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# If All Youth Served: Empowering Youth to Build Community Through Service

Lenore M. Parker

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If All Youth Served:  
Empowering Youth to Build Community Through Service

Lenore M. Parker, Ph.D.  
National Service Fellow, 1998-1999

The original final product is a tool-kit with a series of short pamphlets addressing each of the topics covered in this report. In addition, the tool-kit has a calendar for the year 2000 based on the "If All Youth Served" vision statement, an hourly reporting card for young people engaged as volunteers, and several other "goodies." The tool-kit was not transferable to the Corporation for National Service's website, so this second version was created expressly for that purpose. To get information on how to receive the tool-kit, contact Creative Community Solutions,  
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## THE CORPORATION FOR NATIONAL SERVICE

### About the Corporation for National Service

Created in 1993, the Corporation for National Service oversees three national service initiatives – AmeriCorps, which includes AmeriCorps\*VISTA, AmeriCorps\*National, National Civilian Conservation Corps, and hundreds of local and national nonprofits; Learn and Serve America, which provides models and assistance to help teachers integrate service and learning from kindergarten through college; and the National Senior Service Corps, which includes the Foster Grandparent Program, the Senior Companion Program, and the Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP).

### National Service Fellows

The National Service Fellows program, launched by the Corporation for National Service in September 1997, involves a team of individual researchers who develop and promote models of quality service responsive to the needs of communities. The goal of the program is to strengthen national service through continuous learning, new models, strong networks, and professional growth.

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## Acknowledgements

If All Youth Served: Empowering Young People to Build Community Through Service has truly been a labor of love. It is the culmination of 5 years of work on the subject of engaging young people as volunteers and a lifetime of believing that young people have the resources to make this country great if given the opportunity. I believe that everyone strives to belong . . . If they cannot find ways to belong in socially constructive ways, they will find destructive ways. Service and volunteerism are one way that people can belong in socially constructive ways. And everyone can volunteer, regardless of skills, situation in life, or past history.

I would like to thank Janet Whitcomb from the Volunteer Center of Greater Orange County in Santa Ana, California for getting me involved in research about engaging young people as volunteers. The staff at Portland Area Council of Camp Fire were instrumental in the preliminary research which led to my National Service Fellowship Project and this tool-kit. The Corporation for National Service is a wonderful gift President Clinton has given this country. Specific thanks for this project go to Tom Flemming, Jeff Gale, and Anna Ditto for their commitment to the National Service Fellowship Program. Tom Flemming has been the guardian angel of this project. The other Fellows have been such support through this process. Special thanks go to Anne Ostberg for her clear-headedness, Stephanie Blackman and Becky Blumer for their friendship and belief, and Helen Lowrey for her insight. I feel truly blessed to have spent a year working with this wonderful group. David Morton, Ph.D. and Paula Cole Jones, consultants to the National Service Fellowship Program kept us on track and offered great support and insight. The staff at the Oregon Community Service Commission, Kathleen Joy, Deb Wheelbarger, Patricia Bolin, Marlene Howard, and Jesse DeJesus, were always there to cheer me on and remind me that my work was important not only to young people and community-based organizations, but to the National Service movement. My friends and family were great! They listened when I rambled on about my project, they said all the right things when I was discouraged and “oohed and aahd” at this final product.

Finally, I'd like to thank all the people who participated in the research on which this tool-kit is based. Their passion and commitment to engaging young people as volunteers has been phenomenal. I truly believe that together we can provide opportunities for young people to make a contribution to the world and lead us to places we've never dreamed possible! I hope this tool-kit will be useful to those organizations interested in empowering youth to build community through service, yet reticent to do so. I hope this tool-kit “lights a fire” under people to engage young people in all areas of community-building.

## CHAPTER I A Vision Statement

If All Youth Served . . .

There would be fewer social problems; less crime, less drug use, less homelessness, a higher “safety-net,” and less poverty.

If All Youth Served . . .

People would have more skills, which would result in a higher average income. There’d be universal literacy, better communication, and technology would be used to build community.

If All Youth Served . . .

People’s strengths would be recognized based on their performance rather than their personal characteristics, like race or gender.

If All Youth Served . . .

People wouldn’t be rewarded at other people’s expense. People would take personal responsibility for things. There would be a focus on assets rather than on deficits.

If All Youth Served . . .

People would reflect common values, including: compassion, tolerance, and respect.

If All Youth Served . . .

We would have creative solutions to complex problems and more brains thinking about social problems. More people would have a vested interest in their community. There would be a balance between assets and problems.

If All Youth Served . . .

There would be interdependency and control sharing. There would be “universal” focus on building community; with less tendency for isolationism.

If All Youth Served . . .

People would believe and demonstrate that doing for one is doing for all.

If All Youth Served . . .

There would be a power shift. Things would be equitable, there would be structured non-hierarchy, more people would focus on youth as resources. Youth would be able to vote.

If All Youth Served . . .

Over time, there would be less need for government and a smaller nonprofit sector because we'd automatically take care of each other.

*("If All Youth Served" focus group @ the Learn and Serve America Grantee meeting in Baltimore, Maryland from December 9-11, 1998).*



## CHAPTER II Research Findings

Research on the nature and extent of youth volunteerism is fairly consistent: most studies have found that around 90 percent of young people believe they should be involved in volunteer or service activities, yet only between 50 and 75 percent of them actually participate in these types of activities (Hodgkinson & Weitzman, 1992; Knauff, 1992; Parker & Franco, 1999). Parker and Franco (1999) found that young people gave multiple reasons for their lack of participation in volunteer or service activities: lack of meaningful opportunities, no one asked, lack of time, lack of available activities, or they just were not interested.

Anecdotal information supports the belief that when young people are involved in volunteer or service activities their grades improve, they attend school more regularly, they are less involved in acting out or delinquent behavior, and they are more likely to graduate from high school (Sauer, 1991; Tarshis, 1990; Dean & Murdock, 1992; Kleon, et al., 1996). This anecdotal information is supported by recent research conducted by Brandeis University/Abt Associates (1998) about the benefits of service-learning in higher education as well as the research by Rand (1998) which focuses on service-learning in grades K-12.

Little research was found which dealt specifically with community-based organizations as providers of volunteer or service activities for young people. However, an unpublished report by Parker (1998) suggests that community-based organizations were more likely to perceive young people as additional service recipients than as resources. In fact, when asked about the benefits of engaging young people as volunteers, organizations were more likely to identify benefits to young people themselves rather than to the organization or their clients/constituent groups.

### Research Project Focus

This project, funded through the National Service Fellowship Program of the Corporation for National Service, was designed to remedy this lack of information by shifting the focus to how community-based organizations can be supported in their efforts to engage young people as volunteers. Specifically, this project was designed to shed light on the factors associated with community-based organizations' ability to engage young people under the age of 18 (grades K-12) as volunteers. This project sought to answer the following questions:

- what are the barriers associated with engaging young people as volunteers?
- what solutions exist to resolve those barriers?

- what resources exist for community-based organizations in their attempts to resolve these barriers?

## Research Methodology

This was a flexible method, descriptive study using both qualitative and quantitative data collection strategies.

### Data Collection

Interviews were conducted with ten volunteer coordinators in Portland, Oregon. These interviews were designed to explore their experiences engaging young people as volunteers. They were used to develop surveys to further explore the issues identified in the interviews, particularly those related to the barriers identified to engaging young people as volunteers. While there were some sample specific questions in each survey, the basic format and content was the same. For example, each survey asked respondents to identify whether certain barriers existed (liability insurance, supervision, transportation). The surveys for State Commissions on Service and School-Based State Education Agencies both organizations funded through the Corporation for National Service) asked if the barrier existed in their state and community-based organizations were asked if the barrier existed within their own organization.

### Sample

The surveys were sent to three groups: (1) State Commissions on Service funded through the Corporation for National Service; (2) School-Based State Education Agencies funded through the Corporation for National Service; and (3) community-based organizations, including a random sample of organizations in Alaska, Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, and Iowa; community-based organizations receiving Learn and Serve America funds through the Corporation for National Service; and those community-based organizations responding to an e-mail description of the project on CYBERVPM listserv. The total sample size was 271.

Data collection ended on June 12, 1999 with a 26.19 percent return rate (n=71). Most of the surveys were returned by community-based organizations (52.11 percent) with close to an equal amount from State Commissions on Service and School-Based State Education Agencies (25.4 percent and 22.5 percent respectively).

## Youth Involvement in Community-Based Organizations

Almost three-quarters of the respondents in this study engage young people as volunteers. They involve young people in a wide variety of ways:

- indirect service, including mailings; cleaning; telephone work or maintenance projects (55.2 percent)
- direct service, including one-on-one close contact with individuals, members or clients; delivering meals; coaching or tutoring (40.30 percent)
- leadership activities, including training; committee or board member; committee chairperson (44.8 percent)
- direct service, including one-on-one close contact with individuals, members or clients; delivering meals; coaching or tutoring (40.3 percent)

Over half of the State Commissions responding to the survey require young people under age 18 to be actively involved in the planning and implementation of service-learning projects funded through the Corporation for National Service. Still, most State Commissions and School-Based Education Agencies report that young people are most often involved as beneficiaries of their services and programs rather than as active participants integrated into all aspects of their work.

### Barriers to Engaging Young People as Volunteers

Respondents were more likely to identify structural barriers to engaging young people as volunteers than attitudinal barriers (87.3 percent and 73.2 percent respectively). They did not identify either structural or attitudinal barriers as enough to keep them from engaging young people as volunteers. This is still the case when comparing organizations that currently engage young people as volunteers and those that don't.

#### Structural Barriers

The top three structural barriers identified were:

- transportation
- scheduling
- supervision

Initial interviews suggested liability insurance was a major structural barrier, so it was surprising to see that only slightly over 57 percent identified it as a barrier (see Table 1).

Our organization has a van that is used to transport older volunteers, yet we can't use it to transport young volunteers . . . I've been told it's because of liability issues. What would happen if a young person accused the driver of hurting them?

We have very few "hands-on" opportunities for youth – and most of our programs are off-site – making it difficult to supervise young volunteers.

Table 1:  
Structural barriers to engaging young people as volunteers

Barriers	n	P	Rating of Importance
Liability insurance	36	57.1	2.12
Parental consent	27	43.5	1.69
Criminal history/background check	32	51.6	2.11
Medical release	24	38.7	1.76
Scheduling	47	75.8	2.40
Supervision	46	73.0	2.51
Transportation	53	81.5	2.69
Training young people	10	38.5	2.31
Training staff to work with young people	40	63.5	2.14
Confidentiality	28	43.8	2.02
Lack of meaningful volunteer Opportunities	8	30.8	2.07

Note. Numbers and percents are based on "yes" responses to whether the item was a barrier. Rating of importance was based on a 4-point scale with 1 being "no impact on our work" and 4 being "stops us from engaging young people as volunteers."

#### Attitudinal Barriers

The top three attitudinal barriers were that staff within community-based organizations:

- believe that it is difficult for young people to work independently;
- perceive that young people don't have the skills necessary to work in their organization; and

- believe that young people are immature.

It is interesting that these attitudinal barriers are related to the issue of supervision, one of the top three identified structural barriers. How do you supervise someone you perceive as not being able to work independently, don't have the requisite skills, and think of as immature?

While the belief that their client populations are not appropriate for young people is not one of the top three attitudinal barriers identified, it is ranked as more likely to stop an organization from engaging young people as volunteers (see Table 2).

People in my organization believe that young volunteers take more time than adults . . . I just haven't found that to be the case.

We provide substance abuse treatment for young and counselors will not allow youth volunteers into the area if clients are there.

Table 2:  
Attitudinal barriers to engaging young people as volunteers

Barriers	n	P	Rating of Importance
Client populations are not appropriate for Youth	32	50.8	2.16
Cannot identify service opportunities for youth	31	43.7	2.00
Believe it is difficult for youth to work independently	36	58.1	2.09
Perceive that youth don't have the necessary Skills to work in their organization	33	53.2	2.05
Believe that youth are unreliable	32	51.6	2.07
Believe that youth tend to be immature	33	53.2	1.88
Lack trust in youth's abilities	30	48.4	1.97

Note. Numbers and percents are based on "yes" responses to whether the item was a barrier. Rating of importance was based on a 4-point scale with 1 being "no impact on our work" and 4 being "stops us from engaging young people as volunteers."

. . . and other volunteer literacy programs would not use youth to serve our target population. This is no reflection on the youth, but respect for the adult learner who already has low self-esteem about their skills. Providing

them with a teenage tutor could be perceived as an insult. Many programs don't match any student with a younger tutor, regardless of age.

### Community Service Hours as a Barrier

One barrier identified by respondents in the "other" category was worth discussing: community service hours. Both those community service hours required by courts as part of a diversion program or probation and those required by schools. This issue came up in survey responses as well as workgroups, interviews, and informal networking discussions about engaging young people as volunteers. Most of the concerns center on the following issues:

- lots of young people want to do their hours and aren't really connected to what the organization does;
- because they have procrastinated, young people usually have a short period of time to complete their hours;
- because young people have procrastinated organizations tend to only have indirect opportunities available which young people don't see as meaningful; and
- recording hours can be a burden to Volunteer Coordinators or other staff when there isn't a Volunteer Coordinator

I work in the only HIV-AIDS organization in our region. A few weeks ago I had a young woman call you wanted to be a "buddy" to one of our clients. She had 12 hours of service to complete before the end of the school year. I told her I was sorry but people needed to make a long-term commitment to our clients and that she had missed the training, which is required of all volunteers. I told her we had some office work she could do if that would work for her. She hung up. Several minutes later her month called. She told me that because of me her daughter wouldn't graduate from high school. I felt like I wasn't supportive of young volunteers, but I have to do what is in the best interests of our clients.

### Resolving the Barriers to Engaging Young People as Volunteers

How can the barriers identified with engaging young people as volunteers be resolved? In attempting to come up with solutions, the survey asked respondents to identify how they, or other organizations, had resolved any of the barriers they identified. Over 60 percent of the respondents could not identify any solutions.

To find out what types of help community-based organizations would prefer in order to resolve the barriers to engaging young people as volunteers, the survey

asked respondents to identify whether they would prefer training, technical assistance, networking, or information (see definitions). Close to 90 percent said they would like training (see Table 3). This is the case whether the barrier is structural or attitudinal, yet respondents more strongly prefer training when there are attitudinal barriers (see Table 4). In addition, respondents are more likely to prefer networking opportunities when the barrier is structural rather than attitudinal.

Training is an educational opportunity in a group setting. While training is designed to be applicable to individual organization issues, the focus is generally on broad applications. Technical assistance deals with organization specific issues, usually with individuals or small groups. It is hands-on and results in specific and tangible changes. Technical assistance is usually provided by a consultant. Networking deals with organizations sharing information, best practices, and resources in an attempt to support each other in accomplishing each organization's mission and goals. Information provides the broadest and least specific assistance to organizations. It focuses on educating organizations about program issues with broad recommendations of specific strategies.

Table 3:  
Types of Support

Type of Support	n	P
Training	62	87.32
Technical Assistance	47	66.20
Networking Opportunities	41	57.75
Information	41	57.75

Table 4:  
Preferred type of support for structural and attitudinal barriers

Type of Support	n	P
Training		
Structural Barriers	55	88.7
Attitudinal Barriers	47	90.4
Technical Assistance		
Structural Barriers	34	54.8
Attitudinal Barriers	28	53.8
Networking Opportunities		
Structural Barriers	32	51.6
Attitudinal Barriers	24	46.2
Information		
Structural Barriers	35	56.5
Attitudinal Barriers	28	53.8

Note. Numbers and percents are based on “yes” responses to whether this type of support would be helpful.

### Types of Support for Resolving Structural Barriers

In terms of the top three barriers to engaging young people as volunteers, respondents preferred various types of support (see Table 5). They prefer networking opportunities to resolve transportation issues, technical assistance to resolve scheduling issues, and training related to supervision issues. This suggests that using one type of support, regardless of the barrier or issue, is not a wise practice.

Written information is the most commonly preferred type of support for liability insurance. This is also the case in the areas of medical release, parental consent, and criminal history/background checks.

It is somewhat surprising that respondents prefer training and technical assistance over networking opportunities to identify meaningful opportunities for young people. This is also the case when looking at the attitudinal barrier, “cannot identify service opportunities for youth” (see Table 6). It would seem that there would be more benefits to staff from community-based organizations talking about how they have incorporated youth into their organization through networking than training.

Creative thinking about how to involve young people is the key. If something is a barrier, ask yourself how you can creatively make that not a barrier!

### Types of Support for Resolving Attitudinal Barriers

When looking at preferred types of support for resolving attitudinal barriers, there doesn't seem to be any consistent pattern (see Table 6). As noted above, there is a strong preference for training for all the specific attitudinal barriers impacting the engagement of young people as volunteers. This is particularly evident in the attitude that young people “don't have the skills necessary to work in their organization. Training around this issue could focus on teaching organization staff how to develop the specific skills necessary to positively impact their organization.

Involving young people in volunteering is a learning experience for the organization as well as young people.



Table 5:  
Identified training, technical assistance, networking, and information support to resolve structural barriers

Barriers	Training	Technical Assistance	Networking	Information
Liability insurance	17.6	29.4	23.4	41.2
Parental consent	15.7	15.7	14.6	47.1
Criminal history/ background check	19.6	23.5	12.5	47.1
Medical release	8.2	23.5	12.5	47.1
Scheduling	20.0	40.0	31.9	24.0
Supervision	43.1	39.6	31.3	27.5
Transportation	16.0	32.7	48.9	38.0
Training young people	36.4	22.7	10.0	27.3
Training staff to work with young people	46.0	38.5	25.5	36.0
Confidentiality	19.6	17.0	12.8	35.3
Lack of meaningful opportunities for young people	35.0	30.0	27.8	21.1

Note. Percents are based on “yes” responses to whether this type of support would be helpful. Due to space limitations, only percents are presented.

#### Preferred Formats for Information

Respondents prefer e-mail and short pamphlets to receive information about resolving barriers to engaging young people as volunteers (see Table 7). Despite the preference for e-mail, organizations do not report the world wide web as being one of the most helpful methods of getting information. This may be because e-mail can be obtained free of charge, where more sophisticated technology and higher costs are associated with the use of the world wide web.

#### Types of Support for Resolving Attitudinal Barriers

When looking at preferred types of support for resolving attitudinal barriers, there doesn't seem to be any consistent pattern (see Table 6). As noted above, there is a strong preference for training for all the specific attitudinal barriers impacting the engagement of young people as volunteers. This is particularly evident in the attitude that young people “don't have the skills

necessary to work in their organization. Training around this issue could focus on teaching organization staff how to develop the specific skills necessary to positively impact their organization.

Table 6:  
Identified training, technical assistance, networking, and information support to resolve attitudinal barriers

Barriers	Training	Technical Assistance	Networking	Information
Client populations are not appropriate for youth	35.4	20.0	33.3	28.0
Cannot identify service opportunities for youth	40.4	34.7	35.6	37.5
Believe it is difficult for youth to work independently	41.7	27.5	32.6	40.8
Perceive that youth don't have the necessary skills to work in their organization	50.0	21.6	34.8	42.9
Believe that youth are unreliable	23.9	27.5	34.8	42.9
Lack trust in youth's abilities	39.1	25.0	34.1	46.7

Note. Percents are based on "yes" responses to whether this type of support would be helpful. Due to space limitations, only percents are presented.

### Conclusions and Implications

How do you balance the needs of young people to be actively involved in their communities through volunteer and service activities which they consider meaningful with the community-based organization's need to engage volunteers to accomplish the mission of the organization? The key is to recognize that engaging young people as volunteers is mutually beneficial to young people, community-based organizations and their clients or constituents, and the community as a whole.

Table 7:  
Most preferred format for information

Preferred Format	n	P
Books	2	11.8
Short Pamphlets	11	55.0
E-mail	14	66.7
World Wide Web	8	40.0
CD-Rom	4	22.2
Videos	7	38.9
Brochures	9	50.0
Manuals	4	20.0

Note. Numbers and percents are based on “most preferred” responses to whether this format would be most preferred, somewhat preferred, or not helpful. This question was asked only on the community-based organization survey.

Organizations interested in providing support for community-based organizations to engage young people as volunteers must focus their efforts on what types of support and methods of disseminating information are identified as helpful by community-based organizations. This research suggests they move away from manuals and books to shorter and more accessible formats. As more and more organizations move to use the world wide web as a dissemination tool, it is important to remember that most small organizations do not have the technology for its use and prefer e-mail based formats, including listservs.

Typically, youth advocates and schools frame the importance of engaging young people as volunteers as they benefit the young person. This must change so that community-based organizations see the benefits that young people can bring to their organization and their client/constituent groups. Youth advocates and schools must also work in partnership with community-based organizations to ensure that young people are involved in activities that benefit the organization and it's clients.

Community-based organizations interested in engaging young people as volunteers must recognize that they must provide the context for young people to view all aspects of volunteering, direct service and leadership activities as well as indirect activities, as critical to the organization's success in accomplishing its mission. Making this connection for young people will ensure that they see every volunteer opportunity as meaningful and worthwhile.

## CHAPTER III Liability Issues and Engaging Young People as Volunteers

So what is liability and why is it important when engaging young people as volunteers?

Liability is about responsibility. It is about who is responsible in the event of an accident, injury, or damage. Community-based organizations engaging young people as volunteers are responsible to protect both young volunteers and the clients or constituents they serve. The best way to reduce a community-based organization's liability is to focus on the safety of young volunteers. This means that the volunteer activity or experience should:

- be proactive with lots of opportunities for training
- be meaningful
- have an educational benefit
- be safe

This chapter seeks to:

- discuss the concerns about liability issues expressed by community-based organizations as being a barrier to engaging young people as volunteers;
- provide a common vocabulary around the issue of liability; and
- present information about how to reduce the liability issues associated with engaging young people as volunteers.

### Key Liability Issues

Initial interviews with Volunteer Coordinators as well as working group members identified the following key liability issues: criminal history/background checks, parental involvement, supervision, confidentiality, school and community-based organization partnerships, medical issues, and insurance.

#### Criminal History/Background Checks

Criminal history and background checks are designed to protect children and other vulnerable groups from people who have a record of abuse or criminal convictions involving injury to others. When an organization engages young people as volunteers, the issue of criminal history/background checks is relevant in three ways. To:

- protect young people engaged as volunteers from the actions of adults;
- protect vulnerable clients and constituents from the actions of young people engaged as volunteers; and
- protect the organization's sensitive and/or confidential information.

***Criminal history/background checks for protecting young people engaged as volunteers:*** By law, you only have to complete a criminal history/background check on adults when there is regularly scheduled and/or unsupervised contact between adults and young people. In a school setting, if adults and young people are in a classroom with a teacher and other students it may not be necessary to conduct a criminal history/background check. However, if the adult is transporting a young person to or from a volunteer activity and there are no other people in the car, it is necessary to conduct a criminal history/background check on the adult driver.

It is important to remember that courts tend to hold schools and community-based organizations to a higher standard than parents. Since the goal is to provide safe volunteer experiences for young people and the organization's clients, it is best to err on the side of doing too much than too little!

***Criminal history/background checks for protecting vulnerable clients from the actions of young people engaged as volunteers:*** In most states, criminal history and background checks cannot be conducted on people under age 18. However, the community-based organization can require that young people, parents, or volunteer placement organizations fully disclose any of the issues covered in a criminal history/background check at the time they arrange the volunteer experience. The most common question to be asked is: Do you have a juvenile court record? If so, follow-up questions should relate to the nature of the crime(s).

***Confidentiality and young people engaged as volunteers:*** In some cases, young people engaged as volunteers may be in a position to work with confidential information. Typically, community-based organizations require volunteers to sign a confidentiality statement. When engaging young people as volunteers, this is somewhat tricky since they cannot legally enter into contracts. There are other consequences which may be imposed if a young person violates confidentiality including being terminated as a volunteer.

It is important to have a discussion with young volunteers about confidentiality and the consequences of violating confidentiality. Signing a confidentiality agreement is fine and actually a good thing. Just remember it will not protect the organization from lawsuits.

Some people think that kids are more apt to violate the confidentiality of clients than adults. I haven't found that to be the case. In fact, I've found that kids are more sensitive to these issues than a lot of adults!

### Parental Involvement

It is important to prepare both young people and their parents for the volunteer experience. Community-based organizations must find some way to balance the young person's need for autonomous decision-making with the organizations need to get permission and informed consent. The scope of parental involvement should be determined by the organization and the youth themselves. In addition, the community-based organization should provide assistance in helping the youth facilitate their parent's involvement.

At a minimum, parents should be apprised of the volunteer activity in two ways:

- parental permission; and
- informed consent/assumption of risk

**Parental permission** should be obtained whenever a young person is involved in a volunteer activity. A parental permission slip usually states:

*[child's name'] has my permission to participate as a volunteer with [organization name].*

While parental permission slips will not shield the community-based organization from liability in the case of an accident, injury, or damages, it may reduce the likelihood of a lawsuit. When parents feel a part of the decision-making promise they are more likely to share responsibility in times of crisis.

A parental permission slip must clearly define the volunteer activity, including transportation issues when relevant.

**Informed consent/assumption of risk** relieves the organization from liability for the volunteer activities where the risks have been clearly identified to the parent. It is based on full disclosure of all the facts necessary for the parent to make a decision about their child's participation. An informed consent/assumption of risk form identifies the specific activity the young volunteer will be involved with as well as the risks associated with that activity.

The community-based organization is only protected against the risks specifically identified on the form. For example, if the organization says there is a

risk of getting poison ivy on an environmental activity and a young person contracts poison ivy, your organization is protected. But if the young volunteer trips and falls along a path and that wasn't identified as a risk, informed consent/assumption of risk won't protect your organization from a lawsuit because it wasn't listed as a risk.

Informed consent/assumption of risk forms usually end with a statement that the parent signs which reads:

*I have read and understand the risks involved in this volunteer activity/experience and agree to not bring suit against the community-based organization or it's staff/volunteers for any harm which may result from those risks.*

### Liability Waivers

A liability waiver means that a volunteer, signs away their right to sue the community-based organization in the case of accident, injury, or damages. While liability waivers are appropriate for adult volunteers, they are usually not upheld in court in the case of a lawsuit when related to engaging young people as volunteers. This is for two reasons:

- courts throughout the country have ruled that a parent does not have the authority to waive their minor child's right to sue;
- young people age of 18 (16 years old in some states) do not have the authority to enter into contractual agreements (liability waivers are considered contracts);

Other ways to protect community-based organizations from liability in the case of accident, injury, or damages have been covered in this booklet. However, to summarize, community-based organizations should:

- ensure that all activities are safe;
- ensure there is training which covers the entire scope of the activity;
- ensure that parents are informed about the activity and its risks by having them sign both a parental permission slip and an informed consent/assumption of risk form; and
- ensure that your organization has volunteer accident insurance, pays into Worker's Compensation for volunteers, or requires young volunteers to provide proof of medical insurance (see Insurance section)

## Supervision

A major key to reducing a community-based organization's liability is to have good supervision. What is good supervision?

Good supervision is based on the empowerment model, where young people are nurtured and supported in their attempts to learn and develop skills. The empowerment model suggests that mistakes are the result of a lack of knowledge, so skill development and ongoing check-in during the activity is important. Good supervision also takes into account the developmental level of the young person. The younger the volunteer, the more direct and consistent the supervision must be.

Adults supervising young people engaged as volunteers should enjoy young people and be supportive of their involvement in the community-based organization. It is helpful if they see young people as a resource that can add insight and a fresh look at things.

But remember, unless the supervisor has undergone a criminal history/background check the supervision should occur in a public place.

For a more thorough discussion about supervising young people engaged as volunteers, see the "Supervising Young People Engaged as Volunteers" chapter.

## School and Community-Based Organization Partnerships

With the move towards requiring service in public schools and the institutionalization of service-learning, school and community-based organizations must be prepared to successfully engage young people as volunteers. This means they must:

- work together to develop protocols for service/volunteer activities;
- adequately prepare both students and their families for the volunteer/service experience;
- meet on a regular basis to review and problem-solve the partnership; and
- develop systems for such things as: recording student hours (see original tool-kit for a method of doing this), training, supervision, notification of problems encountered during the placement, and recognition of volunteer/service work

Communication is the key in school and community-based organization partnerships. They are not easy because the bureaucratic systems are so different.



In addition, the reasons for engaging young people as volunteers are different: schools involve young people for the educational benefits, while community-based organizations involve them to advance the mission of the organization. Remembering this difference is key. One way to do this is to focus on the community and societal level benefits of informed and connected young people.

Sometimes schools are so intent on getting students in the field (for service-learning activities) they don't service the placement, prepare the young people or their parents for the activity.

### Medical Issues

There are two areas where medical issues are of concern when engaging young people as volunteers:

- the young person's pre-existing medical conditions; and
- accidents and/or injuries occurring during the volunteer activity.

It is up to the community-based organization to collect information about any pre-existing medical conditions the young person may have. This is most commonly done during the application process with a question like: Do you have any pre-existing medical conditions? Usually a few medical conditions are identified (diabetes, epilepsy) and there is an "other" category. It is also important to ask if the young person has any allergies, and if so, what kind.

It is always a good idea to have the following information in the young person's volunteer file to be used in case of a medical emergency:

- proof of medical insurance;
- emergency medical contact information; and
- permission to obtain medical care in the case of an emergency.

### General Liability Insurance

General liability insurance protects community-based organizations and their staff against claims by third parties. A community-based organization's general liability insurance policy can include volunteers as "additional insureds." While some insurance companies automatically include volunteers in a general liability policy, you may have to ask for this endorsement to be added to your policy. Adding this endorsement does not exclude lawsuits generated by a volunteer against the community-based organization where they volunteer.

## Volunteer Accident Insurance

Volunteer accident insurance can also be purchased through your insurance company. This type of insurance covers a volunteer's medical care up to \$10,000. The cost is usually around \$2.00 per volunteer or \$.18 per day for special events. This type of insurance covers the volunteer if they are injured during their volunteer activities.

## Worker's Compensation

Worker's compensation covers employees in case of an on-the-job injury. While volunteers are not employees, most states allow community-based organizations to include volunteers in their quarterly worker's compensation report. The organization pays an extra amount (in Washington state, it is \$.0494 per hour) based on the number of volunteer hours recorded during that quarter. The age of the volunteer does not matter, so young people can be covered as well as adults. Contact your state's Department of Labor for more information.

The definitions of those who can be covered under Worker's Compensation are:

A **volunteer worker** is "any person who performs any assigned or authorized duties for a city, county, town, special district, municipal corporation or political subdivision of any type, or a private nonprofit charitable organization brought about by one's own free choice, receives no wages, and is registered and accepted as a volunteer by the municipality or organization for whom the work is performed."

A **student volunteer** is "an enrolled student in a public school who is participating as a volunteer under a program authorized by the school. The student volunteer shall perform duties for the employer without wages. The student volunteer shall be deemed a volunteer even if the student is granted maintenance and reimbursement for actual expenses necessarily incurred in performing his or her assigned or authorized duties. A person who earns wages for the services performed is not a student volunteer."

A **community service worker** is "any offender performing services pursuant to a court order or diversion agreement for a state agency, county, city, town, or nonprofit organization."

## Other Medical Insurance for Young People

In some states, young people involved in sports can get low cost medical insurance that covers them during the time they are involved in the sports activity. In Washington state, this coverage includes young people engaged as

volunteers through schools (ExcelServ is an example of this type of company and can be reached at 800-628-8305). Check to see if this type of insurance is available in your state.

Remember, it is important to keep information on the young person's medical insurance in their volunteer file, just in case you need it.

### Indemnification

Indemnification is a contract transferring liability from one person or organization to another. Basically, indemnification is when one individual or organization agrees to assume financial responsibility in the event that any lawsuits are brought against the other individual or organization. It doesn't mean that people cannot sue in the event of accident, injury, or damages but that someone else will pay. It is a "promise to protect."

Indemnification is very useful in the event that a young person engaged as a volunteer injures or damages someone or property while involved in a volunteer activity.

When a community-based organization is considering indemnification by another organization, a school, or an individual it is critical that they ensure that the other party's insurance will cover an indemnification agreement and/or that the other party has the financial resources to cover any costs that may arise out of a lawsuit. There should always be written documentation stating that the insurance company agrees to the indemnification agreement. If the indemnification is with an individual and does not include an insurance company, it is important to require proof that the individual has the financial assets to cover the agreement in the event of a lawsuit.

### Conclusion

While there are definite liability issues involved in engaging young people as volunteers, they are easily remedied with some thought and planning. It is important to not let these issues stop you from engaging young people as volunteers. Remember, young people bring "amazing compassion, knowledge they can change the world, loyalty, enthusiasm, a willingness to learn – make mistakes – and go on, and flexibility" to community-based organizations when engaged as volunteers.

## CHAPTER IV

### Supervising Young People as Volunteers

Supervision is designed to develop and refine the skills of young people engaged as volunteers so they provide quality services to and for community-based organizations' clients and constituents. It is also a way to ensure the safety and appropriateness of volunteer activities.

Over 70 percent of the respondents to the survey used to develop this tool-kit said that supervision was a barrier in their efforts to engage young people as volunteers.

This chapter will:

- talk about the importance of supervising young people engaged as volunteers;
- discuss the empowerment model; and
- discuss how to apply the empowerment model to supervising young people engaged as volunteers.

#### Supervising Young People Engaged as Volunteers

There is really very little difference between supervising an adult and supervising a young person engaged as a volunteer. Good supervisors seek to increase the volunteer's level of empowerment. They:

- show respect;
- set clear expectations;
- supervise people based on their individual learning styles and stage of development;
- recognize exemplary effort; and
- effectively set limits and disciplines "problem" volunteers.

Both adults and young people engaged as volunteers respond best to supervision based on the empowerment model. This model helps both groups become better volunteers and more effective community members.

Not all people view supervision as something positive. Some of the young people I've worked with think of supervision as an adult telling them what to do and micro-managing the volunteer activity. I think of supervision as a tool that enables growth, of both the "supervisee" and the supervisor. I've had to learn to be careful about how I present the concept of supervision to young people.

## Empowerment

There are several definitions of empowerment, but two I like best. According to Rappaport (1985), empowerment is:

A sense of control over one's life in personality, cognition, and motivation. It expresses itself at the level of feelings, at the level of ideas about self-worth, at the level of being able to make a difference in the world around us. . . We all have it as a potential. It does not need to be purchased, nor is it a scarce commodity.

Gutierrez (1999) suggests that empowerment is:

the process of increasing personal, interpersonal, or political power so that individuals can take action to improve their life situation.

I like these definitions because they make it clear that empowerment is not something that someone does to someone, but is something that is inherent and can be nurtured and developed.

### Psychological Traits Associated with Empowerment

There are four psychological traits associated with empowerment (Gutierrez, 1990):

- self-efficacy;
- group consciousness;
- reduction of self-blame; and
- assuming personal responsibility for change

Self-efficacy is the expectation that you can accomplish what you set out to accomplish. It is the belief that you can have an impact on your surroundings and in your life.

Group consciousness is a connection to others or some “thing.” It is the recognition that you are an individual in a social context. It is a belief in interdependency, about sharing responsibility, and contributing to the group as a whole. Group consciousness, in the sense of empowerment, is not about giving up your individuality for the group but about using your uniqueness to move the group forward.

A major challenge for our organization is how to make young people feel connected to the organization and each other. We’ve been trying to make things easy for volunteers and show them the big picture of our efforts. We’ve developed a newsletter with some information specific to our young volunteers. Plus, we consistently repeat the same message so young people can identify and recognize the important work they are a part of.

Reduction of self-blame is the recognition that our past experiences, and societal expectations have an impact on what we do and who we are. Realizing this, an individual places blame on those situations and expectations that have negatively impacted them rather than personalize those situations or events.

Reducing self-blame without its companion trait of taking personal responsibility for change does not empower young people, but puts them in the victim role. Taking personal responsibility for change means that the young person recognizes the social and experiential factors that shape their lives and moves past them to make their life better.

One of our young volunteers had been severely abused by his stepfather. He wanted to volunteer at our crisis nursery so he could help kids like himself. He was great! He shared his story and was a role model about how you could give to others despite bad experiences. He helped the other kids see that the abuse wasn’t their fault, but their parent’s problem.

#### Application of the Empowerment Model to Supervising Young People Engaged as Volunteers

So, how do you take this information and use it to be a good supervisor to young people engaged as volunteers in your organization? There are five strategies associated with empowering supervision:

- accept the young person’s definition of the issue or problem;
- identify and build upon youth’s existing strengths;
- engage the young person in a power analysis of their situation;
- teach specific skills; and

- mobilize resources and advocate for the young person engaged as a volunteer

### Accept the Young Person's Definition of the Issue or Problem

When engaging young people as volunteers it is important to involve them in the planning process of their volunteer activity. Just asking questions about their interests, what they would like to accomplish as a volunteer, and how volunteering can help them accomplish their own personal goals are great ways to demonstrate that you accept the young person's definition of the issue or problem. Once the young person is involved as a volunteer in an organization, follow-up conversations and meetings can help young people see how the experience reinforces or changes their beliefs and actions. Accepting their definition of the issues or problems help young people feel heard. It also models how to listen and truly hear other people.

### Identify and Build Upon the Young Person's Existing Strengths

Strengths are those things that enable us to function on a day-to-day basis. They are how young people express their interpersonal power. It is always a good idea to ask the young person what they see as their strengths or what they do best. Asking them what they enjoy most also helps them identify their strengths. As you learn about the young person it is also a great idea to tell them what you see as their strengths and why you see them as strengths.

It is important to remember that not all strengths show themselves in a positive light. If this is the case, before addressing the issue, try to "reframe" the behavior by asking yourself these questions:

- how could this behavior have helped the young person cope with life?
- what is the young person trying to accomplish with this behavior?
- how can I help them accomplish the same thing in a more positive way?

We had a 9 year old volunteer working our office. She helped us get out the newsletter every month. She had to do everything her own way, with all the steps having to be in a specific order. Where things changed or we suggested ways she could work better, she would cry. We wondered if she was more trouble than she was help. One day we learned about the chaotic family life she had . . . There was no order in the house and no stability. All of a sudden we realized that having the consistency of doing the newsletter the same way each month made her feel she had some control over something. So, we let her prepare the newsletter in a way that best suited her. She

turned out to be one of our best volunteers. Actually, we still do the newsletter her way and she hasn't been with us for several years!

### Engaging Young People in a Power Analysis of their Situation

Young people are often in situations where their power is diminished or taken away from them. We live in a society where young people are not valued and where they are usually considered problems. Despite the fact that between 50 and 70 percent of young people are engaged as volunteers, the myth of young people as "trouble" continues. Many of the difficulties young people face as volunteers is in adults' perceptions of them. A power analysis helps young people see how these perceptions influence their opportunities and ability to make a difference.

Our organization decided to add a young member to our Board. He had been a great volunteer working with older clients. But on the Board he rarely said anything. When he did one of the other Board members would always correct him. He was so frustrated he talked about resigning from the Board.

Gutierrez (1990) identifies the following steps in a power analysis:

- look at how the conditions of "powerlessness" effect the young person's situation;
- identify the potential power in the young person's situation;
- talk about the societal and community forces involved with the situation; and
- help the young person identify their sources of personal power to deal with situation (like forgotten skills, personal characteristics, support networks, supervisors or mentors).

Sometimes having opportunities for groups of young people engaged as volunteers to reflect on their experiences can be helpful. It provides them an opportunity to talk about how they are treated because of their age and what they can do. With a good facilitator, this type of reflection becomes more than just a "complain fest" and can move to action.

Another solution is to have someone do a training on engaging young people. Youth on Board and several other organizations listed in the National Organization Resource Booklet in this tool-kit can help!

### Teaching Specific Skills



One of the most important functions of the supervision process is skill development. An empowering supervisor sees difficulties as being the result of a lack of skill and uses them as an opportunity to teach those skills.

If the community-based organization has developed volunteer job descriptions that are skill-based, supervision starts with the identification of the level of competence of the young volunteer around each skill level. Training and ongoing supervision can then focus on the areas where the young volunteer is lacking.

If the community-based organization uses both adult and young volunteers, it is important that young people are included in training with adults rather than being isolated and trained separately.

### Mobilizing Resources and Advocating for Young People Engaged as Volunteers

Sometimes the young person has a problem with another volunteer, a client or constituent, or a paid staff person. Sometimes the young volunteer has a problem in another area of their life that is impacting their performance as a volunteer. In these situations, the supervisor can help the young volunteer by mobilizing resources or advocating for the young person. The best advocacy is done collaboratively with the young person. If this is done, the young person can learn the skills of self-advocacy which will increase their level of empowerment. Sometimes when we advocate "for" someone we take away their personal power.

### Conclusions

One of the most exciting parts of supervising young people engaged as volunteers is having the opportunity to help them grow and develop, not only in terms of the volunteer activity but as people. You also see the benefits of your efforts directly with an increase in the quality of services provided to the organization and it's clients or constituents.

Supervision based on the empowerment model allows the supervisor the opportunity to function as a mentor. This special relationship benefits not only the supervisor and the young person engaged as a volunteer, but the community-based organization, the clients or constituents, and the community as a whole. It makes it more likely that when the young person is in a position of power they will carry the tradition of mentoring with a focus on increasing people's level of empowerment forward to a new group of young people engaged as volunteers!

## APPENDIX A: Publications About Engaging Young People as Volunteers

This appendix lists the journal articles, unpublished reports, and books that I have found helpful in my work about engaging young people as volunteers.

You can usually get the journal articles from a local university library, especially universities that have a school of social work. Some public libraries have the journals, especially the Journal of Volunteer Administration, but if your local library doesn't, try inter-library loan. While that usually takes a week or two, I think the articles are worth reading particularly if you are trying to make a case to engage young people as volunteers. I continue to be disappointed by the lack of professional publications focusing on how youth volunteers benefit community-based organizations, but hope this project and others like it will help remedy the situation.

The unpublished reports are sometimes difficult to find. I included the organizations that either sponsored or conducted the research, so try contacting them directly. The books you can get either through the library or the publisher. Energize, Inc. (energizeinc.com or 1-800-395-9800) and the Points of Light Foundation (pointsoflight.org or 1-800-272-8306) are also good sources to purchase books, tapes, and videos. If you are a member of the Points of Light Foundation you even get a discount on their books, tapes, and videos.

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