As adults with exposure and experience, we can take for granted that everyone knows or has experience with mundane tasks like how to format a business email, how to write a grant, or how to conduct a meeting. This may be the first time youth have experienced the things that we as adults may take for granted, so leave time to teach (and learn) in the process.”- Adult Ally

“Don’t be afraid to lead and don’t be afraid to let youth lead— both are necessary.”- Adult Ally

Tip #3: Be Flexible

“Design a path... but be open to detours and different (better) paths carved by the youth” - Adult Ally

“Be flexible when necessary. This can mean showing flexibility when meeting, flexibility in terms of how long projects may take, and flexibility in terms of what the project may become.” – Adult Ally

“If we are adults used to program goals and deliverables, we may be squashing creativity and ownership that youth may develop over their own initiatives.” - Adult Ally

Tip #4: Be Balanced in Work

“Youth (and all people really) need balance- it’s important to break up with check-ins, icebreakers, and food.” – Adult Ally

“We alternate (in meetings)- do something that’s hard and then something that’s really fun.” – Youth Leader

“(She) Took a huge project and broke it into bite sized pieces- not so much that it’s overwhelming, but making it do-able”- Youth Leader

Tip #5: Be a Good Listener

“Youth voice matters... If we don’t engage, listen to, and help develop critical thinking skills now, it’s going to be a lot harder in the future”- Adult Ally

“Some adults can listen, but better when you take our ideas into consideration” – Youth Leader

“Validate our ideas... you listen to our crazy ideas!”- Youth Leader

Tip #6: Be Organized

“Write things down, create tools for activities and management.” Adult Ally

“Treat us with respect- treat us as professionals.” – Youth Leader

“Text us about meetings, make sure people are coming- double triple text and do *doodles* so that we have options for meetings.” Youth Leader

Tip #7: Be Transparent & Authentic

“Be transparent with youth about everything that goes into planning youth project.” - Adult Ally

“Be your authentic self as best as you can- youth can see right through...” - Adult Ally

“Don’t make assumptions- don’t assume you know youth issues- talk to youth first.” – Youth Leader

Tip #8: Help Youth Create Structure

“Help create the meeting structure, but limit how long and often you speak in discussions”- Adult Ally

“Enable youth to have leadership roles within a group (being in charge of space, money, notes), Provide training and feedback to help them build skills and grow”- Adult Ally

“Ask (up front if possible) what youth want to gain from the process. They may not know right away, but if they have some goals you had not had in mind you can be more sensitive to them if you have heard them.”- Adult Ally

Tip #9: Be Mindful of Youth Needs

“Take into consideration that we have other things and commitments as well. It’s not “No, if you don’t come you’re out.” –Youth Leader

“We always sit in a circle. If you sit in rows we can’t see each other. It’s like school.” – Youth Leader

“Time is always a big challenge... young people are juggling multiple commitments...as adult allies, we have to find ways to work within their schedules and realities.” – Adult Ally

Tip #10: Have Fun & Have Food!

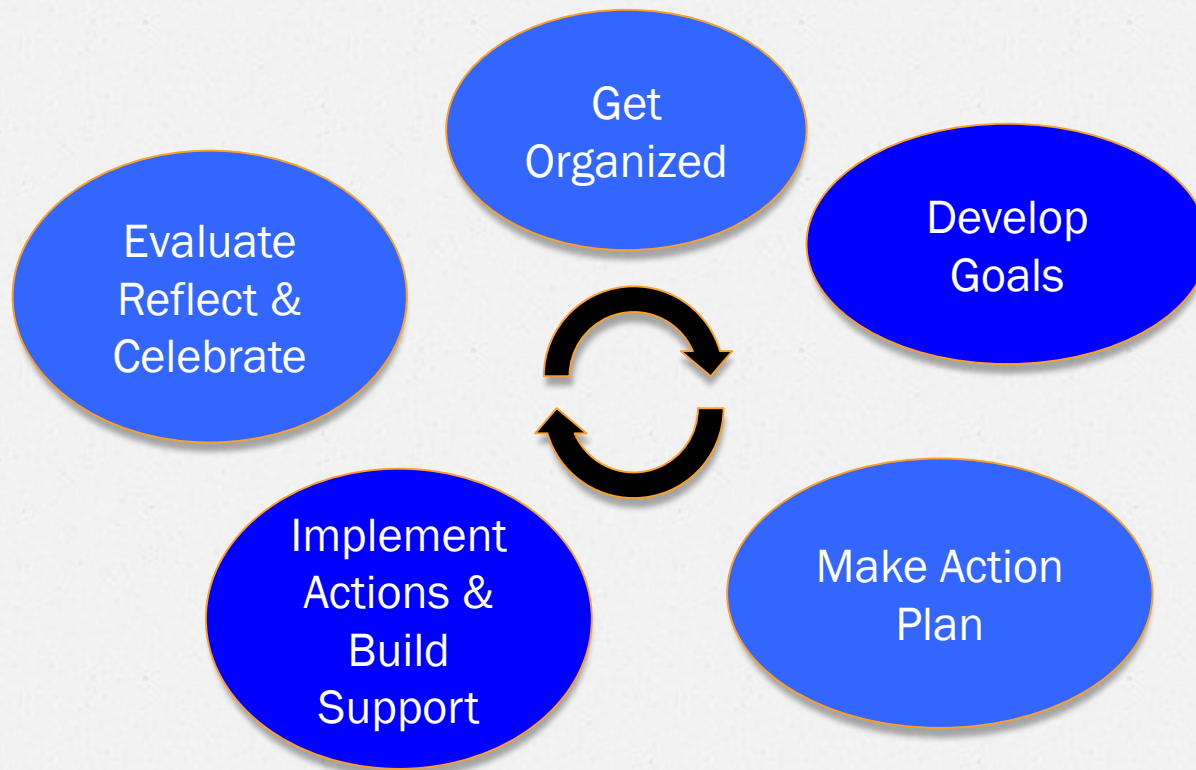
“It’s really fun and colorful- it’s not boring. Some times are more difficult but it’s fun.” - Youth Leader

“Big sticky notes & colorful markers.” - Youth Leader

“Have a back up for Jimmy John’s- be flexible and have options. Have fruit snacks.” - Youth Leader

“Create immediate milestones during the project so youth feel success.... Make time for youth fun” - Adult Ally

Practical Steps in Youth-Led Initiatives



Get Organized

Ideas:

- ★ Start with a few youth, a “core group”- you don’t need large numbers to get started
- ★ Use core group to help recruit & engage others
- ★ Use icebreakers to help form and build relationships (across youth, youth to adult)
- ★ Involve youth in setting group norms (ground rules)
- ★ Have youth take turns in leadership roles

Develop Goals

Ideas:

- ★ Help group visualize a goal
- ★ Draw pictures to identify change: What does the substance abuse look like in your school/community? What would a substance abuse free school/community look like? What changes need to be made?
- ★ Create a list of issues/changes
- ★ Pick one change as a goal- What will you do? Why?
- ★ Make a goal manageable by breaking it into parts

Make a Plan

Ideas:

- ★ Develop a work plan- break it down into small steps
- ★ “Steps in the Process”- Give youth a set of possible steps and ask them to create an order & discuss
- ★ “Post-It Note Planning” - Have youth brainstorm ideas for steps on post-it notes and work together to put the steps in an order
- ★ Create timelines- Who will do what, by when?

Implement Actions

Ideas:

- ★ Hold regular meetings- involve youth in arranging time, creating agendas, organizing room, and setting meeting structure
- ★ Have food, have fun at meetings!
- ★ Involve music, color/art
- ★ Use icebreakers, energizers, & check-ins
- ★ Focus on work plan- and celebrating progress- even if small
- ★ Build support- who can support youth in their work?

Reflect, Evaluate & Celebrate

Ideas:

- ★ Do mini-reflections at the end of each meeting: One thing learned? What's going well? What can be changed?
- ★ Rotate turns taking notes and taking pictures to capture process
- ★ Check in on the time-line, reflect between steps and big picture
- ★ Celebrate every small win--Keeps motivation going
- ★ Have fun- outside of meetings too- have a dinner, go to a sporting event, play laser tag
- ★ Mark transitions- certificates, "paper plate awards", receptions

Resources:

Michigan Youth and Community Program

www.youthandcommunity.org

“Young People Creating Community Change”

“Adults as Allies”

“Participatory Evaluation with Youth”

“Participatory Evaluation with Youth-Facilitator’s Guide”



Michigan Youth and Community Program

Remember Why this Matters...



- ★ *"Now I think young people can make an impact and before I didn't think so, I'm going to live this way and all the kids after me will live this way but now I think I can change."*
- ★ *"This group taught me that our voices matter."*

Moving Forward: Find a Partner & Pick One

- ◎ Think about when you were in high school. Who was an adult that was really important to you? Why? What did they give to you? Brainstorm ideas. Share with a partner. How are these qualities present in your work?
- ◎ Pick a tip/pick a quote that stands out to you. Discuss why. Brainstorm ideas for implementing or strengthening your work in this area.
- ◎ Discuss why you are an adult ally. Why does this work matter to you? What tip would you want to share?

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