Ready... Set... Engage!

Building Effective Youth/Adult Partnerships for a Stronger Child and Youth Mental Health System
READY...SET...ENGAGE!

Building Effective Youth/Adult Partnerships for a Stronger Child and Youth Mental Health System

November 2007

Nancy Pereira
Knowledge Transfer and Evaluation Lead
The New Mentality
a joint project of Children’s Mental Health Ontario and
The Provincial Centre of Excellence for Child and Youth Mental Health at CHEO
READY...SET...ENGAGE! Building Effective Youth/Adult Partnerships for a Stronger Child and Youth Mental Health System

Any or all parts of this publication may be reproduced or copied with acknowledgment, without permission of the publisher. However, this publication may not be reproduced and distributed for a fee without the specific, written authorization of the publisher.

Suggested Citation:

Pereira, N. (2007). Ready... Set... Engage! Building Effective Youth/Adult Partnerships for a Stronger Child and Youth Mental Health System. Toronto: Children’s Mental Health Ontario & Ottawa: The Provincial Centre of Excellence for Child and Youth Mental Health at CHEO.

Please direct all inquiries to:

Children’s Mental Health Ontario
Tel: (416) 921-2109 or 1-888-234-7054
www.kidsmentalhealth.ca

or

The Provincial Centre of Excellence for Child and Youth Mental Health at CHEO
Tel: (613) 737-7600
www.onthepoint.ca

About the Author

Nancy Pereira is the Knowledge Transfer and Evaluation Lead for The New Mentality. She holds a Bachelor of Arts Honours Degree from the University of Guelph with a major in Sociology and an emphasis in Developmental Psychology. As an adolescent, and as a university student, Nancy has been actively involved as a disability youth advocate.

“Youth engagement is something that I have always felt profoundly passionate about, and want to see resonate throughout all efforts that aim to address youth issues or provide support to young persons. My personal and academic experiences have taught me about the positive and powerful impacts that young persons can have on their community if given the chance to be regarded as capable and competent citizens.”
Contents

Acknowledgements 1

Executive Summary 2
  Setting the Stage. 2
  Key Elements. 2
  Getting There 3

Introduction 4

Section 1: Background 7
  Setting the Stage 9
  About “The New Mentality” 9
  Defining Youth Engagement 11
    The Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement 11
    InvolveYouth2 11
    The Laidlaw Foundation 12
    Youth Infusion 12
    Town Youth Participation Strategies 13

Section 2: Fostering Dynamic Partnerships 15
  Youth as Leaders and Adults as Allies 17
  Positive Youth Engagement 17
  Negative Youth Engagement 18
  Integrating Youth into an Organization 19
  Examining Attitudes 20
    Adult Allies 22
    Starting Off On the Right Foot 23
    Benefits of Youth-Adult Partnerships 24

Section 3: Effective Practices for Youth Engagement 27
  Making Decisions with Youth 29
  Motivations and Challenges 29
  Bringing Youth on “Board” 30
    Alternative Approaches to Youth Governance 31
  Other Ways to Involve Youth 32
Acknowledgements

The New Mentality marks the beginning of a journey. We would like to thank the many organizations and individuals who have supported this initiative and generously shared their wisdom and experience with The New Mentality team. We are also looking forward to other organizations coming on board as our journey progresses.

- Algoma Family Services
- Algonquin Child and Family Services
- Centre for Addiction and Mental Health
- Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement
- Central Youth Services
- Children’s Centre Thunder Bay
- East Metro Youth Services
- Good Shepherd Centres
- Griffin Centre
- Keystone Child, Youth and Family Services
- Kinark Child and Family Services
- London Public Library
- mindyourmind.ca/MYM Street Team
- New Path Youth and Family Services
- Office of Child and Family Service Advocacy
- Ontario Association of Children’s Aid Societies
- Peel Children’s Centre/Nexus Youth Services
- Regional Multicultural Youth Council
- ROCK – Reach Out Centre for Kids
- St. Clair Child and Youth Services
- Students Commission
- Turning Point Youth Services
- Town Youth Participation Strategies
- Voices for Children
- Whitby Mental Health Centre
- YOUTHLINK
- Youth Net/Réseau Ado
- Youth Net Halton
- Youth Net Hamilton
- Youth Services Bureau of Ottawa

The knowledge, resources, and expertise that you so graciously shared helped to enrich this report and provided tremendous assistance as we worked to create a foundation for The New Mentality.

I would also like to thank the staff of The Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement who were very helpful in getting me started on this research initiative.

Finally, I extend my sincerest gratitude to The New Mentality team: Terry Brennan from Children’s Mental Health Ontario, Jane Tallim from The Provincial Centre of Excellence for Child and Youth Mental Health at CHEO, and Cathy Dyer, Project Coordinator for The New Mentality, whose constant support, mentoring, and words of encouragement played an integral role in the creation of this report. Thank you as well to the staff of CMHO and the Centre for the guidance, wisdom and knowledge sharing that you all offered throughout this process.

Nancy Pereira
Knowledge Transfer and Evaluation Lead
The New Mentality
a joint project of Children’s Mental Health Ontario &
The Provincial Centre of Excellence for Child and Youth Mental Health at CHEO
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In early 2007, the Centre of Excellence for Child and Youth Mental Health at CHEO and Children’s Mental Health Ontario began a joint youth engagement initiative – The New Mentality. This pilot project is designed to develop a provincial network of youth in Ontario who will promote mental health awareness within various communities, and advocate for a mental health system that will best serve their needs.

Phase one of this initiative included a literature review and interviews with child and youth mental health (CYMH) agencies across the province to determine what the evidence has to say about youth engagement and to pinpoint how this theory is being applied in the field. While the findings in this report do not represent an exhaustive search of the literature, they do offer solid insight into what the term “youth engagement” actually means and how this concept can be put into practice.

SETTING THE STAGE

The practice of youth engagement is a relatively new social phenomenon. Only within the last 20 years has it gained meaningful attention from adults and within the scholarly literature. The 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child was the fundamental catalyst that gave rise to this movement and, almost two decades later, professionals are still grappling with how to best work with youth.

Youth engagement is also a new innovation within many organizations, where the shift from working with youth as clients, to working with youth as partners, can at times seem overwhelming. But it does not have to be.

Although there is no magic formula, there is an openness and willingness amongst youth, adults and youth-serving organizations to make things work. This is what makes exploring youth engagement such an exciting adventure. Feelings of apprehension are common when something is unfamiliar or when little is known about a topic; but with knowledge and resources, these feelings can be replaced with enthusiasm and a readiness to take action.

KEY ELEMENTS

What is the basis for creating that magic formula?

Youth engagement is about empowering all youth as valued partners in addressing, and making decisions about, issues that affect them personally and/or that they believe to be important. It is about adults working with youth to create opportunities for young people to become involved in and contribute to the betterment of an organization and/or community in which they live.

Achieving this involves a number of essential elements:

1. Meaningful Engagement

Youth are engaged when they are involved in experiences they consider to have purpose. Organizations that work successfully to promote the inclusion of youth understand
this, and agree that youth engagement must possess real meaning to both the organization and the individuals involved.

2. Beyond Programming

Youth Engagement is not just another fancy term or a program or an action – it is a way of operating. True youth engagement exists only when youth make important contributions throughout all levels of an organization (Town Youth Participation Strategies, 2006; Schulman, 2006; Laidlaw 2007).

3. Organizational Commitment

Because it represents a huge shift in how organizations traditionally operate and do business, youth engagement requires significant organizational buy-in. To demonstrate support is coming from the top and exists throughout all levels of the organization, everyone needs to be on board – including external stakeholders such as board members (Zeldin et al., 2005).

4. Valuing Youth

Reluctance to engage youth in decision-making often stems from adults over-emphasizing or exaggerating youth’s immaturity or lack of experience. Even well-meaning adults may see youth as having problems that need to be solved, rather than as possessing talents that can contribute to positive outcomes. In order for youth engagement to thrive, adults need to adopt a new lens through which to see young persons - embracing the ideology of youth as being assets today, and not just leaders of tomorrow.

5. Youth-Adult Partnerships

Youth have much to offer to an organization, but they may need adult support and opportunities to demonstrate their capabilities (Norman, 2001). Youth can achieve this when they are actively involved within an organization not just as program members, but also as partners who work with adults and have a voice in program planning and decision-making processes (Wright, 1999). In effective youth-adult partnerships, valued recognition for contributions is granted to all persons…regardless of age (Norman, 2001).

6. Realistic Expectations

Successful adult allies should be realistic about the abilities of youth. While it is important not to underestimate the capabilities of young people, adult allies should be mindful of the limitations that correspond to different levels of development (Pittman et al, 2003). The trick here is to give youth freedom to exercise their leadership potential while providing them with opportunities to develop new skills and to grow within an organization by establishing realistic goals, timelines, and expectations (Libby et al., 2005).

Getting There

There are five concrete steps that can be taken to help organizations initiate and sustain youth engagement:

**Step One:** Analyze your current position

**Step Two:** Create a youth-friendly environment

**Step Three:** Get youth on board

**Step Four:** Keep youth interested

**Step Five:** Evaluate with youth

READY…SET…ENGAGE! expands on these, and other effective practices that organizations and research studies have deemed successful. It is hoped that the tools, strategies and findings highlighted in this report will provide mental health professionals with practical and proven resources to learn from – and draw on – as they venture through the youth engagement process.
Introduction

READY...SET...ENGAGE! has been created as part of the Centre of Excellence for Child and Youth Mental Health at CHEO (the Centre) and Children’s Mental Health Ontario’s (CMHO) joint youth engagement initiative – The New Mentality.

Initially conceived and inspired by youth, there has been a commitment from the beginning to ensure that this project remains youth-led and youth-driven, with assistance and mentorship from the Centre, CMHO and other like-minded organizations. To this end, youth and young adults have been hired and brought on board to lead and coordinate program development and implementation, including research and evaluation.

Phase one of this pilot project included a literature review and interviews with child and youth mental health (CYMH) agencies across the province to determine what the evidence shows about youth engagement and to pinpoint how this theory is being applied in the field. The end result of this process – READY…SET…ENGAGE! – reflects a synthesis of evidence, theory and values, filtered through a youth perspective. While the findings presented here are not an exhaustive search of the literature, they do offer solid insight into what the term “youth engagement” actually means and how this concept can be put into practice.

READY…SET…ENGAGE! seeks to provide mental health professionals who work with children and youth with background knowledge about effective practices for youth engagement. More specifically, this report explores definitions of youth engagement, discusses how to build youth-adult partnerships, looks at supporting youth as decision makers, and identifies roles that youth can assume within organizations. It also showcases effective youth engagement programs that are actively operating within some child and youth mental health agencies.

Section One: Background, provides information to contextualize The New Mentality project, the evolution of the concept of youth engagement, and how youth engagement is defined – in the literature and in practice.

Section Two: Fostering Dynamic Partnerships, positions youth as leaders and adults as allies in the youth engagement process. This section includes:

- Strategies for effectively integrating youth into organizations,
- Understanding the attitude shift that needs to occur for youth engagement to happen,
- The important role of adult allies,
- Pointers for starting off on the right foot, and
- Understanding why this is worth doing - by looking at what the research has to say about the benefits of youth-adult partnerships.

Section Three: Effective Practices for Youth Governance, looks at the reasons for,
challenges to, and specific ways that organizations can integrate youth into their decision-making processes.

Section Four: Making Youth Engagement Happen! presents the five concrete steps that can be taken by organizations to initiate and sustain youth engagement:

- analyzing your current position;
- creating a youth-friendly environment;
- getting youth on board;
- keeping youth interested; and
- conducting participatory evaluation with youth.

Appendix A provides a snapshot of some exciting and innovative ways young people in Ontario are being empowered to have a voice within child and youth mental health organizations. Appendix B features templates for assessing organizational readiness and for evaluating youth-adult partnerships.

The Reference Section provides an annotated list of “interesting reads” for individuals who are interested in helping their organizations attract, engage and empower youth.
Section 1: Background
Youth engagement is about empowering all youth as valued partners in addressing, and making decisions about issues that affect them personally and/or that they believe to be important.
Furthermore, a comprehensive evaluation of this pilot project will be carried out with partners such as The Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement and The New Mentality youth advisory team. This evaluation will include observed outcomes and the insights of the youth participants, adult allies, and participating organizations. The evaluation and the effective practices learned from this process will be relevant to the CYMH sector and will contribute to the growing body of literature concerning youth engagement.

The New Mentality youth advisory group will take the effective practices described in this report and combine them with lessons learned from their own experiences to develop a set of original evaluation tools that can be used to evaluate youth engagement efforts within the CYMH system. These tools will be developed throughout the course of the pilot project and will be presented at the June 2008 Children’s Mental Health Ontario and Ontario Association of Children’s Aid Societies joint conference.

Setting the Stage

In 1989, Canada openly demonstrated its commitment to the world’s youngest
generation by being one of the first countries to sign a UN convention designed to protect the rights of children. The *Convention on the Rights of the Child* is a treaty embedded in the international human rights framework to recognize, protect, and respect the dignity of the child, and to ensure the necessary environment for each individual to develop to his/her fullest potential. This Convention recognizes youth as active agents of change within society, and addresses their right to have their voices heard. Article 12 of the treaty explains “…the child who is capable of forming his or her own views has the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child”. Article 13 expands on this notion by stating that “The child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child’s choice”.

In a democratic society all citizens deserve the opportunity to have their voices heard and to be involved in making decisions about issues affecting them and the communities in which they live. This claim is not exclusive to the adult population; it seeks to be inclusive of all persons regardless of age, ability, or socioeconomic class. According to Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (2005), approximately 14 per cent of the Canadian population fall between the ages of 15-24; but research indicates that only a minority of youth feel that they are regarded as valued members of society. A national study by The Public Health Agency of Canada in 2000 reported a consistent concern amongst youth that their opinions are not heard, respected, or valued by adults (as cited in Halifax Regional Municipality, 2006). A consistent message throughout the literature is that many youth feel excluded from those government processes and organizational structures that impose laws, introduce policies, and form programs that affect them directly.

Many service organizations that work to improve the lives of children and youth strive to uphold the best interests of young persons by adopting a client-centered approach. Within this framework, professionals work for youth, rather than with youth. Adults are perceived as the experts, ignoring that youth are also experts in their own right as service recipients with insight about program suitability. In order for an organization to ensure that its services are meeting the needs of clients, opportunities must be created for clients to voice their opinions, concerns, and recommendations. This client/consumer representation approach helps to keep the mission of the organization in line with the needs of those it seeks to serve. This model is generally accepted when it comes to adult services, but when the clients or consumers are youth this is rarely translated into practice. Politicians, service providers, and parents often have greater influence in program delivery than do youth recipients themselves.

While organizations may be receptive to the idea of engaging youth, some hesitate because they consider the process challenging, and/or they feel that youth would not be interested in adult work – a characterization which over-generalizes youth interests. Youth are not a homogenous group. Like adults, they possess a variety of interests that are not solely exclusive to “youth culture”. Recognizing youth as valuable contributors is an important attitude to cultivate because emerging research shows that youth can help enrich the quality and performance of an organization. Acknowledging that youth have something valuable to contribute is the first step towards embracing youth engagement. The second step is taking action to put this concept into practice – a difficult move if one is unfamiliar with how youth engagement operates. This report can help to put theory into practice by providing an understanding of youth engagement and by highlighting effective practices and strategies that organizations can use to carry out youth engagement initiatives.
Defining Youth Engagement

The term “youth engagement” is an emerging concept that does not possess a universal definition. In the literature many scholars use the terms “participation”, “volunteerism”, “partnership”, “involvement”, and “engagement” interchangeably. In contrast, organizations that research and promote youth engagement regard these terms as being independent of one another and have spent time developing specific definitions for youth engagement.

The following groups have been developing theory and applying it in real world situations. The definitions and approaches upon which their work is based, exemplify how these concepts contribute to various aspects of youth engagement.

The Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement

The belief that engagement should be meaningful appears in the definition created by the Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement (CEYE). Here, youth engagement is described as “the meaningful participation and sustained involvement of a young person in an activity that has a focus outside of him/herself” (Pancer et al. 2002). This definition was influenced by Nakamura’s (2001) concept of vital engagement which describes engagement as a relationship made up of three main components: absorption, meaningfulness, and sustainability. Absorption refers to an individual taking a vested interest in the subject, assuming the role of active participant and critical thinker. Through absorption, a relationship between self and object begins to emerge, and the level of importance that this relationship holds will dictate how meaningful the experience is to the individual. According to Nakamura (2001), meaning can manifest itself in two ways: it can either be inspired by past experiences, which motivate the desire to get involved and make an impact, or it can be a feeling that is strengthened through increased participation. When an activity is deemed meaningful, it often transforms into sustained involvement where a connection is created, a commitment is made, and genuine care is shown for the object. Vital engagement is sustaining when it draws on the values, goals, beliefs, and talents of the individual engaged in the relationship (Nakamura, 2001).

According to the CEYE, in order for a youth to be fully engaged, behavioural, affective, and cognitive components need to be present within that individual. More specifically, the individual needs to spend time doing the activity, enjoy participating in the activity, and demonstrate knowledge about the activity (Luken, 2002).

The CEYE believes that strong youth-adult partnerships are at the heart of youth engagement. Within this framework, youth and adults work as a collective and everyone plays an active role in the decision-making, planning, and implementation process. Young persons and adults combine their efforts to work towards a common goal while sharing knowledge, power, and resources. The beauty of such partnerships is that they draw on the strengths of all members, and exercise shared control among all participants – regardless of age.

InvolveYouth2

Over the past several years the city of Toronto has given increased attention to youth engagement. In seeking to build safer communities and reduce rates of violence within the city, Toronto has actively sought to introduce community programs that engage its younger citizens; recognizing the value that
engagement brings to young people and the communities in which they live.

InvolveYouth2 is an initiative of the Community Safety Plan within the city of Toronto that was launched back in 2004. This program openly demonstrates Toronto’s commitment to helping youth transition into adulthood successfully. The city prescribes to a civic engagement model for youth participation, based on the belief that as youth become active citizens, they begin to assume social responsibilities. In the process, they acquire a sense of self-awareness, which in turn makes them more conscious about social issues (Shen, 2006).

This approach asserts that meaningful youth engagement can be achieved when it is rooted in an anti-oppressive framework that stresses access, equity, and social justice for all persons (Shen, 2006). Instead of perceiving at-risk youth as problems that need fixing, the anti-oppressive framework encourages the civic participation of all youth, particularly those who are marginalized.

Many youth engagement programs attract youth who are already engaged within the community—youth who already have access to resources, are aware of issues, want to make a difference, and actively seek opportunities to expand their knowledge base. The anti-oppressive framework encourages youth coordinators to focus their efforts on recruiting those who are disengaged, particularly minority youth. There is a common misconception that youth are apathetic and lack interest in societal issues. In many instances, however, youth face barriers to engagement that include (but are not limited to) socioeconomic, political, and cultural challenges. Youth engagement seeks to provide youth with avenues for skill development and leadership opportunities. Marginalized youth have much to gain from becoming engaged because they often possess less experience, have limited access to extracurricular activities, and have a greater need for capacity building (Khosroshahi et al., 2006).

The Laidlaw Foundation

The Laidlaw Foundation recognizes social inclusion as an essential component of youth engagement. This organization defines youth engagement as a process emerging from the meaningful voluntary participation of young people in decision-making and governance of organizations or programs that result in:

- An impact or contribution towards change;
- An increase in youths’ understanding of what impacts them;
- Shared power between youth and adults;
- Valuing youth opinions/perspectives; and
- Opportunities for youth to build their vocabulary of experiences (Laidlaw Foundation, 2001).

Building on the theory of social inclusion, the Laidlaw Foundation encourages youth governance to ensure that, as citizens, young persons have an opportunity to act as valued participants, thus demonstrating their capacity to serve as capable contributors within all facets of society. “Youth as decision makers” encourages the adoption of youth civic engagement. The belief is that as experts on their own lived experiences, youth are assets who can help shape the development of their communities. They possess important perspectives, and deserve the opportunity to share them freely with the assurance that their input will be taken seriously.

Youth Infusion

Youth Infusion is a youth-led, youth-run organization out of Austin Texas. Its mission is to promote youth as decision makers, advocates, and agents of change within youth-serving organizations and institutions. This organization regards engagement as a hierarchical process whereby youth achieve
specific levels of involvement that include participation, partnerships, and engagement. Youth Infusion believes that there are distinct differences between each of these levels, which naturally build on one another. Involvement begins at the participation stage, where youth voluntarily give time to a cause, organization, or community program. As levels of participation strengthen, youth-adult networks (partnerships) are established, mutual values are shared, and the decision-making process is structured to incorporate the voices of youth (Schulman, 2006). Engagement is the final stage. This takes place when youth and adults experience feelings of passion, excitement, and intense focus rooted in a commitment to a common collective (Schulman, 2006). “Participation, partnership, and engagement are all organizational assets, but engagement is the ultimate aim of youth involvement because it requires both meaningful participation and highly mutual partnerships” (Schulman, 2006).

Town Youth Participation Strategies

In its *Best Practices in Youth Centres Manual* (2006), Town Youth Participation Strategies (TYPS) approaches youth engagement from an organizational perspective; stating that real youth engagement exists when youth make meaningful contributions throughout all levels of an organization. TYPS sees youth engagement not as a program, but as a method of operating. “Youth engagement is more than a claim that you have youth involved and participating in activities. Its full meaning is connected to the whole approach and core values of an organization and is defined by the level of youth interest and involvement in the planning and realization of each activity” (TYPS, 2006).

In examining the various definitions of youth engagement described above, common key elements emerge: meaningful experiences, social inclusion, youth-adult partnerships, and youth as decision makers. Essentially, youth engagement is about empowering all youth as valued partners in addressing issues that affect them personally and/or that they believe to be important. It is about adults creating opportunities for young people to become involved, and partnering with them to help build a better society.

Each of the definitions in this section reflects the mission of the organization behind it and provides evidence-based, adult insight into youth engagement. But these definitions – written by professionals for an adult audience – can be problematic. One of the lessons that has emerged from the literature is the need for the conceptualization of youth engagement to be translated into a more youth-friendly form, with young people themselves defining what it is to be engaged based on their life experiences. Engaging in an activity allows youth to reflect on a lived experience, and then apply what they have learned to abstract concepts. Being intellectually, behaviourally, and emotionally involved is key to experiential learning – and true youth engagement. Finally, inviting youth to engage not only as participants, but also as leaders, is a critical component of youth engagement and is a grounding principle of The New Mentality.

It is premature at this point to offer an operational definition for youth engagement based on The New Mentality, as this project is just getting started. Over the course of the pilot phase, however, youth participants will become increasingly familiar with the concept of youth engagement through their access to resources and personal experiences. Upon completion of this initiative, it is anticipated that youth participants will be able to construct a definition of youth engagement that can be adopted and utilized within the CYMH sector.
Section 2: Fostering Dynamic Partnerships
The most successful and sustaining youth engagement models operate under a youth-adult partnership structure that permits both groups to support one another while working towards an agreed-upon outcome.
Youth as Leaders and Adults as Allies

The term “youth engagement” is commonly applied to a wide range of practices that can include everything from youth being used by adults, to youth working for adults, to the ideal of youth working in partnership with adults. Not all adult-youth initiatives are created equal, so organizations need to understand the positive – and not-so-positive – ways adults may work with youth.

A popular model for understanding the different ways youth may be engaged when partnering and working with adults is Roger Hart’s “Ladder for Youth Participation”. This hierarchical model, which has been adapted and built upon by a number of researchers, illustrates eight different ways young people can be involved within a community or organization.

Here we’ve split Hart’s model into two separate visual representations to illustrate what is and what is not considered to be youth engagement.

Positive Youth Engagement

**Assigned but informed** is where adults give youth a clear explanation of how their role will fit into the scope of the project and delegate tasks.

**Consulted and informed** engagement is where youth advise adults on ideas and projects that the adults have created.

**Adult-initiated with shared decision-making** is where adults come up with a project idea and work with youth to put it into action. In this case, youth are given the opportunity to participate in the decision-making process and help shape the project’s direction.
Youth-initiated and directed participation positions youth as the leaders who guide their own work. Adults take on a secondary role, acting only as supporters.

Youth-adult partnerships emphasize the notion of “togetherness” where a peer relationship is established between all members (regardless of age) who have equal decision-making power and work as a collective towards shared goals.

Negative Youth Engagement

Tokenism occurs when young people appear to have a voice, but in reality have little influence over the operation of the organization and the ways they participate. Even though youth are present, responsibilities and decisions continue to rest in the hands of the adults.

Young people are decorations when they are used as props or window dressing to augment a cause, although adults do not pretend the cause or project has been initiated by youth.

Manipulation is where young people are used to gain support for a cause by being presented as leaders, when in fact they are only brought in to solicit endorsement.

Organizations that use negative youth engagement strategies may actually hinder the youth engagement process. If the purpose of youth engagement is to create opportunities for youth to get involved and make a difference, it is counter-productive to create opportunities and not utilize the skills or expertise of youth.

Manipulating children and young people by using them as decorations or tokens only reinforces and perpetuates reservations youth may already have about working with adults and will inevitably cause them to become disengaged.

Within the literature, the evidence demonstrates that the most successful and sustaining youth engagement models operate under a youth-adult partnership structure that permits both groups to support one another while working towards an agreed outcome (Camino, 2005; Jones et al., 2004; Libby et al., 2005). All members of a youth-adult partnership participate in decision-making, have equal control over the direction of the project, and share accountability for emerging successes and failures.

Also referred to as intergenerational partnerships, this framework epitomizes the concept of social inclusion, whereby instead of competing for the right to participate, all persons (regardless of age) work together to create change (Dougherty, 2004). In effective youth-adult partnerships, valued recognition for contributions is granted to all persons (Norman, 2001). Youth-adult partnerships ensure that youth needs are being met through service and programming efforts (Clarke, 2007).

Finally, within a societal context, the literature indicates that when youth and adults work as a collective, this results in healthier and safer communities (Youth Affairs Council of Victoria, 2004; Pancer et al., 2002; National The Innovation Centre et al., 2003).
Integrating Youth into an Organization

The decision to incorporate youth into an organization can be a huge culture shift, for example, from a hierarchical to a flat organizational structure (Shen 2006; Schulman, 2006; and Zeldin et al., 2005). Acting on this decision demonstrates that an organization is open and committed to change. Because of this, staff need to examine their current situation and look at how youth fit into their organization’s operations before bringing youth on board (Schulman, 2006; Zeldin et al., 2005).

To truly give youth the opportunity to voice their opinions, organizations must create youth-friendly environments that are receptive to the opinions of young persons. Youth should not be brought on board until there is a clear consensus among all adults regarding their role within the organization (Zeldin et al., 2005). Commitment from everyone on staff is also imperative because it is difficult for youth to succeed if only one person is there to support them. To demonstrate that support is coming from the top and exists throughout all levels of the organization, everyone needs to be on board – including external stakeholders such as board members (Zeldin et al., 2005).

Youth Engagement Continuum

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YOUTH SERVICES APPROACH</th>
<th>YOUTH DEVELOPMENT</th>
<th>YOUTH LEADERSHIP</th>
<th>CIVIC ENGAGEMENT</th>
<th>YOUTH ORGANIZING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Defines young people as clients</td>
<td>Provides services and support, access to caring adults and safe spaces</td>
<td>Includes components of youth development approach plus:</td>
<td>Includes components of youth development and youth leadership plus:</td>
<td>Includes components of youth development, youth leadership and civic engagement plus:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provides services to address individual problems and pathologies of young people</td>
<td>Provides opportunities for the growth and development of young people</td>
<td>Builds in authentic youth leadership opportunities within programming and organization</td>
<td>Engages young people in political education and awareness</td>
<td>Builds a membership base</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programming defined around treatment and prevention</td>
<td>Meets young people where they are</td>
<td>Helps young people deepen historical and cultural understanding of their experiences and community issues</td>
<td>Builds skills and capacity for power analysis and action around issues young people identify</td>
<td>Involves youth as part of core staff and governing body</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Builds young people’s individual competencies</td>
<td>Builds skills and capacities of young people to be decision makers and problem solvers</td>
<td>Begins to help young people build collective identity as social change agents</td>
<td>Engages in direct action and mobilizing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Provides age-appropriate support</td>
<td>Youth participate in community projects</td>
<td>Engages young people in advocacy and negotiation</td>
<td>Engages in alliances and coalitions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Emphasizes positive self identity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Supports youth/adult partnerships</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As an organization creates opportunities to engage youth, it should be able to clearly define its present workings with youth and identify where it would like to improve. The U.S.-based Funders’ Collaborative on Youth Organizing has developed a Continuum of Youth Engagement model (shown above) that outlines five different youth engagement approaches that can exist within an organization. This continuum is rooted in the field of positive youth development, which recognizes youth as assets and emphasizes the importance of youth involvement in the operations of programming and community development.

To sustain youth engagement, organizations must create environments that are supportive, inclusive and welcoming of young persons. Canada’s Students Commission (SC) is a national organization that works to create engagement opportunities for youth whereby adults and young persons work in partnership to help foster awareness on youth-related issues. In order for these partnerships to succeed, and for actions to translate into change, the SC proclaims that there are certain grounding values that must be present at all times within the partnership. This evidence based value structure is what the SC refers to as the four pillars of youth engagement Respect, Listen, Understand and Communicate™.

“When we truly respect another person, we can really listen to what they are saying; by listening we can understand who they are and what they mean; by understanding each other we open the door for real communication, learning and growth” (Students Commission).

Examining Attitudes

Adults and youth bring unique perspectives to a partnership. For the project goal(s) to be achieved, it is necessary for all participants to embrace these differences and assume the dual role of teacher and learner (Dougherty, 2004). Partners must learn to work cooperatively with one another. Adults need to adopt a new lens through which to see young persons, embracing youth as assets of today, and not just leaders of tomorrow. Similarly, youth need to let go of the negative stereotypes they may have about adults. But before this can happen, adults and youth must be willing to recognize, discuss, and be honest about their reservations (Texas Network, 2002). One way to facilitate this might be to hold a training session for both youth and adults (either separately or as a large group) where persons can openly voice their opinions in a safe, non-judgmental environment. The most effective way to work past barriers is to take a proactive stance and have persons within an organization look inward and reflect on their own attitudes and behaviours (National The Innovation Centre, 1996).

The differing attitudes that adults have about youth can best be understood through William Lofquist’s Spectrum of Attitudes Theory (1989). This theoretical framework identifies types of relationship dynamics that may exist, based on classifying youth into one of three categories: objects, recipients, or partners.
When youth are regarded as objects, adults possess total control of the relationship. They see themselves as experts and believe they know what is best for youth. This attitude can be detrimental to youth engagement efforts because it leaves youth feeling devalued.

Where youth are perceived as recipients, they are seen as “mini adults-in-training”. Here, engagement opportunities are created for youth to “learn to think like adults” and structured roles are developed for them to serve within a hierarchical power dynamic. This attitude ignores that youth have a voice and do not need to be trained on what to say. To transcend this dynamic, young people must be recognized as valuable contributors and experts, rather than consumers “with potential”. Youth know what’s working, what needs improving and what needs to be introduced and, as service recipients, they should be on the frontline of evaluation. When these beliefs are present, participants can move towards the next level.

When youth are regarded as partners, adults truly understand that the right to exercise one’s abilities does not come with age. They recognize that in order for youth issues to be addressed and for youth programming to succeed, it is necessary that a working relationship grounded on mutual respect and confidence in ability exists between adults and youth.

Moving away from a client-focused approach and creating more opportunities for youth to become involved will motivate youth to build on their skills and help them address their problems (Pittman et al., 2003).

Of course, attitudes work both ways. The Continuum of Change (a conceptual model developed by Youth Infusion) illustrates the different ways that youth and adults may perceive one another within partnerships.

Meaningful youth-adult partnerships permit all members to draw upon and contribute their expertise. To achieve this, research indicates that these partnerships must move away from a traditional focus on trying to define power relations, towards an asset-based frame of thinking (Zeldin et al., 2005). Developing a real understanding about the contributions that the two groups can offer each other allows for the roles to define themselves. For example,

### Continuum of Change

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Youth are viewed as the target audience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Adults are viewed as authoritarian—out-of-touch with the younger generation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Adults are viewed as an intermittent advisor—someone to go to in times of need</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Adults are viewed as mentors—someone to learn from in both good and bad times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Adults are viewed as trusted guides and lifelong learners— they both teach and learn from youth</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Youth can provide adults with:

- Enthusiastic energy,
- Creative talents,
- Fresh perspectives,
- Direct access to youth population,
- Up-to-date information on the best mediums to reach other youth, and
- Knowledge about current challenges facing youth.

Adults can provide youth with:

- Opportunities to get involved,
- Resources,
- Mentorship,
- Support,
- Experiential knowledge regarding operations of organization, and
- Credibility with other adults and when they take programs out into the community.

**Adult Allies**

Youth engagement initiatives can only succeed and become embedded within an organization if staff is committed as a collective to the movement (Shen, 2006; Zeldin et al., 2005). One way organizations can demonstrate this commitment is to appoint an adult ally on staff to mentor, support, and advocate for youth. Effective adult allies possess a genuine belief in the capabilities of youth, ensuring that their voices and opinions are both heard and taken into account by the organization (Shen, 2006).

What makes for a good adult ally? Youth from Youth Net and the mindyourmind.ca Street Team identified the following attributes as being essential in youth-friendly adults and adult allies:

- non-judgemental
- outgoing
- flexible
- compassionate
- fun
- positive
- sensitive to the needs of youth
- honest
- friendly
- competent
- not condescending
- active listener
- knowledgeable
- helpful
- able to relate to youth interests

Research shows that youth welcome the active participation of adults, recognizing the experience and access to resources that adults have to offer. The challenge for adult allies participating in youth/adult partnerships is to find a balance between leading the project and abandoning it altogether. When adults partner with youth they often assume that youth want total control of the project. They feel that as supporters, it is their responsibility to remove themselves and step back. This will
only hinder the engagement process, however, as youth may become overwhelmed by the expectations that are being placed on them.

Adult allies should avoid giving youth too much (responsibility) too soon. In the beginning, they should work alongside young persons to ease the transition and demonstrate that there is an adult who cares (to rely on). Successful adult allies need to be aware of the abilities of youth. While it is important to not underestimate the capabilities of young persons, adult allies need to be mindful of the limitations that correspond to different levels of development (Pittman et al., 2003). Ideally, adults need to give youth the freedom to exercise their leadership potential, while providing them with opportunities to develop new skills and to grow within an organization (Libby et al., 2005).

Youth-adult partnerships require a role-shift on the part of the adult. Instead of always being the assumed “leader”, the adult can be engaged as a participant, taking direction from youth. In this way, adult allies forfeit some control in order to give youth the opportunity to triumph from their successes, and/or learn from their mistakes.

The dynamic of a youth-adult partnership will also vary depending on the levels of involvement. To say only that a partnership exists does not provide enough details about the structure of the relationship.

Starting Off On the Right Foot

Throughout the duration of the partnership, adults and youth must have equal input and collectively agree on rules, expectations, guidelines, and consequences (Texas Network, 2002). When youth first enter into an organization, much of their focus is centered on ensuring equity and equal rights. Research shows that role clarification dispels these issues of power and leads to greater importance being placed on relationships and self-worth (Zeldin et al., 2005). As youth begin to feel valued within the organization, their level of commitment increases. With this in mind, when developing a new project or program, youth should be involved in the planning process from its early stages.

Including youth in goal setting is extremely important because youth are cause-oriented and need something to work towards. However, discussing concepts and plans that involve too much forward planning may cause youth to lose interest. Developing action plans jointly can give youth focus and fulfill their need to see results. Working with youth to create structure and direction will help them develop a sense of ownership, responsibility and vested interest in the partnership – key elements in fostering meaningful experiences.

Engaging youth in developing a project or carrying out a task can be time-consuming. It is necessary to develop a flexible timeline in order to ensure that established goals are attainable for everyone involved (Libby et al., 2005). In most cases, commitment to an organization is an extracurricular activity that youth voluntarily undertake, so adults need to be sensitive to the schedules of youth when planning meetings and program-oriented activities.

Benefits of Youth-Adult Partnerships

There is a scarcity of research on the impact of intergenerational relationships. One well-known U.S. study, “Youth in decision-making: A study on the impacts of youth on adults and organizations”, (Zeldin et al., 2000) examines 15 organizations where youth participated in decision-making (through boards, advisory groups, and planning committees). The results of this study showed that working directly with youth fosters adult confidence in
youth competence, with adults acknowledging the important contributions that young persons bring to an organization. By really “listening” to youth, adults found themselves to be more aware of youth concerns and were better able to structure their programs to satisfy youth needs.

Adult feelings of confidence and effectiveness increased, and feelings of personal commitment towards the organization were strengthened. On a systems level, youth governance allowed for organizations to develop a more inclusive environment by becoming more conscious of the importance of diverse representation within their organizational culture. In addition, these intergenerational partnerships allowed for increased community outreach efforts, gave rise to the amendment of organizational policies, and reflected positively on the reputation of the organizations as being seriously committed to youth.

While the results of Zeldin et al.’s (2005) study show strong benefits for youth-adult partnerships, more research is needed in this area. Many psychological studies have looked at the impact of engagement on youth development and pro-social behaviours, but the benefits of youth-adult relationships have yet to be proven through evidence-based research. Much of the research that addresses youth engagement is cross-sectional, rather than longitudinal, making it difficult to draw cause-and-effect conclusions about youth engagement and positive youth development.

As mentioned earlier in this report, a comprehensive and ongoing evaluation component will be an integral part of The New Mental-ity project. This longitudinal study will assess participants at several intervals as they progress through the engagement process. Part of the evaluation will explore the impact of partnership on youth and adult participants. Attitudes of management will also be measured in order to learn whether or not this initiative positively impacted perceptions of youth engagement at an organizational level.
Section 3: Effective Practices for Youth Engagement
If an organization is looking to include youth on its board or on a committee, it is best to ensure that a number of spots are designated for youth so that they will not feel overwhelmed by the number of adults present.
Effective Practices for Youth Engagement

Making Decisions with Youth

“Youth governance” and “youth as decision-makers” are terms that are used interchangeably in the literature. The underlying meaning is that youth have equitable access to (and play active roles in) making decisions, setting policies, and influencing outcomes on matters that affect their lives (Texas Network, 2002). In a governance role, youth are not just actors in the project; rather, they step up as leaders and assist in directing the show, working in partnership with adults to shape the structure of organizations and/or programs that cater to youth.

The roles that youth serve on boards or planning committees differ from those of their adult counterparts and it is important for adults to recognize the unique perspective that youth offer to a decision-making body. Specifically, youth are action-driven and results-oriented; they operate most effectively when their efforts are being translated into something tangible. Youth have different interests, skills, and experiences than their adult counterparts, and it is these differences that enrich programs and services of an organization (Warner et al., 2007).

Motivations and Challenges

Youth are experts in their own right who have important things to say and can contribute to the overall improvement of an organization (Libby et al., 2005). There are many good reasons why an organization might introduce or strengthen youth governance, including:

- A desire to be accountable to youth,
- A belief that the inclusion of youth will help the organization make better decisions,
- To strengthen the relationship between the organization and the community it serves,
- To give youth the opportunity to learn more about the organization, and
- To support youth in developing/enhancing leadership skills.

(Shen, 2006; Youth Affairs, 2004; Texas Network, 2002)

Youth-serving organizations should have client/consumer representation on their boards and programming committees because these are the people who can offer direct feedback about, and insight into, the effectiveness of services. Unfortunately, the integration of youth into a decision-making body can prove to be quite challenging. Perhaps the biggest
obstacle stems from adults questioning the abilities of youth. It may be easy to proclaim that youth are competent, but gaining adult support can be difficult and may require proof through practice and experiential learning.

Typically, adults need to witness youth competencies firsthand in order to have faith in their abilities (Zeldin et al., 2005). The only way to witness youth in action is to create opportunities where they can demonstrate their skills. This solution seems logical, but can be difficult to put into practice because there are limited opportunities for youth to get involved as active agents of program structuring. A study carried out in the United States (Zeldin et al., 2001) explored the impact of youth decision-making on adults and organizations. Results showed that adult attitudes changed once they considered youth participation as having a purpose with meaningful outcomes.

To integrate youth into the decision-making process within an organization – and establish equal power relations among all members – adults must give up some of their control. This involves appreciating the assets that youth bring to the table, respecting their opinions, and taking those opinions into account in the same way as with adult colleagues. The advantage to having both youth and adults as decision-makers is that each brings forth qualities that improve decision-making outcomes. Youth are natural risk-takers and are not as intimidated as adults are in challenging the existing culture of an organization, thinking outside the box or stepping outside social norms.

**Bringing Youth on “Board”**

How a board or committee functions may need to be altered in order for youth governance to be effective. The introduction of youth onto a board requires that an organization take an honest look at how it operates. The Youth Leadership Institute (YLI) is a California-based organization that uses youth-adult partnerships within organizational structures (such as boards or advisory committees) to advocate for youth participation in community change efforts. To make the transition from a traditional adult member board to one that includes youth, the YLI (Libby et al., 2005) suggests that organizations re-evaluate their internal policies to reflect their commitment to youth and to ensure that they are prepared to bring youth members on board.

Not only does this demonstrate real commitment to youth engagement, infusing
youth participation into the organizational structure (at all levels) makes it a permanent practice throughout the entire organization (Libby et al., 2005). According to Libby et al. (2005), “Once young people experience an organizational commitment to engaging them at every level they have a tendency to stay involved with the organization for longer periods of time.”

Training for adult staff is necessary to accommodate the different skill sets that are required when adults and youth work together. Similarly, youth who are recruited to a board may not have experience acting in a governance capacity and will need training to help orient them on procedures to help increase their confidence as they enter into their new roles. Finally, the Youth Leadership Institute suggests that there must be a mechanism in place where youth and adults can offer their feedback about a partnership’s effectiveness. Practically speaking, if an organization is looking to include youth on its board or on a committee, it is best to ensure that a number of spots are designated for youth so that they will not feel overwhelmed by the number of adults present (Libby et al., 2005). Recruiting only one young person to sit on a board to act as a “voice” for all youth is an unrealistic approach to employing youth engagement. The literature suggests that it is best to create three or more positions for youth on a board so that young persons can feel comfortable voicing their opinions and/or concerns (Texas Network, 2002).

Once youth are “onboard”, adult board and committee members must make a conscious effort to ensure they are given the opportunity to speak. Two suggestions include allowing youth to talk first on a topic or issue or to have a youth act as a chair or co-chair. It is vital that youth recruitment to a board have purpose. Otherwise, the organization risks tokenism, with youth serving merely as symbols for inclusion – a form of practice that is both unfair and counterproductive. Implementing a token strategy not only widens the gap between youth and adults, it may also cause the youth to become disinterested and resentful (Khosroshahi et al., 2003). It is a good idea to pair youth members with adult mentors who can sit with them in the beginning and provide explanations if and when required. This is especially effective in the early stages as youth are transitioning into their new roles.

Introducing youth onto the board of an organization may also entail amending anti-discrimination policies to include a clause addressing ageism. In addition, a complaint-resolution mechanism that is easy for youth to follow may need to be developed. Recognizing youth in company policies and practices not only empowers and values young people it also demonstrates true organizational commitment towards youth representation.

Alternative Approaches to Youth Governance

Having young people sit at a table with adults is sometimes intimidating or boring for the youth. Fortunately, there is an effective alternative that incorporates participation in a more enjoyable way. A “parallel process” separates adults and youth into two groups. When addressing an issue, each group first discusses it amongst their peers, and then come back together to voice their opinions and reach a consensus. In the United States, the city of Hampton (Virginia) is recognized as being a leader in the sector of youth engagement. While youth representation has been enacted in a number of ways, city staff has found that a parallel process works best because it is sensitive to the developmental needs of both youth and adults (Hawthorn) and permits both groups to work in their preferred modes.

What happens, however, if an organization is unable to sustain youth involvement on its board? Such was the case with the Youth Services Bureau of Ottawa (YSB) a few years ago. Their solution was to
start a discussion with their youth members to come up with a creative solution. Now, twice a year, the board members of the YSB meet with approximately 40 youth from their youth engagement program to discuss what the board has done and/or is planning to do in the near future. Within this context, youth have the freedom to offer feedback, make suggestions, and play an active role in helping to create a strategic plan for the upcoming year. This way of coming together removes formalities that are present in board meetings, such as moving and passing motions, and offers an opportunity for youth to have meaningful input on future directions of the organization. In this capacity, youth have the chance to engage in what they understand best: action-oriented activities.

Traditional board structures that primarily give attention to policies and procedures are not youth-friendly. To make youth involvement meaningful to both the individual and the organization, the operations of a board must be more focused on vision and learning. Dennis Boyle, Executive Director of Keystone Child and Family Services (Owen Sound), strongly believes in the vision and learning model. He recognizes that in order to better meet the needs of children and youth, it is necessary for youth to be sitting on the board and providing input. He also recognizes that to really grab the attention and commitment of youth, boards must tap into their intellect. Youth want to feel that they are making meaningful contributions, a task that is difficult to achieve when more formal policies and procedures take precedence.

Keystone Child, Youth and Family Services has amended its board policies to include youth, based on a model developed by Ontario schools for their student trustees. Like the educational boards, youth participants on Keystone’s board function as ex-officio members. This means they are representatives who can take part and apply their influence in discussion and debate, but they do not have voting rights. The process of remodelling the structure of the Keystone board involved youth defining their own roles. Yet despite these efforts Keystone has only been successful in getting one young person to join its board. Nevertheless, Boyle explains that the introduction of even one youth representative has positively impacted the culture of the board and organization by challenging the perspectives of adult members and helping to broaden the services that Keystone provides. “Engaging intellect, dialogue, and discussion encourages progression”, he says.

Other Ways to Involve Youth

There are positions other than governance roles where youth can make meaningful contributions. The following is a list of common examples from the literature that are currently being used within CYMH agencies.

Ad Hoc Committees

Ad hoc committees tend to be onetime occurrences where professionals bring a group of youth together to consult on a particular youth-related issue. These committees are a good way to hear the concerns and/or suggestions of persons whose needs agencies are trying to meet. One thing that adults should keep in mind is to not allow their own opinions and interpretations interfere with what youth are actually communicating. In the document “Youth Partnerships and Participation” the Foundation for Young Australians suggests that adults can work through this challenge by having team meetings where youth ad hoc input is shared and interpreted. Another suggestion is for adults to hold an information session where youth can provide feedback about the conclusions that adults have drawn.
Youth as Consultants

Youth who act as consultants provide feedback to organizations on their programs and services. They also voice their opinions on ideas that organizations bring forward for consideration. This engagement strategy is used when adults want to access the opinions of youth, but may not have the means to accommodate them within their organizations.

Reference Groups

Youth who belong to reference groups evaluate the current position of operations within a particular aspect of the organization and suggest strategies for improvement. While reference groups do not have direct decision-making power, their input is passed on to those that do. Because of this, it is important that youth in these groups receive feedback, so they can be assured of real influence (Foundation for Young Australians, 2000).

Advisory Groups

Youth who sit on advisory groups advise management or the Board of Directors on the operations of the organization. In order for this group to be effective, there must be constant dialogue between youth and adult managers. Roles and expectations must also be clearly identified to avoid frustrations over levels of power or control.

Peer-to-Peer Support

Within this role, young people act as peer counsellors and receive training in areas such as active listening, facilitation, conflict mediation, and issues that youth commonly face (such as substance abuse, depression, anxiety, peer pressure). Throughout the process adult professionals support the youth peer counsellors.

Peer Educators

When peers lead youth through a workshop or discussion forum, this is known as a peer-to-peer learning model. No one understands youth better than youth themselves – they know which issues are important to persons in their age demographic, and can offer valuable suggestions on how messages can best be delivered. If the intention is to communicate a message or deliver a workshop to youth; gather a group of youth volunteers, offer them training on presentation techniques, include them in designing the workshop, and allow them to act as facilitators.
Researchers

One important but seldom utilized role that youth can play within organizations is that of researchers.

Traditionally, young persons have been viewed only as objects of research, but the Convention on the Rights of the Child has provided an opportunity for their roles to be expanded and redefined through participatory action research (PAR). In this type of research, youth assume the dual role of subject and researcher. Within this context, young participants are part of the research team and have input into everything from defining the problem(s), developing the primary research question, establishing goals and outcomes, and evaluating results.

A study out of the UK entitled *Children as Active Researchers: A New Research Paradigm for the 21st Century* (Kellett, 2005) found that children's engagement in research has a positive effect on their self-development. Moreover, they feel empowered by having their voices heard (Kellett, 2005). On a systems level, research supporting PAR suggests that programs and organizations that include youth in research and evaluation processes have higher levels of youth involvement, gain greater community support, and are more appealing to funders (TYPS, 2006). Interestingly enough, these factors also contribute to sustained engagement.

Sceptics of the PAR approach feel that children and youth are not competent enough to carry out research because of their ages, while supporters argue that social experience is a more reliable measure of competence (Kellett, 2005). One cannot deny that youth are the experts when it comes to their own generation, and possess insight into a culture that adults can no longer access directly. Adults’ reluctance to involve youth may also center on young people’s unfamiliarity with research procedures – a challenge that can be addressed by helping youth to understand research practices and methodology so they can participate in research and make informed decisions (Kellett, 2005).

Overall, participatory action research creates better conditions for the group being studied, as research results can be immediately integrated into programming. Moreover, when the evaluation report is written in partnership with youth, results are more easily accessible and clearly communicated to them.
Section 4: Making Youth Engagement Happen!
Many young people seek choice and spontaneity in short-term and long-term opportunities. Provide volunteer assignments that can be done after school, on weekends, or during school holidays.
Making Youth Engagement Happen!

Over the past decade, youth engagement has become increasingly popular within organizations and communities. Despite increased efforts to integrate youth, however, barriers to engagement opportunities still exist. A common challenge that may prevent organizations from creating opportunities for youth is the lack of knowledge in this area. The following five-step model, based on common trends identified in the literature, has been constructed as a process model to offer direction on how to make youth engagement happen. Each step presents tools, strategies and/or research findings that professionals can draw on as they venture through the youth engagement process.

Step 1: Analyze Your Current Position

Youth Participation can take many forms. If an organization does not yet practice youth engagement, adults must first ask which potential opportunities can be developed for youth. If young people are already engaged, adults must take an honest look at how youth operate within their organization.

One tool for assessing an organization’s level of and/or readiness for youth engagement is Harry Shier’s (2001) “Pathways to Participation” model. In this model youth participation progresses sequentially from youth being listened to at level one, to being supported in expressing their views at level two, to having their views taken into account at level three, to being involved in decision-making processes at level four, to sharing power in decision-making at level five. At each level there are three stages of commitment/questions that can help organizations determine their current positions and establish a planning process to get to the next level: Openings (willingness to engage); Opportunities (avenues within an organization to make engagement happen); and Obligations (where youth engagement is embedded into policies and procedures and becomes a way of operating).

Other helpful assessment tools that organizations can use to measure their capacity to engage youth include the Laidlaw Foundation’s practical “Self-Evaluation Checklist” and Youth Infusion’s “Youth-Adult Engagement Readiness Assessment” framework. The Youth Infusion framework is particularly interesting as it incorporates input from the staff as a whole, recognizing that youth engagement is a cultural shift that affects all members within an organization. Both of these resources can be found in Appendix B.
Shier’s Pathways to Participation

Start Here: Children are listened to.

Are you ready to listen to children?

Are you ready to support children in expressing their views?

Are you ready to take children’s views into account?

Are you ready to let children join in on your decision-making processes?

Are you ready to share some of your adult power with children?

Openings

Do you work in a way that enables you to listen to children?

Do you have a range of ideas and activities to help children express their views?

Does your decision making process enable you to take children’s views into account?

Is there a procedure that enables children to join in decision-making processes?

Is there a procedure that entitles children to share power and responsibility for decisions?

Opportunities

Is it a policy requirement that children must be listened to?

Is it a policy requirement that children must be supported in expressing their views?

Is it a policy requirement that children’s views must be given due weight in decision-making?

Is it a policy requirement that children must be involved in decision-making processes?

Is it a policy requirement that children and adults share power and responsibility for decisions?

Obligations

This is the minimum requirement if you endorse the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child


READY...SET...ENGAGE!
Taking On a New Approach

Associated with the positive thinking of “youth as assets” is the concept of Appreciative Inquiry (AI). This practice challenges organizations to take on a strengths-based approach when assessing and adapting their services for youth. Rather than focusing on the problems that exist within programs, AI challenges organizations to capitalize on their successes.

The AI questioning process asks:

- What is working within the organization?
- What strategies or processes were followed to make this happen?
- What next steps can be taken to build upon this positive work?


Step 2: Create a Youth-Friendly Environment

Supporting the idea of youth engagement – and working to embed it into the culture of an organization – are two very different attitudes. This goes back to the old adage “actions speak louder than words”.

What does it mean to be youth-friendly? The following is a list of characteristics that are commonly identified in the literature.

Make youth feel wanted by:

- Fostering a warm and welcoming environment.
- Respecting youth as individuals and not expecting them to conform to adult culture.
- Allowing youth to be active contributors in the design, development, and implementation of a program.
- Assigning an adult ally to work with youth.
- Recognizing the importance of accessibility by providing transportation or by covering transportation costs.
- Providing flexible hours of operation.
- Seeking feedback from youth about what is working, and what needs improvement.
- Allowing them the freedom to voice their own opinions without making assumptions.
- Being open-minded to learning from youth.
- Working with youth to develop policies for youth engagement within the organization.

Upholding the rights of youth is the underlying basis for youth engagement. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child made it public law for youth to have a voice on issues that affect them, but failed to present a method of practice. The Declaration of Accountability on the Ethical Engagement of Young People and Adults in Canadian Organizations (Alderman et al., 2006) has developed an ethical model of good practice that outlines seven principles that institutions can adopt to meaningfully engage youth. These seven principles include:

**Principle 1: Youth engagement is not a program.**
Integration of youth should occur in all areas (and at all levels) of an organization. Youth engagement should be understood as a
method of operating, not just as an initiative.

**Principle 2: Children should be recruited on the basis of relevant qualifications, and not on age alone.**
The experience will be more meaningful if youth are able to contribute to a cause that they believe in, or have experience with.

**Principle 3: One youth representative cannot be the voice for all youth.**

**Principle 4: Debate is a learning tool.**
Debate builds on knowledge, gives everyone opportunities to be teachers and learners, and encourages personal and organizational growth.

**Principle 5: Dignity and Safety.**
Personal safety should be a primary concern. People should not feel obligated by an organization to take on something that compromises their physical and mental health.

**Principle 6: Avoid false expectations.**
Remember to be realistic about the abilities of youth.

**Principle 7: Balance and Accessibility.**
Organizations must ensure they are meeting and accommodating the needs of youth as required (for example, coordinating a meeting time that fits their schedule, offering reimbursements for travel expenses).

**Step 3: Get Youth on Board**

Informing youth about opportunities can be a challenge if youth-adult contact is irregular, but this can be done successfully if adults understand the needs and interests of youth. A 1998 study by Katherine Gaskin identifies eight characteristics that young persons look for when deciding where to volunteer. Based on this study, the Institute for Volunteering Research has developed its FLEXIVOL Model (Lukka, 2000) which provides a clear description of each characteristic:

**Flexibility**- Young people seek choice and spontaneity in short-term and long-term opportunities. Provide volunteer assignments that can be done after school, on weekends, or during school holidays.

**Legitimacy**- Provide information about the full range of volunteer work available and explain its significance. Young people want to know how they are making a difference.

**Ease of Access**- Make sure that information is available about your organization and the volunteer position. Be clear about how you will help the volunteer prepare for this role and explain what kind of training you will provide.

**Xperience**- What skills will youth learn through the volunteer position and how will these skills further their career paths? Explain the relevance of the volunteer experience by making direct connections with employment possibilities.

**Incentives**- Offer tangible rewards, especially references.

**Variety**- Young people want opportunity to explore their interests and work towards personal goals. Can you promise them work that will keep them learning about new things?

**Organizations**- Young people are looking for an efficient but informal environment. They want to participate in a relaxed and supportive workplace. Reassure them that they will not be overwhelmed with policies and procedures. Let them know that checklists or phone and e-mail check-ins are as valid as written reports.

**Laughs**- Young people want their volunteer experiences to be enjoyable, satisfying and fun.
The Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement’s *Process of Youth Engagement Model* outlines the many different personal and external factors that initiate and sustain barriers for involvement at individual, organizational, and community levels. To address these factors, this model recommends a multifaceted approach as the key to developing an effective recruitment strategy.

### Process of Youth Engagement Model

**Initiating factors: (How and why youth become engaged/involved)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Want to:</th>
<th>Have to:</th>
<th>Need to:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>personal interest/passion/enjoyment</td>
<td>sense of obligation</td>
<td>family initiated- parent/guardian signed you up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>professional/personal development/benefit</td>
<td>sense of guilt</td>
<td>school initiated mandatory community involvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>boredom</td>
<td>sense of responsibility</td>
<td>post-secondary application required</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>inspired/encouraged by another person</td>
<td>values/beliefs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>youth-friendly environment (e.g., food being offered, good people already involved)</td>
<td>prove something</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>have a voice/make a difference</td>
<td>norm/natural progression</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Motivation + Opportunities**

Influenced by another person or made aware of opportunities through advertisement or through participation in/with other activities/organizations

### Sustaining Factors: (What keeps youth engaged/involved)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individual Factors</th>
<th>Organizational Factors</th>
<th>Community and Societal Factors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>enjoyment/values/beliefs/personal interest/passion</td>
<td>provides opportunities</td>
<td>make significant, sustainable changes in the community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>personal rewards/benefits</td>
<td>youth-friendly environment</td>
<td>problems in society and community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sense of responsibility/commitment/obligation</td>
<td>supportive environment</td>
<td>nothing else to do in one’s community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>social aspects/acceptance</td>
<td>role models</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>working towards a goal</td>
<td>recognition of accomplishments</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Barriers: (What prevents youth from becoming and/or staying engaged/involved)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal Barriers</th>
<th>School/Family/Organizational Barriers</th>
<th>Community/Societal Barriers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>time</td>
<td>parent disapprove/don’t provide support (financial)</td>
<td>lack of guidance/support from adults</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>indifference</td>
<td>organizational involvement is not youth-friendly</td>
<td>lack of opportunities and knowledge of opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>disillusionment</td>
<td>organizational structure</td>
<td>lack of respect for youth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lack of confidence</td>
<td>group dynamics</td>
<td>limited community resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>personal limitations</td>
<td>limited opportunities</td>
<td>ageism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>limited capacity</td>
<td>discrimination</td>
<td>attitudes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>unrealistic goals</td>
<td>limited resources</td>
<td>media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>life circumstances</td>
<td>school structure</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>individual personalities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>negative experiences</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Street Team Strategies

In the early stages of this pilot project, The New Mentality team travelled Ontario to visit various agencies that are employing youth engagement initiatives within their organizations. The aim was to gain more knowledge on how to get a youth engagement project off the ground. While the literature offers many effective practices, the team felt it would be beneficial to tap into the expertise of persons who were successfully carrying out youth engagement within their agencies.

In a discussion with the Street Team at mindyourmind.ca several ideas for recruiting youth were recommended:

- Attend local community events and distribute flyers or set up displays,
- Set up booths or put up posters in public libraries,
- Set up booths after school or on weekends near food courts or movie theatres at malls.
- Ask clothing or music stores if you can put up posters or leave a stack of flyers on their counter for customers to see,
- Latch onto local bands,
- Advertise on popular online sites that youth frequently visit such as myspace.com or facebook.com,
- Go to local high schools and make classroom presentations or speak at an assembly, and
- Be creative in your delivery to get the attention of youth.

Common suggestions that emerged when talking to adults from CYMH organizations included:

Get Online – The youth of today are the online generation. With increased access to computers, youth rely on the Internet as their primary source of information. If an organization has a website, work to ensure that opportunities for youth involvement are posted online and are visible. If youth have to work at finding advertisements then chances are that an organization will be overlooked as a volunteer spot. To attract youth, organizations must ensure that their website is youth-friendly – make it visually pleasing.

Youth to Youth Approach – During adolescence, the most influential people in a young person’s life are their peers. These are the people they most relate with and want to talk to. Once there are youth volunteers on board, work with them to develop a recruitment strategy.

Hold a Conference – Bringing young people together to talk about youth-related issues might spark their interest to become further involved.

Target High School Students – Get the message out to parents, teachers and guidance counsellors. All students in Ontario must complete volunteer hours in order to graduate; this can act as a catalyst for more long-term involvement.

Make it Youth-Friendly – If posters are being put up around the community, make sure to use youth-friendly language. The message needs to be “short and sweet” and the presentation visually appealing.
If organizations wish to gain access to youth they need to tap into their interests, draw on their values, go to where they are, and communicate to people who have influence in their lives such as parents, teachers – and other youth. One way to bring youth together and spark their interest in becoming engaged is to hold a youth conference to initiate discussion about a topic and get youth to create action plans to carry out educational programming within their communities. The Students Commission uses conferences as its primary method for engaging youth. It operates according to a youth-adult partnership model where conferences are created for youth, by youth, in partnership with adults. These conferences give young persons an opportunity to get together to voice their concerns, and identify potential solutions on social issues that affect their lives.

The Students Commission believes that these types of gatherings help to foster positive attitudes about engagement – and the research supports this. In the study, “Youth Conferences as a Context for Engagement” (2002), Pancer et al. examine the impact of conferences on youth and conclude that events such as these:

- Promote self-awareness and personal growth,
- Make youth feel empowered, respected, and supported,
- Provide opportunities for learning and expanding ways of thinking,
- Give youth hope for the future, and
- Provide youth with resources to take back to their communities, and potential ideas to put into action.

Step 4: Keep Youth Interested

Once youth are recruited, the next challenge is to maintain their interest and commitment. The goal here is to make their experience meaningful. In 2002, the Heartwood Institute out of Nova Scotia conducted participatory action research with twenty youth centres across Nova Scotia in an attempt to identify how these centres maintained successful operations. The results of the study uncovered five key ingredients that contribute to success.
These include:

- youth ownership,
- mentorship,
- community connectedness,
- effective coordination, and
- a sustainable energy source.

These five ingredients can be expanded to provide an understanding of what needs to happen for youth involvement to be meaningful and ongoing.

Youth ownership gives young people opportunities to grow and assume responsibility in making decisions alongside adults concerning issues that affect the organization/program.

Building on this sense of ownership is effective coordination, where energies are concentrated on finding the strengths of group members and drawing on those talents to enrich the quality of the program.

Mentorship ensures youth have adult support when required. Within this capacity, adults act as role models and resources for the youth. In addition to sharing the experiential knowledge that helps youth work within an organization or community, mentoring also demonstrates a desire and openness to learn from youth.

Adult staff represents a sustained energy source for youth-centred projects. Consequently, it is vital that they understand and value youth engagement. Many think money is the key ingredient for a program to thrive, but advocates for youth engagement would argue that personal commitment, dedication, and enthusiasm take precedence over finances.

Developing community connectedness helps make youth feel more empowered and gives adults a new lens through which to see youth as contributing members of society.

Within these successful operations, the Heartwood Institute has identified additional key components that must be present to maintain youth involvement. These include:

- **Adventuresome Learning**— experiences that are fun, engaging and challenging.
- **Meaningful Contribution**— engaging youth to meet a genuine need.
- **Peer Support**— acquiring a sense of belonging from other youth and the community as a whole.

### How do we know if youth are feeling engaged?

What qualities emerge as a result of active youth participation? A 2002 study by the CEYE (Luken, 2002) surveyed 78 youth-serving organizations in Canada via telephone interviews. The results of the survey showed that youth feel engaged when:

- They are respected, valued, trusted, feel appreciated, safe and comfortable,
- They are working in a youth-friendly environment and contributing in a meaningful way,
- Their voices are heard,
- They are given the chance to be involved and make decisions, gain leadership skills and see their ideas realized,
- There is a social aspect to their involvement,
- They see change and progress happening,
- Their imaginations are touched and they are valued,
- They are in a space where they have ownership and control.
Positive Youth-Adult Partnerships – based on mutual caring and respect.

Empowerment – experiences where youth feel valued and have the power to make a difference.

Step 5: Evaluate with Youth

Evaluations help organizations determine how well projects apply resources, meet outcomes, and impact target audiences. To successfully evaluate youth engagement initiatives, organizations must be open to including youth in the process – a practice known as participatory evaluation (PE). The purpose of PE is not to fulfill the interests of donors, but rather, to serve as a practical tool for assessing whether or not programs are meeting expectations, and to identify what needs improvement. Including those who are directly involved in a program ensures that the evaluation will have relevant feedback to build on the success of the youth engagement initiative.

Project outcomes are not the only factors that evaluations measure. Staff can use evaluations to learn how project participants are feeling. Youth-adult partnerships are effective in practice, but can be difficult to foster, so it is important that feedback be received from both adults and youth. As frontline participants, they possess first-hand insight into what did and did not work.

The Laidlaw Foundation has developed an Evaluation Tool Kit for Building an Organization’s Capacity to Engage Youth (www.laidlawfdn.org/cms/file/children/youth-eval-toolkit.pdf). This toolkit includes samples of questionnaires that can be administered to youth and adult participants to gain perspective on what the experience was like for them as individuals.

The Town Youth Participation Strategy (TYPS) strongly supports the practice of PE and concludes that organizations who adopt participatory action research and participatory evaluation have stronger levels of youth engagement, better overall community support, enhanced funding opportunities, and improved potential for sustainability.

Principles of Participatory Evaluation

- Participatory evaluation focuses on learning, success, and action.
- The evaluation is useful to those who are doing the work that is being evaluated.
- The evaluation process is ongoing and includes ways to let all participants use information from the evaluation throughout the project, not just at the end.
- Recognition of the progression of change – knowledge, attitudes, skills, and behaviour – is built into the evaluation.
- Participatory evaluation makes it possible to recognize shared interests.

Conclusion

Depending on an organization’s objectives and readiness, there are many different ways in which youth can become meaningfully engaged and make positive contributions. But this is not something that can be done overnight; it is a process that is defined over time and perfected through commitment.

The keys to fostering youth engagement are:

- make the experience meaningful,
- give it purpose,
- demonstrate genuine support, and
- empower youth to become advocates for their own needs.

For youth-serving agencies, the importance of engaging youth should be self-evident. Research shows that integrating youth improves the ability of organizations to meet the needs of young clients. In addition, engaged youth not only bring their energy and creativity to the table, they also experience health benefits from being engaged – a win-win situation. The most efficient way of addressing the mental health needs of youth is for adults to partner with and include them in program planning and decision-making. The necessary culture shift for this to happen is acknowledgment of youth not just as consumers or having problems that need to be solved, but as instruments of change with voices and perspectives that can, given the chance, positively impact organizations and communities.

Through the strategies, tools and practices included in this resource, it is hoped that adult allies for The New Mentality and individuals working in the child and youth mental health sector will expand the roles of youth in their organizations. The New Mentality invites CYMH organizations to join in on the learning as we get this youth engagement initiative off the ground. It’s time for professionals and youth to come together and work to create a stronger mental health system to meet the needs of youth. It’s time to give mental health a youth voice… Time to take action… Time to engage!
Appendix A

Youth Engagement within Ontario Child and Youth Mental Health Organizations

In the early stages of this project The New Mentality Team visited a number of child and youth mental health organizations across Ontario to discuss what they are doing to actively engage youth. The following identifies some of the exciting and innovative ways young people across the province are being empowered to have a voice when it comes to creating a mental health system that reflects and serves the issues that are most important to youth.

Algonquin Child and Family Services

Algonquin Child and Family Services has partnered with local high schools to implement a youth engagement initiative based on a restorative justice program model. This model builds a strong sense of community among all students by creating a more restorative culture within the school environment. The program is still in its pilot stages, but to date, 345 youth and 60 staff and community members have been trained as peer mediators and restorative justice facilitators. The role of the peer mediators is to facilitate small group discussions and help fellow students who are in conflict situations listen to one another, work through differences, and find an agreed means of moving forward. This program is in keeping with the internal policies of the participating schools as well as the Education and Safe Schools Act. The implementation of this program has adults and youth working together: 5-8 youth sit on the steering committee and are given opportunities to voice their opinions, provide input, and participate in decision-making.

Centre for Addiction and Mental Health

Creating a space where the voices of young women can be heard was the impetus behind a youth-led initiative called VALIDITY – Vibrant Action Looking into Depression in Today’s Young Women. Sponsored by the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH), VALIDITY was created in 1999 to hear and learn more about what young women have to say about depression.

In partnership with a Provincial Youth Action Team, VALIDITY has conducted focus groups and hosted a provincial conference where young women (ages 13-24) are encouraged to talk about their lives and to identify risk factors and prevention strategies related to depression. More than 300 young women across Ontario have joined in this participatory action research project since its inception.

Based on their explorations, the youth action team made recommendations that included the development of resources for professionals and a resource guide for
by violence in some way, and they draw on their experiences to raise awareness and teach youth in the community about prevention strategies.

Respect in Schools Everywhere (RISE) is a manualized program designed by EMYS to help young people reduce the level of violence in their schools and communities. It is based on evidence-based practices for violence prevention and has been proven to provide both primary and secondary effects. In the RISE program student leaders and at-risk students are identified and recruited to deliver workshops and carry out violence prevention activities and events at their schools. Youth leaders are given training in violence prevention and leadership skills, as well as opportunities to network with students, parents, and within their local communities. Topics covered by RISE include: bullying, cyber-bullying, date rape, and gender-based harassment.

Reach Out Centre for Kids

Youth Aiding Youth is a peer-mentoring program that matches youth between the ages of 15-24 with children between the ages of 6-12. This prevention/early intervention program is aimed at children who are considered to be at high risk for mental health difficulties, but who have not yet experiencing significant problems. The mentorship relationship seeks to help children develop social skills and self-esteem. Youth mentors also act as advisors, offering suggestions for improvement and program ideas to the coordinator.

Keystone Child, Youth and Family Services

In 2006, Keystone created two positions on its Board of Directors for youth consumers. In preparation for this shift, the organization researched different engagement models for healthcare providers, co-written by young women and clinicians, called Hear Me, Understand Me, Support Me. Woven throughout powerful personal stories from participants are discussions about risk factors for depression, prevention strategies and what young women want – and do not want – from service providers.

Another VALIDITY initiative is “Girls Talk” – an eight-session education and prevention program that provides adolescent girls with a chance to share ideas, experiences and insights about mental health, depression and life in general in a safe and nurturing environment. The pilot ran in spring 2004 at two high schools in the Halton region and in Ottawa. Girls Talk groups have also been conducted with young women from First Nation and Francophone communities, in mainstream high school settings, and with several other diverse groups.

Girls Talk is currently being revised and will expand to include topics such as resiliency, empowerment, body esteem/self care and understanding values.

East Metro Youth Services

The Violence Intervention Program (VIP) is a 1997 youth initiative that is still going strong within East Metro Youth Services (EMYS). The mission of VIP is to create safer communities by encouraging young people to take an active role in developing and delivering programs to youth in schools and community locations, while building strong partnerships with community organizations in order to reduce youth violence.

The VIP program incorporates skills development, experiential learning and education to develop youth expertise in the areas of problem solving, conflict resolution, communication, public speaking, negotiation, teamwork, assertiveness, and decision-making. Youth on the VIP team have all been affected
READY...SET...ENGAGE!

Youth ages 12-24 a forum and opportunities to achieve their full potential. This program has a youth advisory council of six to ten members who play an active role in how SOYC is run. Youth suggest new programs that they would like to see and evaluate those that already exist. SOYC has developed a variety of groups that are informed by the needs or interests of youth. Examples of past groups include:

- Job Coaching
- Girl Talk
- Speak Your Mind – Hot Topics on Social Issues
- Leadership programs on conflict resolution and peer mentoring
- Social Connections, which provides opportunities for isolated youth to meet other youth and form supportive relationships to help them obtain more confidence and competence with social skills.

In order to track the demographic of youth coming into the centre, surveys are distributed on a biweekly basis. These surveys track factors such as age, area of residence, and reasons for accessing the centre.

**Regional Multicultural Youth Council**

The Regional Multicultural Youth Council (RMYC) is a youth-run organization that seeks to engage young people from small and isolated communities in North-Western Ontario. Its mission is to mobilize all youth towards a fair and just society where there is equal opportunity, equal access, and equal participation for all, regardless of race, ethnicity, or cultural background. The council operates according to a youth-to-youth approach, which seeks to empower children and youth and provide them with activities to foster their wellbeing and improve their quality of life. While this group does not specifically focus on mental health, it deserves mention because it includes youth in governance practices. In addition, the opinions of youth were solicited about the types of roles that youth could serve on their board. As a result, Keystone has officially expressed its commitment towards youth participation by amending its board policies and by providing a written description of the roles that youth will serve.

**mindyourmind.ca**

Statistics report that 1 out of 5 children suffers from a mental health disorder, yet many young persons are not accessing services. In response to this need, mindyourmind.ca has taken a proactive stance and developed an online strategy to assist youth in getting help. The thinking is that if adults and agencies really want to conduct outreach, they need to go to the places where youth feel comfortable and naturally go to seek information. For most youth the Internet is the logical choice. The mindyourmind.ca website is an outreach tool for youth that provides resources, skills, and information to help them cope with mental health difficulties and get help for themselves or their friends. Youth engagement is at the heart of this organization, which is what helps make it a success. Youth from the mindyourmind.ca Street Team advise adult staff on everything, from how to keep the site youth-friendly, in both presentation and content, to making sure that issues that are most important to young people are front and centre. Moreover, the street team actively promotes positive mental health among youth in the community through their work to reduce the stigma associated with mental health.

**Peel Children’s Centre/ Nexus Youth Services**

The Square One Youth Centre (SOYC) is a drop-in where youth are welcome to come in and hang out at any time. Its mission is to give

---

**READY...SET...ENGAGE!**
is a youth-led initiative that has become very successful in its ability to draw in youth and connect with the community. Moffat Makuto (adult supporter of RMYC) explains that rather than have adult workers working for youth, this organization supports the idea of youth working for themselves. The presence of an adult is a mere legality. Youth are the directors, planners and decision makers concerning all council operations and the board is comprised entirely of youth. Recognizing that youth are sometimes hesitant to open up to adults, the RMYC prescribes to a peer-to-peer model. The RMYC has learned that having youth at the forefront gives them the freedom to identify the issues that are most important to them, and the opportunity to develop their own solutions to address those problems. This sense of ownership strengthens levels of participation which in turn motivates youth to put forth their best efforts.

Whitby Mental Health Centre

The Whitby Mental Health Centre conducts “Stomping Out Stigma” (S.O.S) summits for students in the Durham region. These daylong events gather youth and teachers at the Whitby Mental Health Centre. Participants hear stories from mental health consumers and are led through interactive workshops from mental health professionals on the topics of stigma and various mental health disorders. These summits also provide students with an opportunity to gain leadership skills. They are given resources to assist them in building teams in their schools and a toolkit to guide them through the process of creating their own original student-led initiatives. After attending the conference, many delegates show a dramatic increase in knowledge about mental illness and report a positive change in attitude towards persons living with mental health disorders. In an attempt to help share their newfound knowledge, many students report feeling inspired and taking action to create anti-stigma campaigns at their schools. In May of 2007, the S.O.S. summit model was awarded the Minister’s Innovation Award for Health Promotion.

Youth Net /Réseau Ado (Halton & Ottawa)

Youth Net /Réseau Ado (YN/RA) is a bilingual mental health promotion and intervention program run by youth, for youth. It emerged as a result of the Canadian Youth Mental Health and Illness Survey (Canadian Psychiatric Association, 1994).

Survey results indicated:

- Youth were at a high risk for mental health problems,
- Youth were unhappy with current mental health services, and
- Youth are likely to talk with people their own age before talking to their parents or professionals.

The format for YN/RA was developed through 20 pilot focus groups with 200 young people from a variety of backgrounds. These youth felt that for Youth Net to be meaningful, it needed to be led by youth. As a result, Youth Net has developed and utilizes a “youth helping youth” format where facilitators are older youth who are young enough to remember what it’s like to be an adolescent, but who are old enough to have had some life experience.

YN/RA sites currently exist in Ottawa, Halton, Peel, Grey Bruce and Hamilton ON, Delta BC, Montréal, Montérégie and Montmagny QC, and Newcastle, England. Youth Nets run independently, with programs and structures differing based on regional needs and the resources available from supporting agencies.

One objective of the Youth Net program is to provide youth with a safe space to express, explore, and discuss their views about mental
health.

Within the Halton Region, Youth Net Halton holds youth group discussions primarily in public high schools. Older youth (usually between the ages of 19-29) become trained facilitators, and guide their younger peers through interactive discussion sessions. These workshops take place without the presence of a teacher or counselor in the room, to encourage open and honest discussion.

Youth Net Halton runs the “Talking About Mental Illness” (TAMI) program. TAMI is a powerful anti-stigma curriculum that brings volunteers from the Canadian Mental Health Association into classrooms to share with students their real life experiences with mental illness. Depending on the schools, TAMI may be run as a stand-alone program or in conjunction with Youth Net discussion groups.

Pens and Paints is an eight-week program designed to meet the needs of youth aged 15-19 that are at greater risk of having mental health issues and/or being marginalized for various societal factors. Each session incorporates one specific theme coupled with an artistic activity.

In Ottawa, all of the programs at Youth Net/Réseau Ado (YN/RA) are initiated, developed, and delivered in collaboration with youth. Located at the Children’s Hospital of Eastern Ontario, as part of its Mental Health Patient Service Unit, YN/RA strives to reduce the stigma surrounding mental health and mental illness through prevention activities, education, research and advocacy. YN/RA provides alternative support services for youth in schools, community centers, treatment centers, detention centers, and drop-ins – any place where youth are found in rural and urban areas.

Like other Youth Nets, YN/RA helps youth explore mental health and strengthen coping mechanisms through forums in which youth are provided with an opportunity to be heard and to act on their own behalf. This includes:

- Free facilitated focus groups where youth can have open discussions about mental health issues, learn from one another about various coping strategies and be connected to youth-friendly resources.
- Support groups offered in partnership with community organizations; these include groups such as Girls Talk and other support groups specifically requested by youth.
- Youth Fax/Fax Ado newsletters written, designed, and edited by youth for youth on a variety of mental health topics.

YN/RA also supports youth who want to start their own unique initiatives such as:

- Pens and Paints
- The Free Ride snowboarding program
- The Take a Hike outdoor program
- Yoga for Youth

Youth Services Bureau of Ottawa

Within Ottawa’s Youth Services Bureau (YSB), not only do youth receive services, they are also actively involved in many facets of the organization. The YSB subscribes to a “power with” verses “power over” youth engagement model that works in partnership with youth, and supports youth voices within both YSB and the community-at-large. Beyond its formal youth engagement program, YSB integrates and supports youth participation in programs and services that include its youth tenant associations, its internal committees (such as the Speakers Bureau and Youth Recognition Committee), and external committees that include various networks within the City of Ottawa. By incorporating youth engagement at all levels of the organization, a stronger and very visible youth voice has been created to impact the services delivered to Ottawa.
youth. The YSB believes it has been successful in attracting and involving youth because it takes the time to listen to what they are saying and treats young people as valued members of the organization.

This agency has a number of youth engagement programs currently operating which include:

- **The Education and Advocacy Youth Advisory** provides feedback to the YSB Board of Directors, managers and staff on how to most effectively engage and work in partnership with youth to develop programs and services to better meet their needs – especially for high-risk youth.

- **The Rainbow Youth Advisory** focuses on issues raised by Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Two-Spirited, and Transgender youth. The advisory works at addressing these issues through awareness campaigns and community education.

- **The Downtown Youth Advisory** focuses on issues faced by street-involved and homeless youth. This advisory works in partnership with the YSB downtown services and drop-in program to increase youth voice, identify trends and issues, and establish program goals. The youth advisory also assumes a mentoring role for youth that access the drop-in and provides a bridge between youth and staff.

- **In partnership with the HIV/AIDS program, the Harm Reduction Youth Advisory reaches out to schools and other youth programs through workshops that link harm reduction methods to issues such as HIV/AIDS, Hep C, substance abuse, and safer sex. This group frequently participates in community initiatives such as networks, panel discussions, and harm reduction training.**

- **The Ethno-Cultural Youth Advisory** focuses on the needs of visible minority youth, with a particular focus on new immigrant youth issues. The mission of this team is to assist in the development of better services for this population of youth.

- **Twice a year, the board conducts a retreat with the entire youth engagement program (up to 40 youth) to set organizational direction and programming for the coming year.**
## Appendix B

**Tools for Evaluating Organizational Readiness**

**Laidlaw Foundation’s Self-Evaluation Checklist**

This checklist can be accessed online at: [www.laidlawfdn.org/cms/file/children/youth-eval-toolkit.pdf](http://www.laidlawfdn.org/cms/file/children/youth-eval-toolkit.pdf)

**Assessing Your Organization’s Capacity to Engage Youth**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Training/mentoring</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Challenges/Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Budget to train adults in working with and/or engaging youth</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Budget to train youth in working with adults</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presence of adult mentor(s) to help guide youth</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orientation provided to the organization and adult members prior to beginning involvement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An attempt to match the organization /board /team with the youth was made while honouring the youth's time commitments, interest, and availability in participation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Leadership                                                                     |     |    |                     |
| Presence of an adult visionary leader, with institutional authority, to strongly advocate for youth decision-making within the organization |     |    |                     |
| Presence of adults who are prepared and motivated to work collaboratively with young people |     |    |                     |
| Presence of youth who are prepared and motivated to work collaboratively with adults |     |    |                     |

| Opportunities for meaningful involvement                                  |     |    |                     |
| Existing opportunities for youth and adults to [do activities] work together |     |    |                     |
| Formal positions and/or roles/responsibilities (i.e., position on the board, governance role, staff role etc.) has been assigned for a youth to fill |     |    |                     |

---

**READY...SET...ENGAGE!**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Youth have a clear understanding of their role within the organization</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Challenges/Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Existing opportunities for youth to design projects</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Existing opportunities for youth to manage projects</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Existing opportunities for youth to lead projects</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth in governing positions (i.e., board, decision-making) receive all mailings and information that others in governing roles would receive</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A plan is in place to ensure that youth who are working with the organization succeed (i.e., to ensure that power is shared with youth, to ensure that youth are well supported)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Culture of Your Organization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization has made youth and adult partnership an operational priority</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Challenges/Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Youth involvement is an organizational expectation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adults within the organization strongly advocate for including young people in decision-making roles</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity is appreciated as part of the organization's culture</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relevant Partnerships formed with other groups/organizations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal strategies, policies, or structures in place to involve youth in decision-making roles within the organisation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth who work within the organization provide ongoing feedback, ideas and support for increasing youth participation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Active Recruitment of Youth

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outreach efforts targeting youth and aim to involve different community members</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Challenges/Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Activities integrate the different needs of the community groups</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Youth-Friendly Structure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The project accommodates unique needs of youth (e.g., transportation, financial constraints). Flexible times are set for meetings (evenings, weekends)</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Challenges/Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meetings are short and action-oriented</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process exists that allows for learning/open discussion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elements in place to ensure that youth voice and action are valued and included in efforts aimed at social or community change</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effort in place to create an environment that is interactive, fun and stimulates self-directed learning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Appendix B
### Sustainability

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sustainability</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Challenges/Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Important elements are in place that can help to make the project a success:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Evaluation plan</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Technical assistance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Partnerships</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Networks across similar projects</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A process/method is in place to collect and share important lessons; discoveries of what works and what does not work; knowledge gained from engaging youth</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan to address sustainability beyond the grant has been developed. There is a long-term financial plan</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A plan is in place to deal with potential youth turnover and loss of organizational capital (leadership, institutional memory):</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Electronic archive to capture work &amp; knowledge gained year to year</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o A mechanism for alumni input</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o A full-time or part-time paid staff member</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Youth-Adult Engagement Qualitative Report Card
(Youth Infusion)


**Instructions:**

Read the series of questions listed in the far left column. You will notice that each question is phrased in the present tense (i.e.: How does your organization engage youth?). If your organization does not currently engage youth, use the questions as a guide to design future youth-adult engagement mechanisms and strategies. Youth-adult engagement is a continual evolution.

Once you have filled out the second column “My Insights,” start a dialogue with your colleagues. Fill out the second column, “Others’ Insights.”

Next begin prioritizing improvement areas. Under the column “Our Insights” rank improvement areas from most important to least important. This should be a collaborative exercise between you, your colleagues, and your supervisors. This will form the basis of your action plan.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Definitions</th>
<th>My Insights</th>
<th>Others’ Insights</th>
<th>Our Insights</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What does it mean to be engaged in your organization?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How are youth currently engaged in your organization?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How are adults currently engaged in your organization?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organizational Structures</th>
<th>My Insights</th>
<th>Others’ Insights</th>
<th>Our Insights</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is your organization’s mission and purpose? Does it specify the role of youth? Is it asset oriented and forward focused?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What roles do adults play in your organization? What roles do youth play in your organization?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where are youth located in the organizational hierarchy? How much access do youth have?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Organizational Processes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>My Insights</th>
<th>Others’ Insights</th>
<th>Our Insights</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How does work get done on a day-to-day basis? How are youth integrated into the task structure?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How are organizational decisions made? How engaged are staff members? How are youth integrated into decision-making processes?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What internal communication mechanisms exist? How do supervisors and staff communicate with one another? How do colleagues communicate with one another? How does the organization communicate with stakeholders? How does the organization communicate with youth?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How open is the organization to change? How are organizational changes introduced and implemented?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How are adult staff members recruited? What is the hiring process? Who participates in hiring decisions? How are youth participants recruited? How are youth decision makers recruited?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What incentives exist within the organization? Are they intrinsic or extrinsic? What motivates staff to come to work and to do a good job? What incentives exist for youth engagement within the organization? Why would a young person want to work with your organization?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Organizational Dynamics

**How does your organization integrate reflection into assessment practices?** Are stakeholders included in organizational reflection?

**What type of language does your organization use to talk about your work?** To engage youth? What type of language do youth use to talk about their communities? Is there alignment?

**How would you describe the identity of your organization?** How recognizable is your organization to your community, to youth? How do you market the ideas you sell?

**How would you describe your organization’s work culture?** How well do youth mesh with the dominant culture?

### Action Plan

I commit to doing the following THREE things to further youth adult engagement within my organization:

1)  
2)  
3)

My organization commits to doing the following THREE things to further youth adult engagement:

1)  
2)  
3)
References


This document is a reflective tool to assist organizations to develop, or refine, youth engagement values, policies and practices. For groups currently engaging with young people, or those that are beginning the process, to reflect on their organization’s structures, culture and capacity - both human and financial - to respectfully engage with young people. This tool is also intended to assist young people optimize their engagement with organizations.


Linda Camino is a well-known researcher in the field of youth engagement. She has conducted a number of evaluations addressing youth-adult partnerships and this article is a summary of her findings. In it she presents barriers that might hinder youth-adult partnerships and strategies that can be used to strengthen these relationships.


This workshop summary looks at the benefits of participation action research, discusses barriers that youth encounter when taking on research roles, and identifies key ingredients that must be present for youth research efforts to succeed.


This resource is an excellent learning tool for CYMH organizations that want to engage youth within their operations. The information in this guide is derived from literature, the experiences of youth mental health services in New Zealand and Australia, and consultation with youth consumers. This guide presents an original ParticipACTION model for engaging youth. In utilizing this model, it is hoped that New Zealand youth will become active within the mental health system, offering a youth voice to improve services and ensure that their needs are being met. This document can be downloaded from the Werry Centre Web site: www.werrycentre.org.nz


This guide is for organizations thinking about forming youth-adult partnerships. Written in partnership with the Canadian Environmental Network – Youth Caucus, it offers practical advice on working with youth. Specifically, it looks at how to make an organization youth-friendly, identifies potential barriers and challenges, and outlines five principles for intergenerational partnerships.

In this guide the authors provide examples of youth engagement projects that are making a difference in various communities around the world and describes what social change looks like when young people are involved in action-oriented activities.


This manual provides organizations with tools to help them conduct program evaluations for youth engagement initiatives. The manual breaks down evaluation into five different components which include: strategy, target groups and needs, aims and goals, review of project performance and outcomes for participants, and transfer of knowledge.


This study identifies characteristics that youth look for when seeking a volunteer position.


This report was developed as a tool to help the Halifax Regional Municipality create a welcoming environment that engages all citizens – including youth. Creating Youth Friendly Communities discusses strategies, best practices and success indicators for youth governance and makes the case for why communities and governments should work to involve youth.


This famous article includes Hart’s Laddar of Participation, a model used to understand the various ways young people are engaged.


The City of Hampton (Virginia) is recognized as being a leader in youth engagement. In taking on an asset-based frame of operating, a suffering city was able to revive itself by investing in its citizens – which included youth. This article looks at the effective practices that this city uses to succeed in its youth engagement efforts.


This document offers a look at Canadian youth demographics and trends. It is one of the foundation pieces for the first phase of the new strategy as it provides a profile of the client group. The document has two main objectives: 1) to support the development of a service strategy for young Canadians; and2) to foster a better understanding of Canada’s youth population (demographic factors, young people’s attitudes and behaviour, youth trends).


This speech examines the Youth Engagement Continuum published by the Funders Collaborative on Youth Organizing in

References
New York.


This paper discusses the importance of including children in the research process. It outlines several reasons for working with children, as well as challenges that limit this practice. *Children As Active Researchers* attempts to answer the question of whether or not child-led research can be validated within current fields of academic research. Issues of ethics, power relations, and adult influence are addressed and the findings from a three-year pilot study examining experiences of children as researchers are presented.


This report describes a number of youth-led programs and organizations across Canada that have been successful in carrying out youth engagement initiatives. Youth voices are echoed throughout this publication and recommendations for youth engagement programs are made.


This study examines the use of a conference as a vehicle for educating youth and teachers about mental health and stigma. Results of the study show that conferences help improve understanding about mental illness and foster increased positive attitudes among youth delegates. In addition, research findings conclude that conferences are excellent tools for networking and effective ways for promoting program messages and services.


This article looks at the attitudes that adults hold towards youth and how these attitudes can impact the youth involvement experience. Moreover, it outlines the potential benefits youth and adults can have on one another and lists important elements that comprise successful youth involvement.


This article explores how adult attitudes might act as barriers to engaging youth. It also provides tips that adults can use when working with youth and tips that youth can use when working with adults.


This article presents a definition of youth-adult partnerships, and provides an explanation of the youth-adult relationships continuum.


This website describes how the Laidlaw Foundation defines youth engagement.

Using a qualitative research approach, this exploratory research study examines four youth programs (two of which are youth-led, and two that are adult-led). Findings from the research indicate that both types of leadership offer beneficial outcomes to youth development. This article also outlines some of the challenges faced by youth and adults within their leadership roles.


This article discusses how youth-adult partnerships can serve as an effective practice for influencing community change. The authors describe the Youth Leadership Institute’s experience working with youth in philanthropy and training. Moreover, they discuss the lessons they have learned which include: securing organizational commitment; upfront training for young people and adults; and a mechanism for ongoing support.


This article discusses how the field of positive youth development came to be and describes “The Continuum of Youth Engagement” created by the Funders Collaborative on Youth Organizing. The article also focuses on the new movement of Youth Organizing, where youth take action to address the issues they believe need to be addressed in order to foster better communities.


The Spectrum of Attitudes focuses on the nature and quality of relationships between and among people. The three attitudes making up the Spectrum might prevail in any kind of relationship- people viewed as objects, people viewed as recipients, and people viewed as resources.


Based on a research study with 20 youth centres across Nova Scotia, this article identifies five key ingredients that contribute to the success of a youth centre when financial resources are limited.


This paper describes the FLEXIVOL model, which is a ‘wish list’ for young people 16-24 years old. It serves as an acronym for the most important elements in a desirable volunteer experience: Flexibility, Legitimacy, Ease of access, Xperience, Incentives, Variety, Organisation, and Laughs.

Nakamura, J. (2001). The nature of vital engagement in adulthood. In M. Michaelson, J. Nakamura (Eds.), *Supportive References*
This chapter examines the concept of vital engagement and describes what it means for one to become absorbed with a cause and meaningfully engaged in an activity. It describes how an interaction between self and object can develop into a meaningful and sustained relationship.


In this article, the author offers a definition of the term “youth-partnership”, provides an explanation of why youth and adults should work together, and presents examples of ineffective youth engagement practices.


This article identifies and gives clarity to common myths surrounding youth engagement. It also explores the definition of youth participation and depicts gaps in the research that provide ideas for future studies.


This article presents the findings of a study that was done on the “Creating Change 2001” youth conference that was hosted by the Students Commission. It explores the definition of youth engagement, and looks at how youth become engaged as well as the concept of using a youth conference as a tool to spark youth interest and motivate young people to get involved in their communities.


This article explores youth engagement from a youth development framework. It attempts to define a youth development approach by looking at how adult perceptions of youth have changed through the years. It also explores how becoming engaged improves the lives of youth and their communities; how family, schools and communities impact youth; and what it means to be engaged.


This resource guide provides professionals with background knowledge on youth participation as presented in the literature. It looks at what it means for youth to be engaged as partners within an organization, and offers a series of activities that professionals can draw on when they begin to work with youth.

Using a participatory action research approach, this study addresses the question of how to engage youth in the work of organizations and identifies five elements that contribute to the success or failure of youth engagement efforts.


This guide explains how youth engagement can lead to safer communities and healthier youth development. It offers a definition of youth engagement for fostering civic participation that is rooted in an anti-oppressive framework. This guide also outlines barriers related to youth engagement and offers strategies that can be utilized to overcome potential challenges.


This paper offers a model based on five levels of participation: 1. Children are listened to. 2. Children are supported in expressing their views. 3. Children’s views are taken into account. 4. Children are involved in decision-making processes. 5. Children share power and responsibility for decision-making. In addition, three stages of commitment are identified at each level: “openings”, “opportunities” and “obligations”. The model thus provides a logical sequence of 15 questions as a tool for planning for participation.


This guide provides practical tips and strategies that organizations can utilize to strengthen/create healthy youth-adult partnerships.


This guide provides training activities that organizations can utilize to strengthen/create healthy youth-adult partnerships.


This is the follow-up guide to the one published in 1996. It provides more updated activities that organizations can utilize to strengthen/create healthy youth-adult partnerships.


This manual describes the best practices used by member centres. The best practice principles that emerged include: youth voice and youth inclusion; practical experiential learning and asset building; prevention/protection through social connection and process; participatory action research and participator evaluation; access and availability; mutual respect: non-judgmental/open door policy; open participation structure and time for social interaction; and physical activities/recreational opportunities.


References
The Convention on the Rights of the Child is the first legally binding international instrument to incorporate the full range of human rights—civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights. In 1989, world leaders decided that children needed a special convention just for them because people under 18 years old often need special care and protection that adults do not.


This article discusses the findings of a qualitative research study done on twelve youth action teams throughout Nova Scotia. These teams use a community youth development (CYD) approach as the grounding value within their youth engagement efforts. This article presents lessons learned from youth and adults who were working in partnership to strengthen communities.


This document outlines effective strategies (as identified in a literature review and an exploratory research study) that organizations can use to incorporate youth into governance structures.


This handbook, by the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria in partnership with the Office for Youth, educates adults about the effectiveness and benefits of youth participation and encourages the creation of opportunities for youth to get involved. It outlines some of the barriers that youth and organizations might encounter when partnering with one another, and offers helpful strategies to work through these obstacles.


This article argues that successful youth engagement initiatives must receive support from top managers. It identifies six managerial guidelines that can be followed when attempting to introduce youth-adult partnerships into the structure of an organization.


This study from the University of Wisconsin-Madison looks at the effects of youth participation on adults and organizations. Recognizing the powerful influence that research has on social movements, Zeldin and colleagues explore the impact of youth-adult partnerships within 15 organizations. Their findings conclude that if the right conditions are in place, young people can have powerful effects on adults and organizations and can be instrumental in influencing positive change.

### Check Out These Websites!

- **Apathy Is Boring** [www.apathyisboring.com](http://www.apathyisboring.com)
- **At The Table** [www.atthetable.org](http://www.atthetable.org)
- **Laidlaw Foundation** [www.laidlawfdn.org](http://www.laidlawfdn.org)
- **Taking It Global** [www.takingitglobal.org](http://www.takingitglobal.org)
- **The Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement** [www.engagementcentre.ca](http://www.engagementcentre.ca)
- **Youth Infusion** [www.youthinfusion.com](http://www.youthinfusion.com)
Credits

Cover art is provided by Bronwyn Louks

Bronwyn Louks is a fine arts student at Queen’s University. A Youth Consultant for The New Mentality and Youth Representative to the CMHO Board of Directors, Bronwyn is a survivor of clinical depression and a champion for child and youth mental health.

“Washing Free is an acrylic painting that represents an emotional transition. The red face characterizes former suffering that is being washed away by the cleansing, cool, coloured water. The illuminating yellow light in the background signifies warmth and hope in moving forward. In essence, the painting is a tribute to survivors of mental health disorders.”

Design and layout is provided by Cathy Dyer

Cathy Dyer is the Project Coordinator for The New Mentality. She is a graduate of the University of Toronto where she received an honours undergraduate degree in Political Science. She has worked in the field of youth engagement for nine years, starting off in the child welfare sector. Cathy brings vitality and vision to wherever she goes and believes that youth are powerful agents for positive change.

“Soar to New Heights”

In 2007, students created a mural using the concepts of freedom, rebirth, and overcoming difficulties. The eagle, flying away from darkness represents strength and courage. The youth agreed that theme for this artwork “Soar to New Heights” is a powerful message for all those involved in child and youth mental health. Artists: Janelle Bossé, Kathryn Carreau, Genevieve Hogg, Salomon Schroeter, Emanuel McAuliff, Paul Harrison, Emilie Rabeau, Julie Meilleur, John Peippo - led by Adam Davidson (Instructor) and Scott Gauthier (volunteer) of the Ottawa School of Art

“A World Without Stigma”

In 2006, students created a mural that focused on breaking down the stigma of mental health by imagining what a world without stigma would look like. Artists: Claire Brascoupé, Alan Hay, Sébastien Lemire-Mulato, Angélique Pauzé - led by Adam Davidson of the Ottawa School of Art

“I Dream My Painting and Then I Paint My Dream”

In 2005, students collaborated over a three-day period to develop a mural based on the Vincent van Gogh quote “I dream my painting and then I paint my dream”. Artists: Liora Altman, Martin Diegel, Laura Dwyer, Tobin Gibson, Lisa Halton, Vanessa Nostbakken, Mark Paul, Jonas Pauzé - led by Adam Davidson (Assistant Leader) and Chantal Dahan (Artist Instructor) of the Ottawa School of Art