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Youth Service: From Youth As Problems to Youth as Resources

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Youth Service: From Youth As Problems To Youth As Resources

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By Bonnie Benard

"People become house builders by building houses, harp players by playing the harp. We grow to be just by doing things that are just."

— Aristotle as quoted in
*Researching Out: School-Based
Community Service Programs*

Youth as Resources: A New Paradigm

"Youth as problems, or youth as resources? Communities with problems or communities with resources?" These opening sentences to *Reaching Out*, a recent book on establishing community service programs for youth, encapsulate a critical issue I see confronting anyone relating to or working with young people, whether as parents, teachers, community folk, or prevention advocates and other helping professionals: the framework or perspective from which we view youth in our society today. Whether we view youth as problems or as resources determines not only our expectations for our youth and our actions towards them, but also the type of programs we, as preventionists, design to address youth issues. Furthermore, from research in social and educational psychology, we know the critical role adult expectations have on the subsequent thoughts and behavior of children. A salient example is the research demonstrating that high parental and teacher expectations are perhaps the most significant variables correlating with a youth's academic success. According to one scholar, "It is therefore essential that educational policies and practices" — and I would add, *prevention policies and practices* — "are developed on the basis of expectations that are both *realistic* and *non-limiting*, thereby allowing young people to express their full potential in supportive and safe environments" (Kurth-Schai, p. 113). Just as Kurth-Schai claims most educational policies and practices are based on negative expectations for youth — on youth as problems instead of as resources — many prevention policies and practices similarly reflect this negative underlying paradigm.

According to Kurth-Schai, our failure to view youth as resources, "to acknowledge the potential of young people to contribute to the social order," is based on the following three current conceptualizations of childhood:

- 1) Children as *victims* of adult society;
- 2) Children as *learners* of adult society; and
- 3) Children as *threats* to adult society (pp. 114-116).

According to the first view, children are vulnerable and need *adult protection* in order to survive. In the second, children are incompetent and problematic and need *adult intervention* in order to develop properly. In the third perspective, children — especially those in need of public support — are a danger to the social order and need *adult control*.

None of these perspectives ascribe to youth a useful role in society, and consequently the types of tasks assigned to youth — usually focused only on academic achievement — indicate they're not expected to contribute to the welfare of the family or the community. Kurth-Schai is not alone in voicing her conclusion that, "Children are excluded from active and meaningful participation in human society" (p. 116). Over 50 years ago anthropologist Ruth Benedict noted that "American society provides few meaningful role opportunities for youth, thereby preventing them from assuming adult responsibilities; then society blames them for their pugnaciousness and irresponsibility" (in Langton and Miller, p. 30). Furthermore, other contemporary social researchers suggest that society still tells "teenagers they have no real place in the scheme of things, that their only responsibility is to go to school and learn and grow up. When they have learned and grown up, which is supposed to occur miraculously at age 18, they can perhaps make some modest contribution as a citizen. The young people, therefore, view themselves as strictly *consumers*, not as *contributors*" (Hedin in Langton and Miller, p. 20). According to adolescent psychologist Gisela Konopka, "Almost

everywhere adolescents have been neglected or maligned — or ridiculously romanticized. Adolescents still do not have a place in most societies, and those who have offended the mores of a society are frequently treated like concentration camp inmates" (p. 546). And, of course, we've all heard the diatribes against the self-centered and materialistic youth of today. However, as Joan Lipsitz, former director of the Center for Early Adolescence, states, "The only thing universal about adolescence is puberty... Most of what else they are, we [adult society — parents, teachers, business leaders, the media] help make" (in Harrison, p. 6). Denied the opportunities to be useful contributing members of society, youth will continue to protest their segregation through dropping out, alcohol and other drug abuse, teen pregnancy, suicide, delinquency. In other words, youth who are denied the opportunity to be *resources*, will be *problems*.

Participation: The Key to Prevention

Those of us in substance abuse prevention as well as in education and in other helping professions have often operated according to a "*pathology*" paradigm in which youth are viewed as problems to be fixed instead of as resources to our communities. While many substance abuse prevention programs now focus on creating environments that provide positive alternatives for youth, several programs still reflect the pathological model by their often exclusive focus on individual change strategies, that is, on providing information or teaching personal and social competency skills. While the information and life skills strategies do have a place in prevention efforts, research on both the risk and protective factors for substance abuse and other inter-related problem behaviors like delinquency, dropping out of school, and teen pregnancy does not support these strategies as the *central* components in prevention programming. What is clear

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from research on resilient youth — youth who have become healthy adults in spite of adversity — is the significant role played by the opportunity to experience *somewhere in their lives* a caring, nurturing environment which encourages their *active participation* (i.e., problem-solving, decision-making, planning, goal-setting, helping others) in meaningful activities. The Perry Preschool Project, which found inner-city black youth who had experienced this empowering environment at ages three and four *half* as involved in problem behaviors at age 19, as well as the research of Michael Rutter on schools which appeared to "protect" youth from becoming involved in alcohol and other drugs, etc. provide two examples of solid research supporting a reorienting of our prevention efforts from individual change to environmental change efforts focused on providing *alternatives*, that is, on creating nurturing contexts that provide opportunities for youth to participate in meaningful activities (see *Prevention Forum*, March 1987 for a discussion of protective factors research).

In addition, several cross-cultural studies as well as several other sociological and psychological studies indicate that "youth participation in socially and/or economically useful tasks is associated with heightened self-esteem, enhanced moral development, increased political activism, and the ability to create and maintain complex social relationships" (Kurth-Schai, p. 117). On the other hand, "Related studies demonstrate the *lack* of participation is associated with rigid and simplistic relational strategies, psychological dependence on external sources for personal validation, and the expression of self-destructive and anti-social behaviors including drug abuse, depression, promiscuity, premature parenthood, suicide, and delinquency" (Kurth-Schai, p. 117).

Lending support to this argument is the just published research by Richardson et al that found latchkey youth (who took care of themselves for 11 or more hours a week) were at *twice* the risk of substance abuse as those who did not take care of themselves at all. The authors conclude that, "Traditional societies had clearly defined roles for

young adolescents in the life of the community. These contributory roles have largely been replaced by autonomy and leisure and frequently accompanied by no adult supervision. This time could be put to good use both in the home and in the community. The family or community that learns to direct the energy, general good will, and potential of these young adolescents into community or individual improvement projects may find that they benefit the community as well as the individual" (pp. 564-565).

The Antithesis of Participation: Alienation

Another way to underscore participation in socially valued tasks as perhaps the most critical protective factor in preventing social problems like substance abuse is to look at the major consequence of *not* participating: alienation. Alienation has consistently been identified in study after study as a major risk factor for involvement in alcohol and other drugs, delinquency, teen pregnancy, school failure, and depression and suicide. In fact, lack of social bonding to, that is alienation from, the major socializing institutions of family, school, and community is currently the main theoretical base underlying prevention efforts (Hawkins et al). The hypothesized process, put simply, is that without opportunities to participate in meaningful ways in caring environments within their families, schools, and communities, young people will not identify with or bond to these social institutions, thus becoming disconnected and alienated from them, and will, subsequently, seek their identity within the context of their peer culture alone and often through participating in the negative activities of alcohol and drug use, delinquency, and precocious sexuality. According to Levine, "Unless a social system — be it a family, group, institution, neighborhood, or society — can instill in its youth some degree of *purpose* and *community*, a substantial portion of the adolescents, particularly those with low self-esteem and increased vulnerability (for whatever reason), inevitably will become society's *problem*" (p. 4).

The challenge to us, then, according to Levine, is that, "We — as... professionals, as citizens, and as parents — should be searching for ways to harness that force, to 'turn on' our youth, to

capture their inherent need for an ideology and group" (p. 4). We must create within our families, schools, and communities the opportunities for young people to meet their basic human needs of connecting to other people and to a large meaning or purpose. We must provide the opportunities for youth to be the resources they truly are and not the problems we think them to be.

Youth Service: A Positive Alternative

By way of this long introduction, we established a rationale for participation in meaningful activities as a means of encouraging young people to develop their potential and as a consequence, discourage their involvement in problem behaviors.

Let's now discuss what I see as an exciting prevention approach that not only is based on the premise that youth are resources but also is focused on providing opportunities for youth to participate in socially meaningful and valued activities: the youth service movement. This movement also bears the potential of coalescing on national, state, and local levels the numerous groups concerned with the welfare of this generation and future generations of young people. After a brief overview of the youth service issue, we'll examine the rationales for youth service, the guidelines recommended by several researchers and policy planners on youth service, and the implications for prevention program planners.

Overview of Youth Service

Referred to by various terms — youth action, youth participation, youth community service, national service, student service, civic service, youth service — the phenomenon we're discussing (and we'll use the term youth service) is youth working in the school or community performing "*socially needed*" tasks (Mosko, p. 1). Youth service programs have even more forms than names, depending on their respective combinations of the following characteristics:

- 1) local, state, or national sponsorship;
- 2) in-school or out-of-school;
- 3) voluntary or mandatory;
- 4) paid or unpaid;
- 5) focused on job/career development or human development;

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1) residential or non-residential.

Youth service programs vary from national service programs like the Peace Corps and VISTA to local Boy and Girl Scout service activities; from school-based cross-age tutoring programs to school-community programs in which youth receive academic credit for working in childcare centers; from residential state conservation corps to non-residential urban corps programs — to name only a few!

Youth service is not a new idea. Most books and articles on the topic credit William James with laying the seed for national youth service with his 1910 essay, "The Moral Equivalent of War," in which he proposed that conscription of the entire youthful population of the United States into community service was "a means outside the context of war [for] galvanizing a society to its highest levels of cooperative values, of raising a generation with a new sense of 'civic discipline'" (Langton and Miller, p. 27). Since that time national service has continued to attract interest as reflected in the church-based work camps of the 1920s; the New Deal's Civilian Conservation Corps and the National Youth Administration; the conservation work of conscientious objectors during World War II and their *human* service work during the Korean and Vietnam Wars; the Peace Corps and ACTION in the 1970s, and "the growing number of small-scale conservation corps now operated by federal, state, and local authorities" (Danzig and Stanton, p. 3).

Youth service — even in its national form — has enjoyed widespread popularity among the public since the Civilian Conservation Corps of the 1930s. A 1984 Gallup poll reported that 65% of the American people and 58% of young people favored a program in which *all* young men and women would serve for one year either in the armed forces or in civilian social work in return for educational benefits (Danzig and Stanton, p. 4).

Similar interest has been expressed by federal policymakers as reflected in the fact that bills to establish additional youth service programs have been introduced in almost every session of Congress over the last decade. While none have passed (according to several

authors, everyone lauds the idea in the abstract, but no one can agree on specifics!), during the last year a number of legislative proposals promoting youth service were introduced, including one designed by the Bush Administration (see Heffernan and Tarlov, pp. 8-9 for an overview of these proposals). What is clear, according to several observers of the youth service debate (see *youth Policy and Youth Record*, newsletters of the Youth Policy Institute, as well as *Streams*, Youth Service America's newsletter, for ongoing coverage of this issue), is that the "current level of interest suggests that some type of federal youth service initiative will be formulated this year" (Heffernan and Tarlov, pp. 8-9).

More fuel has been added to the fire as well in that new groups are joining with more traditional youth service advocacy groups. For example, over the last five years numerous task force and commission reports addressing the growing crisis of youth at risk for school failure, substance abuse, and other problem behaviors have recommended that community youth service be incorporated into the middle and high school curriculum as a way to connect "disconnected" youth. The Council of Chief State School Officers, the National Governors' Association, the William T. Grant and Carnegie Foundation are just a few of the organizations that have published reports/statements advocating youth service in just the last two years.

Rationales for Youth Service

Researchers and policymakers have proposed several reasons justifying youth service as a needed social policy. The following summarizes the most frequently offered rationales:

1. *Promotes the healthy psychological, intellectual, and social development of youth.*

Youth service, according to a study by Fred Newman and Robert Rutter, aids the *psychological* development of youth by easing the "transition from the dependency of childhood to the status of an independent adult, able to care for others, to make decisions on one's own, and to feel a sense of competence functioning in the adult world" (in Lewis, p. 5).

Service experiences promote the *intellectual* development of youth by encouraging "the growth of reasoning skills, abstract and hypothetical thought,

and the ability to organize diverse sources of information into a constructive problem-solving process" (Lewis, p. 5).

Social development is encouraged in that community service experiences provide "a vehicle for developing a reflective sense of responsibility to the society at large, empathy for the conditions of others, and bonding to and participation in social institutions" (Lewis, p. 6). Young people can develop self-esteem, empathy, and nurturing behavior only as they interrelate in a caring way with others.

II. *Helps youth assume adult responsibilities.*

According to the National Crime Prevention Council's *Reaching Out*, while youth are visually exposed to more of the adult world than any prior generation, "Young people, nonetheless, have fewer opportunities to make sense of how to learn adult skills, and how they will fit into the adult community" (p. 12). Similarly, Heffernan and Tarlov state, "An empowering, character-building experience, service also can help prepare youth for adult responsibilities, including productive roles in the job market and full participation as citizens to lead the nation into the next century" (p. 4).

III. *Work needs to be done!*

Stanton claims that besides the positive developmental effects of service on youth, the main reason for youth service "is that there is much work which needs doing and that [youth] can do — as shoppers or drivers for shut-ins, as tutors, as collectors of recyclable materials, as singers of old songs at nursing homes, as trail-makers in state parks, as daycare aides, and as helpers or initiators in a hundred other ways" (preface to *Reaching Out*). Similarly, Meisel states, "This country is in desperate need of an effective youth service program. If we look at many of the major problems facing our country in literacy, education, childcare, eldercare, etc. — all solutions are labor intensive and in part dependent on *cheap human energy and creativity*. These are resources that young people have in abundance. We need to challenge and support them in their desire to serve" (p. 3). Danzig and Stanton suggest that *3½ million* service positions in education, health, childcare, the environment, justice, libraries, and

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museums could be created for both young and old (p. 40-41)!

IV. *The creativity of youth is needed to address social problems of the present and future.*

Kurth-Schai warns that, "As we move toward future environments characterized by increasing challenge, change, complexity, and choice, higher levels of personal responsibility, tolerance of diversity, cooperation, and creativity will be required. In order to adapt and flourish, children need to develop a strong sense of self-worth and social commitment. By denying their potential to contribute to society we limit children's ability to develop these traits" (p. 117). According to futurist Alvin Toffler, "The rest of us need all the energy, brains, imagination, and talent that young people can bring to bear on our difficulties. For society to attempt to solve its desperate problems without the full participation of even very young people is imbecile" (quoted in Kurth-Schai, p. 118).

Kurth-Schai presents a fascinating argument, supported especially by anthropological research, that, "The imaginative experiences of childhood represent humanity's primary source of personal and cultural evolutionary potential" (p. 119). She proposes that, "Young people possess an unparalleled potential to contribute to the development of human society by generating, expressing, and acting upon optimistic images of societal futures" (p. 122). In other words, youth are especially skilled in creating that "universe of alternatives," a critical step we discussed in the April 1989 *Prevention Forum* in effecting social change. In fact, she cites unpublished research by Lorenzo and Nicholson in which children's images of societal futures were shared with adults through child-created media presentations and which catalyzed the involvement of parents, community residents, and representatives of academic, business, and social service organizations in a variety of community development projects! According to Kurth-Schai:

"Such findings provide an indication of the capacity of youth to create images of the future powerful enough to guide

and motivate positive *social change*. Additionally, young people have demonstrated capacities to provide leadership, nurturance, and economic assistance. In a world characterized by widespread feelings of purposelessness and powerlessness, the social contributions of childhood represent a primary source of humanity's hope for the future" (p. 123).

V. *Builds the linkage between school and community.*

As I mentioned earlier, numerous task force and commission reports concerned with education's failure to meet the needs not only of youth at risk but of *all youth* who must live in the 21st century, have emphasized the necessity of the school and community working together as partners. According to Ernest Boyer (his 1983 book *High School* was one of the first educational reform reports to advocate youth service), "Students do not see formal education as having a consequential relationship to who they are, or even, in a fundamental way, what they might become... Our study seems to reinforce the view that a well-implemented school service program can counter the notion that school is irrelevant" (in Harrison, pp. vii-viii).

According to Polk and several other educational reformers, the alienation large numbers of at-risk youth feel in our society as a result of not being offered either opportunities to participate in their schools and communities or *hope* for future careers is exacerbated by the organization of the school itself in that schools:

- 1) further *segregate youth* into "youth ghettos;"
- 2) *extend economic dependence* well into late teenage years;
- 3) *reinforce the pervasive passivity* of students in the educational process;
- 4) routinely *deny basic constitutional rights* to students (pp. 464-465).

The consequence of schooling, then, is further alienation and disconnectedness: "Lacking access to direct participation in responsible and active roles in either the school or community, and the sense of involvement such would engender, many students drift into a sense of *powerlessness* and *apartness from the school*" (Polk, p. 465). What makes this situation especially critical is that, "As extended

families, churches, and other institutions play diminished roles in linking teens with their communities, schools become the major connector of youth with the community beyond the family" (*Reaching out*, p. 12). Schools often remain the only institution — for large numbers of our youth — that can build the necessary "social capital" for youths to live fulfilling, productive lives.

To counter this alienation and to make education relevant to the present and the future real worlds, Kurth-Schai states, "We must encourage [in our schools and communities] the development of children's complex, creative, and cooperative thought processes [creative thinking, critical analysis, and social problem-solving], by providing opportunities for young people to act upon their thoughts in real-life social settings, and by promoting reconceptualization of the roles of student in the classroom and student in society" (p. 128).

Precedents for this type of "service-learning" as Kendall describes it exist in the alternative and experiential education domain as well as in even more traditional vocational education programs (in Lewis). While only a small percentage of schools have a community service program at present, the movement is spreading due not only to the push of the school reform movement but also to the pressure of growing community problems like gangs and drugs and to unmet community environmental and human service needs. In fact, this year Atlanta became the first large urban community to make youth service *mandatory* for high school graduation (word-of-mouth has it that several smaller communities are already doing this...).

The recently released report of the Carnegie Task Force on Education of Young Adolescents, *Turning Points: Preparing American Youth for the 21st Century* (see article on p. 5 of this issue), should build even more enthusiasm for youth service in that it calls for integrating youth service into the core curriculum in *middle school* education. Furthermore, *Turning Points* sounds like a course in *Prevention 101* in its advocacy of school-community collaboration! According to the report, schools must link not only with businesses but also with human service organizations in the community in "sustained partnerships" (p. 70):

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"Youth-serving and other community organizations represent a rich potential source for extending the educational experiences of young adolescents outside the classroom. With their long history of working with youth, these groups are natural members of collaborative efforts with educators and health professionals to transform middle grade schools. Working with schools, youth-serving agencies can become partners in a broader system of youth development, and can assume responsibility for key elements of a transformed school program. These agencies and organizations can develop programs aimed specifically at attracting young people from middle grade schools after school, on weekends, and during the summer, when young adolescents are full of energy and may be most vulnerable to the negative pressures of peers or undesirable adult influences" (p. 81).

Only by breaking through the isolating experience of schooling in our society and encouraging the active involvement of youth in community life can we hope to make education relevant and effective in preparing young people for life and work not only in the present but in the increasingly complex and challenging world of the future.

Guidelines for Developing Youth Service Programs

I've summarized and categorized the following recommendations from several books and articles on youth service (see References). While most of the "experts" concur on most of the recommendations, several points are still open to debate.

I. Sponsor/structure

• Community control

No matter whether a youth service program is sponsored at the federal, state, or local level, to be successful it must:

1) Be responsive to community needs which are identified at the local level

(Lewis; Heffernan and Tarlov; Mosko; Danzig and Stanton; Eberly).

2) Involve "careful project selection at the local level" (Heffernan, p. 13).

3) Be citizen — including youth — directed at the local level (Heffernan and Tarlov; Lewis; Danzig and Stanton; Eberly; Mosko; Meisel).

4) Be integrated into existing community-based organizations (Eberly, p. 208).

5) Allow for the wide diversity of forms and programs which reflect the unique configurations of each community (Lewis; Mosko; Heffernan and Tarlov; Eberly; Danzig and Stanton).

A majority of youth service advocates do not advocate a program national in scope, that is, a federally sponsored, organized, and controlled effort that establishes a whole new federal bureaucracy. Rather, the recommendations are for leadership and support from the federal government. According to Lewis, "With appropriate leadership and support from the federal government, the best of existing youth service programs will be expanded, new initiatives will be developed, many more young people will be involved, and citizen service can become an integral part of every young American's experience" (p. 21). Similarly, Heffernan and Tarlov argue for the "incremental expansion of community-based service programs [through federal start-up funds, operating grants, and other financial incentives], as opposed to the wholesale creation of new service activities at the state or national levels" (p. 13). Danzig and Stanton claim, "Noncoercive, diverse, locally defined opportunities for service still could meet nationally established objectives, deserve national financial support, and advance the ideal of serving the nation's needs... and would accord best with our society's preference for local control, diversity, and experimentation" (p. 277). Supporting these views, Mosko recommends the "creation of a decentralized national system based on community organizations... a mix of federal, state, and local programs that addresses the problems in education, healthcare, daycare, and social welfare" (pp. 87 and 145). Mosko claims that "What the state and local programs offer in variety and innovation, they lack in scale... and visibility... Clearly, only the federal government can provide the resources and public attention necessary to make

national service a real option for the youth of America" (p. 87).

Mosko supports a public cooperation structure similar to that of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. This model is also proposed by the Coalition for National Service, which advocates the creation of a National Youth Service Foundation as a public corporation to be funded on a matching basis by the federal government and private sources. This foundation would perform the following functions:

- 1) Finance technical assistance and action-research activities;
- 2) Develop a program of educational benefits for young people who devote full time to a service program;
- 3) Provide funding for demonstration projects and assistance to state governments and nonprofit groups to develop or expand youth service programs (Lewis, p. 21).

II. Goals/Objectives

• Emphasize both benefits to society and to youth

Seemingly, consensus does not exist on this issue. Mosko, Hornbeck, and the proposed National Youth Service Foundation state youth service programs must emphasize service to society over educational and personal development; on the other hand, Boyer and others claim while, "Service is concerned with helping others... above all, it is concerned with improved learning" (in Harrison, p. ix; Polk, p. 477). However, virtually all researchers and advocates do agree that both objectives are mutually achieved. The issue appears to be more philosophical: if we emphasize the personal development of youth, we are viewing youth as problems; if we emphasize service to society, we are seeing youth as resources. It seems clear to me that we must perceive both goals as inter-related and as components in the same process — the one is actually a means for achieving the other. In other words, service not only promotes personal development, but self-fulfilled individuals, in turn, make even greater contributions to society. Those of us in prevention have long ago learned to live with "two-pronged" approaches — we know we cannot prevent problems like substance abuse unless we promote building the health of families, schools, and communities! That we must "avoid issues that polarize" if we hope to build

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statewide and national coalitions around youth service was clear to the Youth Service America Conference last year that endorsed, among other issues, initiatives that "emphasize both the tangible benefits to society and the leadership development of young people as the major reasons for youth service support" (Lewis, p. 16).

III. Activities/Content

• *Developmentally appropriate throughout lifespan*

While the focus of "youth service" programming per se is usually on adolescence, the opportunities to participate in socially beneficial activities, i.e., to help and care for others, must be available to people throughout the lifespan — from preschool and early elementary opportunities to be a "buddy" to a new child or to work cooperatively in small groups, to middle school cross-age and community service programs (according to the Center for Early Adolescence, early adolescence years are peak ones for service), combined job training and community service programs in high school, full time conservation corps jobs open to young and old, and other intergenerational programs open to all ages.

• *Intensity*

Youth service programs should provide youth "a *sustained experience with depth*" (Hornbeck in Lewis, p. 16); and opportunity to "*concentrate their efforts*" (Doty in Lewis, p. 16); and should "*engage students, not merely expose them as many programs do*" (Lewis, p. 17). The idea here, as in other prevention efforts, is to provide experiences of the intensity sufficient to actually influence a person's personal and social development.

• *High degree of youth involvement*

Most researchers/advocates of youth service stress the importance of youth "ownership" of these efforts. Several claim youth should be involved in the actual administration of and have the responsibility to make decisions not only in these programs (Meisel, p. 13; Hedin in Langton and Miller, p. 32), but in the guidance of their schools as well (Kurth-

Schai; Boyer in Harrison, p. x). According to one leader of Youth Service America's Youth Advisory Council, "Youth will continue to commit themselves to service as they become a *part of substantive policy*" (Cathy Palm in More than YAC YAC, p. 3).

• *Vital services*

Edward Doty states youth must be allowed to "engage in work meeting real human need or compelling social concerns rather than chores or housekeeping duties" (in Lewis, p. 16). Mosko claims the failure of most job training programs for youth are due to this lack: "Only when training programs involve young adults in the *delivery of vital services* to the community can they hope to include the values that make for good citizenship... In short, if job ventures for youth were structured as national service programs, they might prove more successful..." (p. 90).

• *Multistrategic/multifaceted*

As mentioned earlier, "Service programs are almost as varied as the communities where they are found" (Harrison, p. 9). According to Heffernan and Tarlov, "Increasingly, service programs today include training, education, *prevention*, and employment components for participants. Such components further enrich the service experience and help promote participation among disadvantaged youth" (p. 4). In other words, youth service programs offer a *unique* opportunity to integrate the development of basic academic skills with career skills and other critical life skills — a combination advocated by most researchers and policy makers concerned with the increasing population of youth at risk.

• *Diverse, stimulating options*

Youth should have the opportunity to choose from a range of "challenging, exciting, and fun" service activities (Polk, p. 478). To actually engage students and create intensity of experience, service activities must be not only vital, as we discussed, but also salient and appealing to youth as well.

• *Rewards*

Most advocates of national service agree with Mosko that, "*Educational benefits* for youth who complete a term of duty are a keystone of any national

service program" (p. 160). And, of course, any full time youth service programs like state conservation corps involve payment of wages. However, the issue of whether youth should be paid for *part-time* community service work is controversial. Former Maryland State Superintendent David Hornbeck (also Chair of the Carnegie Task Force on the Education of Young Adolescents) recently proposed a student service requirement in his state that excluded *paid* service. His and others' argument is that if developing altruism and a concern for others is a goal of youth service, paying youth defeats the purpose.

Several researchers, however, advocate the payment of wages: Polk states participants in youth action programs that combine school and part time community service work "*must be paid*, since the issue is to use the process to model youth employment and to begin the work of creating new career ladders" (p. 477). According to Heffernan and Tarlov, "In light of the financial pressures many young people face today, however, strategies to make service a realistic option, especially for disadvantaged youth, need to go beyond altruism. *Providing financial incentives or rewards encourages more young people to serve*" (p. 12). I would add one additional argument for payment. When society pays us for a service, we know we are valued, and this, consequently, increases our motivation and our self-esteem.

• *Time for reflection and discussion*

No other element is so unquestionably advocated as essential to successful youth service programs as "the opportunity to systematically reflect" (Langton and Miller, p. 32), or as Kendall states, "a program design that creates opportunities and programmatic structures from young people's intentional *reflection* on their experiences" (in Lewis, p. 25). Hornbeck's proposal for statewide youth service in Maryland created a writing and/or similar component with "time for reflection" (in Lewis, p. 16). Boyer concludes, "Students should not only go out to serve; they also should be asked to *write* about their experience, and, if possible, discuss with others the lessons they have learned" (in Harrison, p. xi). Similarly, "Ample opportunity for participants to reflect and discuss their

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service experience [is necessary] to reinforce the benefits of such activities" (Heffernan and Tarlov, p. 13).

Besides the obvious benefit of reflection as vital in the experiential learning cycle, programs that structure time for *discussion*, that is, group analysis and group problem-solving, push beyond exposing students to the real world... [and address] the synergism of social, political, and economic concerns" (Lewis, p. 17). According to Levison, "The risk of not addressing such issues is that community service becomes a stereotype-confirming experience" (in Lewis, p. 17).

Another benefit of small group reflection and discussion is the opportunity it provides for positive peer interaction. This concept is central to Polk's model of youth service and action teams in which small groups of young people work together in the planning, training, and review of the service activity, thus not only providing them the opportunity to develop vital life skills like critical thinking and problem-solving, but also giving them the chance to develop positive peer friendships in a supportive environment, creating "settings where peers come together and form new friendships around the work being undertaken" (Polk, p. 478). Ultimately, this generation of positive peer cultures may be the most powerful variable engaging and bonding youth to the community and the larger society.

• ALL youth

Researchers and advocates of youth service also overwhelmingly agree that youth service programs must be targeted to *all* youth, irrespective of their race, socioeconomic status, or academic and behavioral history. To really engage at-risk youth and to avoid youth service programs becoming either just another option for the already "successful" youth (as most *service* programs have traditionally been), or, on the other hand, to avoid the negative labeling that results from programs targeting only at-risk youth as many job training programs do, programs must be mixed as widely as possible. According to Polk, "The mixing of students with different academic and behavioral histories [usually reflecting socioeconomic

differences] will avoid the problem of the program either 'creaming' the top students or of negatively labeling the group with the consequent penalty of stigmatization" (p. 478).

According to Mosko, "The concept of national [or youth] service offers a *special hope for one of America's most disturbing and intractable trends*: the solidification of a youth underclass most visibly among racial minorities in our major cities" (p. 89). Furthermore, Mosko states, "What characterizes American society today is that both good and bad economic times co-exist to an extent not found since abolition of slavery. A *seemingly permanent underclass of youth* has become restlessly juxtaposed with a youth enjoying unprecedented material influence" (p. 89).

According to Harold Hodgkinson, this trend shows every sign of worsening. In his just-published report on the demographics of education and service delivery systems he states, "A generalization that seems to hold for the end of the 1980s is that states and families are getting more unlike each other in terms of income — more rich, more poor, and fewer in the middle" (p. 19).

That a democracy cannot exist with from one-fourth to one-third of its future generation growing up in poverty is clear. Creating a means whereby youth from both extremes can work together in meaningful activities is a vitally needed public policy response. Certainly, "In the end there is no voluntary scheme that can insure the participation of the very rich in national service [or other forms of youth service]... But a comprehensive national service program linked with student aid would at least introduce the concept of civic responsibility to a very large portion of American youth..." (Mosko, p. 162).

• Careful implementation

Like any other prevention effort, successful youth service programs are developed from a *sound process of program planning and management* that is *collaborative*, eliciting the active participation of all concerned community systems — youth, parents, school personnel, local businesses, churches, agencies, local government, etc., and *dynamic/flexible*, adapting according to programmatic needs and environmental changes. In addition, the following

points have been identified as particular to implementing youth service programs:

■ *Do not displace paid employees.* Several authors caution that youth service programs must take care not to displace employees in existing jobs. According to Heffernan and Tarlov, this can be avoided by *careful project selection at the local level*: "The best [youth service] models from the conservation and service corps fields have included close consultation with local officials and public employee unions to ensure that corps projects do not conflict or interfere with the efforts and responsibilities of public agencies" (p. 13).

■ *Careful match between participants' interests and their work.* According to Danzig and Stanton, this is one of "the most important and best established lessons to be learned from the many youth and service programs of the past quarter century" (p. 278). Certainly, providing young people the opportunity to choose their respective service opportunities will help ensure this match.

■ *Careful supervision.* "Careful adult supervision within a well-defined structure" is essential to the success of a youth service program (Danzig and Stanton, p. 278). Besides the obvious benefit of ensuring that the youth service experience facilitates the personal and social development of youth, careful supervision helps create a supportive environment, providing young people ongoing adult guidance and nurturance.

■ *Training.* Training of all involved in the implementation of a youth service effort is critical — youth, parents, teachers, administrators, staff of community organizations and public agencies (Meisel, p. 3). Training significant players in the family, school, and community can help assure that service experiences are meaningful, of sufficient intensity, and integrated throughout a young person's social environment.

■ *Coordinators as "Zealous Champions."* According to Lee Levison's study of community service programs in independent schools, successful programs have coordinators with enthusiasm, commitment, and a firm sense of purpose — "Zealous Champions" he calls them (in *Reaching Out*, p. 15). As in any successful prevention effort, "just one person" with vision and commitment can

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be the catalyst for effecting community change (*Reaching Out*, p. 15; *Prevention Forums*, July 1988 and April 1989).

Conclusions/Implications

Our number one conclusion from this review of youth service is that youth service opportunities must be a key component of comprehensive prevention programming. While youth service represents one of the best means of providing positive alternatives to youth (an essential prevention strategy), it has not received the attention in prevention policy it deserves.

A second conclusion is that creating service opportunities for young people does not refer *only* to developing youth service programs *per se*, but rather to creating ongoing opportunities for youth throughout the arenas in which youth live their lives — families, schools, and communities — to actively participate in critical analysis, decision-making, problem-solving, goal-setting, and, especially in caring for others. The critical issue becomes, then, the necessity of integrating, connecting, or linking these arenas, of creating a unified, consistent, ongoing positive environmental message that youth are contributors and resources (Newman and Rutter in Danzig and Stanton, p. 107; Meisel, p. 3).¹ Creating nurturing environments for youth means creating opportunities for youth to nurture.

A third conclusion follows: the means for creating youth services opportunities is through the development of community-wide prevention collaboratives/task forces that include young people, parents, school personnel, community businesses and organizations, and government agencies (see *Prevention Forum*, October 1989).

Our fourth conclusion is that because youth service opportunities will evolve from community-wide collaboration, and

reflect each community's unique cultural configuration, youth service programs, like other prevention efforts, will take a variety of forms and be reflected in a diversity of programs. Danzig and Stanton conclude, "National service [and other forms of youth service]... is not simple or unitary; it is a *host of possibilities* that might be realized in a host of ways, each with promise, each with difficulties..." (p. 280). That this is currently the case is obvious from the literature (for example, see program descriptions in *Reaching Out*, *Turning Points*, and books and articles by Heffernan and Tarlov, Lewis, and Harrison).

That "the time is right" for developing coalitions at the local, state, and national levels encouraging youth service opportunities for youth is clear. Several authors cite growing enthusiasm in the national public policy arena for the concept, especially since youth service appears to address several current social concerns: political apathy among the young, responsible citizenship, job training and national competitiveness, unmet social needs (i.e., childcare, healthcare, eldercare, homelessness), and student financial aid.

According to Meisel, this enthusiasm at the national level for youth service only reflects what many local communities and a few states have already been doing: "Movements are not born in Washington, D.C., for by the time they get there they have already happened. Movements are created by and dependent on what is happening in hundreds of communities across the country" (p. 2). This is not only the case for the youth service movement, but for the prevention movement as well.

However, as we cautioned earlier, without any leadership (including financial support) at the national or state levels, youth service programming will not achieve the scale necessary to effect broad youth policy changes. The consequences of *not* providing service opportunities for our youth are grave. According to Mosko, "A comprehensive program of national service would call upon all of our country's races and classes to take part in a common civic enterprise. *If this possibility is ignored* and time is allowed to slide by, the richest country in the world will enter the 21st century crippled by an unemployed, unassimilated, and embittered underclass" (p. 99). Meisel's

"fear is that if we fail to create effective policies and implement meaningful programs, we will blame young people. *Just remember, if it doesn't work, it's because of bad policy, not bad kids*" (p. 4). Bad policy is policy that "fails to acknowledge and utilize the social contributions of childhood" (Kurth-Schai, p. 127). Bad policy is policy that continues to view youth as problems instead of as resources and as our hope for the future of humanity.

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¹For a discussion of some of the issues involved in developing and implementing school-community partnerships, see the books *Reaching Out* by the National Crime Prevention Council; *Student Service* by Charles Harrison of the Carnegie Foundation; *Education Incorporated* by Northeast-Midwest Institute; and *Building Bridges to Citizenship* by the Close Up Foundation.

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Investment in Youth: Child Care For Today

Traveling in Scandinavia this summer, I was impressed with the economic and psychological investment of those countries in their children. Scandinavians put their children in front of most, if not all, other priorities. My experience was greatest in Finland, where I attended the meetings of the International Society for the Study of Behavioral Development. My American colleagues agreed that we, so proud of our heritage, our standard of living, and the American credo avowing equality and freedom of opportunity, are "backward" in our attention to many educational and other environmental needs of our children. The Finns find amusing that we in the U.S. are still debating whether mothers should have time off from their jobs when their babies are born, whether the family should suffer an income loss during this period, and whether there should be child care and kindergarten programs for the *whole* population of children in the nation.

There are differences between Finland and the U.S. that make many features of the Finnish system difficult to import here. There are only five million people in all of Finland, and most families have only one or two children. About 80% of Finnish parents with pre school-aged children work full time.

Play, work, and teaching are the cornerstones of Finnish early childhood education. Great attention is given to individual differences in children, and screening for their talents and deficiencies is routine. Interventions for children with special needs are elaborate and provided readily, through state-subsidized programs. Some kindergartens are even available on a 24-hour basis, for parents with irregular working hours. (Similar practices are cropping up elsewhere. The community of Stirling, Scotland, has established a children's play and care center where parents can leave children in familiar and safe surroundings for whatever reason a parent might wish — to go shopping, for example.)

Before kindergarten, child care is extensively available, subsidized by the state and the local communities. A special profession of "child-minders" has evolved, a cohort of trained people who take seriously the Finnish cultural imperative that outside-of-home

education begins with daycare. Because the educational aspects of daycare and kindergarten are taken so seriously, elementary school does not begin in Finland until the child is seven years of age. Pre schools motivate children to ask, observe, and experiment to create readiness for later learning, but do not explicitly teach reading and addition.

Children's rights in Finland are embodied in a child welfare policy enacted by the national legislature: "A child is entitled to a secure and stimulating environment and to a harmonious and well-balanced development. A child has a special right to protection." National law in Finland prohibits corporal punishment and other humiliating treatment of children. Moreover, child custody and guardianship legislation defines the child's right of access to both parents in the case of divorce. Maternity leave and allowances in Finland are subsidized: 263 working days, 30 taken before the due date. Adoptive parents are entitled to all of this except the 30 days prior to delivery. Parents can share the leave; the days may be used cooperatively between mother and father. Fathers have 12 days of paternity leave when the baby is born. The government and employers meet the costs jointly.

One of my American psychologist colleagues in Finland, upon learning of these customs, exclaimed, "All this and there is no poverty and very little crime against persons in Finland?" "That's about right," our Finnish friend replied. It's worth thinking about.

— Lewis P. Lipsitt, Ph.D.
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