1996

Adults as Allies

Barry Checkoway
University of Michigan

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/slcepartnerships

Part of the Service Learning Commons

Recommended Citation

Adults as Allies

by Barry Checkoway
School of Social work
the University of Michigan

INTRODUCTION

Young people are creating community change! They are tutoring in the schools, working in health clinics, and serving meals in soup kitchens. They are cleaning up the environment, rehabilitating houses for the homeless, and formulating strategies for neighborhood revitalization. They are solving problems, planning programs, and involving people in decisions at the community level.

But these young people are not working in isolation, without support and encouragement. Some adults are working closely with them and playing various roles in the process – from bringing young people together and giving them encouragement, to nurturing their ideas and building support for their work. These adults view "youth as resources" – as competent citizens who have a right to participate and a responsibility to serve the community.

This workbook is for adults who are, or who want to become, allies of young people creating community change. These include youth workers and school teachers serving in established institutional

roles, and community leaders and neighborhood activists involving youth in new grassroots initiatives. The assumption is that adults can benefit from information and intended to increase inter-generational interaction and mutual support in the common cause of creating change.

"Adults as Allies" is intended to accompany a parallel publication called "Young People Creating Community Change," which provides practical tools for youth working at the community level with or without adult assistance. However, unlike "Young People Creating Community Change," which provides an overall step-by-step process, the present publication is a compilation of ideas to increase awareness and pose questions for consideration in your local situation. The only answers to these questions are the ones you will provide.

Ultimately, if only a fraction of adults viewed young people as resources and served as allies in creating community change, the results would be extraordinary.

WHAT IS YOUTH PARTICIPATION?

Youth participation is a process of involving people in the decisions that affect their lives. It includes a wide range of activities – from forming committees and holding meetings to lobbying the legislature and fighting city hall – which are so numerous that entire catalogs are given to their description.

Some adults view youth participation in terms of its scope, such as the number and frequency of activities. Thus, it is common for adults to conclude that because a number of youth activities occur, and because a number of young people take part in them, participation is taking place.

However, quantity is not an adequate measure of quality. Quality participation shows some effect, influences a decision, or produces a desired outcome. Thus, when an adult agency holds meetings in the youth center but the decisions have already been made elsewhere, or includes a young person on its board of directors but does not heed his or her views, the participation is "token," and not of "real" quality.

What does youth participation mean in your community?

DEFINING YOUTH PARTICIPATION: DO YOU AGREE?

"Youth participation is the involving of youth in responsible challenging action that meets genuine needs, with opportunities for planning and/or decision-making affecting others in an activity whose impact or consequence is extended to others – i.e., outside or beyond the youth participants themselves. Other desirable features of youth participation are provision for critical reflection on the participatory activity and the opportunity for group effort toward a common goal."

– National Commission on Resources for Youth, 1975

WHO ARE THE YOUTH PARTICIPANTS?

Most young people are uninvolved or minimally involved in community affairs. A small proportion are very active, but the activists are not usually representative of the overall population. Income, education, and socioeconomic status all relate to participation and contribute to the characteristics and attitudes that support further activism.

Adults may unknowingly perpetuate the uneven levels of youth participation in the community. Indeed, they often reach out to youth who already hold leadership positions rather than identify those who are traditionally underrepresented. This tends to perpetuate existing patterns of power and privilege, promoting young people who are already active rather than identifying those with potential and encouraging them to participate more actively. If only a fraction of adults sought to engage underrepresented youth in community affairs, the results would be significant.

> *Who are the young people who are creating change in your community? What kinds of things are they doing? Who are the young people with potential for more actively? How can adults develop new youth leadership in the community?*

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF YOUTH PARTICIPATION?

Adults who promote the active participation of young people may encounter resistance from others who do not share this purpose. One way to prepare for these encounters is by recalling the benefits of participation, and establishing them as a framework for response and a platform on which to stand.

What are the benefits of young people creating community change – for youth themselves? for the organizations they develop? for the communities they change?

Here are some statements to use with those who are skeptical.

Personal development

Youth participation can lead to improved academic achievement by increasing the substantive knowledge and practical skills that come from "real life" problem-solving, while also strengthening social responsibility and long-term civic values. In contrast to youth who accept their situation as a given, participants are more likely to think critically and to actively challenge their circumstances.

Organizational development

Participation involves youth in activities that bring people together, teaches them to set priorities and make decisions, and enables them to plan programs that contribute to their organizational capacity. In contrast to youth who do not view themselves as a group, participants play roles that contribute to collective action and prepare them to make a difference. These roles can have particular importance for at-risk or economically disadvantaged youth.

Community development

Youth participation contributes to community development. When young people tutor in schools, volunteer in hospitals, work in homeless shelters, serve meals in soup kitchens, rehabilitate abandoned buildings, or formulate strategies for neighborhood revitalization, they are developing the community while developing themselves.

YOUNG PEOPLE CAN CREATE CHANGE!

In a society whose media often often portray young people as deficits – and who thus may accept these portrayals of themselves – adults can help by providing examples of how youth have successfully created community change. For example:

- Twenty-first Century Youth Leadership Project organized against racial discrimination in Selma, Alabama. Young people organized a protest demonstration, called a citywide boycott, and conducted a sit-in in the high school. They also marched against toxic waste dumps, conducted tours of houses whose landlords refused to make improvements, and mobilized residents against drug abuse in public housing.

- Latin American Youth Center in Washington, D.C., responded to announced cutbacks in youth programs by circulating petitions, testifying in public hearings, and demonstrating at city hall. They staged street theater in front of city council, visited council members in their offices, and convinced them to restore the funds.

- Students Educating Each other about Discrimination (SEED) is a group of teenagers in Ann Arbor, Michigan, who educate themselves and younger children about discrimination. They assessed racial attitudes in the schools, formulated an action plan, and built support for a citywide program in which they train teenage facilitators for anti-racist educational work with younger children.

- City Year involves young people in a year of full-time community service in Boston. Teams tutor children in elementary schools, run after-school programs, conduct violence-prevention workshops, and organize community cleanup campaigns. In one project designed to provide housing for elderly homeless women, they renovated the interior and exterior of a building, paved a driveway, and provided access for the disabled.

- Youth Action Program of East Harlem youth rehabilitate abandoned housing for the homeless while also completing their education and preparing for employment. They operate a resource center and a "safe haven," and form citywide coalitions to set youth priorities for the city. Each project is governed by an activist core of young people who make policy and budgetary decisions.

- Indiana Youth as Resources members form planning committees, assess community needs, invite proposals for programs that benefit youth, and allocate funds for implementation according to criteria. Special emphasis is placed on proposals involving young people of color, low-income youth, and youth who have been traditionally excluded from community participation.

- Community Youth Creative Learning Experience (CYCLE) is committed to leadership development and continuing education throughout the life cycle in Chicago's Cabrini-Green public housing project. During the day, high schoolers help elementary students with homework and participate in cultural activities; at night, they meet with their own tutors, who share college experiences and serve as role models themselves.

There are several sources of information on successful efforts by young people nationwide, but there also are local efforts in most communities. Adults can help young people find their own examples by asking the following questions:

What is a youth group creating community change in your community? What kinds of things do they do? What makes them stand out in your mind? What lessons can be learned from them?

COMMUNITY CHANGE AS A LEARNING PROCESS

When young people create community change and reflect critically upon their experience, they can learn lessons that last a lifetime.

Adults who work closely with youth are strategically situated to translate experience into learning – by asking questions and raising issues that prompt young people to think about the process of change.

What are the lessons learned from community change? Research shows that successful community-based youth programs have the following characteristics:

Strengthening Community

Community-building is a process of people working together at the community level. Whether defined as a place where people live, or a group of people with common concerns, or the issues that tie people together, the community is a unit of solution.

Joining Together

People joining together usually can accomplish more than one person acting alone. As individuals unite in solidarity, they realize that their individual problems have social causes and collective solutions. This group solidarity does not diminish the importance of individual initiative, but rather recognizes the strength that comes from joining together.

Getting Organized

Community change can start with unplanned actions or random events, but lasting change takes organizational development in which people establish roles and relationships over time. It takes its simplest form in such activities as holding meetings and forming committees on a regular basis.

Believing in Change

Some young people believe that change is possible and take action accordingly; others are aware of community problems but only occasionally try to do something about them; yet others appear alienated or withdrawn from participation in the community. For them, especially, creating change can serve as an awakening process and motivational force.

Multicultural Cooperation

These efforts recognize that the community is not "monocultural," with all people having the same social and cultural characteristics, but "multicultural." Multicultural cooperation requires that people recognize the differences among groups and build bridges for cooperation across them. As such, community change is a tool for a more multicultural society.

CRITICAL REFLECTION FOR COMMUNITY CHANGE

Young people learn a great deal from creating community change, but the learning process is not automatic.

On the contrary, many young people become passive recipients of information rather than active participants in their own learning. In schools, they often sit in silence while teachers talk, rather than challenging their circumstances; and accept difficult situations as given, rather than seeing them as problems to be solved.

Adults who work closely with young people are strategically situated to help youth reflect critically upon experience and move them across the "continuum of change." At one point on this continuum are people who face problems in their lives but do not believe that change is possible. At another point are people who are aware of problems and participate in the community to a limited or minimal extent without much impact. At still another point are people who perceive that community problems have solutions over which they have control; show confidence in their own abilities; and take decisive actions that produce results. Critical reflection can cause learning that is truly transformational, especially for those who are new to the process.

Various activities can facilitate reflection, including:

- Individual conferences – between participants and facilitators to set goals and reviews.

- Daily meetings – in which participants meet before or after activities.

- Weekly group sessions – built into the program for study of relevant topics.

- Special workshops – that focus on special needs or particular skills.

- Writing journals – that enable participants to describe activities and reflect upon experiences.

Facilitation of reflection can be a process of "problem-posing" in which the facilitator helps people to identify the things they want to change, find the root causes of problems, and work out practical ways to make it happen. David Werner describes health workers in Mexico who bring villagers together to discuss the causes of illness through a problem-posing dialogue that involves a series of "but why?" questions, as illustrated by the following dialogue between a worker and child in the village:

"The child has a septic foot."

"But why?"

"Because she stepped on a thorn."

"But why?"

"Because she was barefoot."

"But why."

"Because she was not wearing shoes."

"But why not?"

"Because they broke and her father was too poor to buy new ones."

"But why is her father so poor?"

"Because her father is a farm worker."

"But why does that make him poor?"

"Because he is paid very little as a farm worker and must give half his harvest to the landowner."

"But why?"

Adults are strategically situated to facilitate the reflection process, but are no substitute for young people doing it themselves. There are many communities where young people care for their younger brothers and sisters, and where "youth to youth" is the best way to learn.

DEVELOPING A THEORY OF COMMUNITY CHANGE

Young people who are creating community change are sometimes so busy with daily tasks that they lose site of the broader vision that motivated them to become involved in the first place.

However, this broad vision can provide a positive psychological and intellectual foundation, especially in the face of resistance. It can help people to see the connections among issues, explain the root cases of problems, and clarify the choices to be made. It can provide a reminder of purpose, sense of direction, and platform on which to campaign in the community.

Adults can help youth to develop their own theory of community change, by posing questions and raising issues that provide perspective and recall the broader vision.

The following questions were formulated by Greg Speeter to help people develop their own theory. Are there young people in your community who might benefit from their answer?

> *What needs changing in the community?*

> *What would the ideal community look like?*

> *Why is there a gap between the real and ideal?*

> *What strategies can be developed to work toward solving the problem?*

WHAT IS YOUR COMMUNITY?

"Community" is a word with many meanings and uses. It is customary to view community as place in which people live (such as a village or city), or as a population group with similar characteristics (such as rural villagers or older people), or as a group of people with a common concern (such as religious freedom or the status of women). The concept of community is often used, but less often defined. When it is defined, it is commonly used as a noun or adjective.

But community also is a process through which people take initiative and act collectively. It varies from one area to another, but generally is based on the belief that problems in communities have solutions in communities, and that people should participate in the matters that affect them at the local level. Community thus is more than a noun or adjective, but also a verb that refers to a process of participation, and a means of solution in society.

> *What is your community? What is your unit of solution?*

CAN THE WIZARD EMPOWER THE LION?

Can an adult empower a young person? It is common to view empowerment as a process in which a person or community gives or gets power from another. Such a notion holds that power originates outside the person or community, and is received or taken from another. Another view of empowerment holds that power is a present or potential resource in every person or community. There is always another person or community that can become empowered. However, the key is for people to recognize and act upon the power or potential power that they already have.

Consider this story: In The Wizard of Oz, the Cowardly Lion asks the Wizard for courage. Eventually, the Wizard gives a ribbon to the Lion, signifying courage. When the Lion looks at the ribbon, he believes he has power; when he feels this way, he also acts this way. But, as the Wizard remarks, "I don't know why people always ask me for what they already have."

> *How can you help a young person believe that he or she has the power to participate?*

SEVERAL STRATEGIES OF COMMUNITY CHANGE

Community change has several strategies, but there is a tendency for young people to become limited in their strategic orientation. This is especially true when adults steer youth into a few safe strategies rather than challenging ones, and when youth themselves accept the choices that adults allow. Thus, adults encourage youth to sweep the streets rather than protest the sanitation department, or to volunteer in the hospital rather than lobby for health reform, or to tutor in the schools rather than challenge inequities in education.

However, it is as mistaken to become captive to a single strategy as it is to ignore the other options available. Adults who work with young people are in a position to help them understand that there is no single strategy for achieving community change. There are several strategies from which to choose, including the following:

- Mass mobilization – amassing individuals around issues through highly visible public demonstrations, such as when they plan demonstrations against racial discrimination.

- Grassroots organizing – building powerful organizations for social and political action to "empty the shelters," "take back the park," or "save the environment."

- Citizen participation – representing people in committees and meetings of community agencies, such as when they have a seat on the school board or city planning commission.

- Public advocacy – representing group interests in legislative or other institutional arenas, such as when they lobby legislators to show support for youth programs.

- Popular education – raising consciousness and strengthening confidence through small-group meetings, such as when they educate themselves about the root causes of poverty, and discuss alternative solutions.

- Local services development – providing services of their own at the community level, such as assisting in child care center or tutoring children in math.

> *Which of these strategies has the most potential to empower youth in your community? Which ones would you choose for young people? Which ones would youth themselves choose?*

DO YOU VIEW YOUTH AS VICTIMS, OR AS RESOURCES?

Many adults view "youth as resources." This view assumes that young people are competent citizens with a right to participate and a responsibility to serve their communities. Proponents of this view want youth to build on their strengths by "making a difference" in ways that provide them with tangible benefits and develop healthier communities.

This contrasts with the view of "youth as victims," which assumes that young people are vulnerable members of society too often victimized by forces beyond their control. Proponents of this view want to "save the children," "defend their rights," and protect them from worsening conditions. Child-protection providers are a vocal presence in the community, where they promote programs to expand needed services for youth.

> *Do you view youth as victims, or as resources? What is your view of the role of young people in society? What would happen if society viewed young people as competent community builders?*

ASSESSING THE ASSETS OF YOUTH

Some adults perceive that young people are the best judge of their own situation and that youth services should directly respond to the expressed needs of their clients. As a result, they employ interviews, focus groups, surveys, or other methods to assess their needs.

However, a needs assessment by adult providers for service delivery is different from a participatory assessment by young people who are creating community change. Also, the focus on the needs of young people carries the risk of ignoring their substantial strengths, increasing their dependence upon providers of services, causing them to lose confidence in themselves, and making them feel unable to do things that otherwise are within their grasp.

In contrast, John McKnight and John Kretzmann describe a process of rediscovering youth as assets in the community. They recognize that young people have assets – such as time, ideas, dreams, peer and family relationships, energy, and enthusiasm – that can be used to make an important contribution. They encourage adults to engage youth in community-building through steps to:

> (1) Make a "capacity inventory" of the assets of young people;
>
> (2) Identify potential individual and institutional partners for them; and
>
> (3) Build mutually beneficial relationships between local youth and others in the community.

WHAT CAN YOUTH DO?

"There is virtually no limit to what young people can do, no social need they cannot at least do something about. With a broad enough perspective, it's hard to think of a positive social role teenagers have not at some time filled: from leading crusades, commanding armies, advising kings – being kings – to making scientific discoveries, composing symphonies, and exposing injustices. What youth can do is limited more by social and political convention than by capacity, energy, or willingness."

> – *Dan Conrad and Diane Hedin, 1991.*

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Adapted with permission from Dorothy Stoneman, Leadership Development, 1988.

Historically, young people have been treated as if they were less important than adults. Their ideas have been assumed to be less valuable, and their feelings less valid, than those of adults. Their rights to make decisions have been largely denied; the details of their lives have been subject to incredible control from parents and peers in all types of institutions, but especially schools. They have been vulnerable to punishments and abuses, limited in their legal rights, and treated as if they were the possessions of their parents. Young people who are members of a racial or cultural minority in society carry a double or triple load of oppression.

Leadership development can provide young people with experiences that counteract these invalidations and eliminate the inequality. It can liberate them from the current reality of oppression and help heal the scars of their past mistreatment.

There are several things to keep in mind when undertaking leadership development:

- The Importance of Nurturing Relationships – Generally speaking, people are not eager to take on responsibility for the well-being of others unless they feel well-cared-for themselves. Furthermore, individuals learn best from others who love them. This is particularly true with young people. Whenever a young person emerges and is able to sustain him or herself as a solid leader, it is almost always true that at least one adult has taken long-term personal responsibility as a mentor, friend, and counselor for that person's development and well-being.

- Differences in Potential Leaders – The potentially outstanding young leaders are not always the most outspoken, most popular, most assertive people with the most developed viewpoint. In fact, sometimes the most aggressive "leaders" have some negative characteristics associated with their dominance. Some outstanding potential leaders are very quiet at the outset.

- The Importance of Accomplishments – Programs that seek to organize young people to create community change should have, ideally, very high standards of achievement. Activities that seek only to educate young people are not always enough. The work also should have significant and visible results.

- Involvement in Real World Issues – Young people do not have to limit their vision to their own community or ethnic group. Experience starts at home, but vision doesn't stop at the borders of the neighborhood.

- Correcting Academic Deficiencies – To develop young leaders, it's important to help them correct academic deficiencies. If the leaders can't read well, can't write, and can't speak standard English when they choose to, their ability to exercise leadership will be limited.

- Broadening the Scope of Activities – Some youth-serving agencies and schools limit themselves to leadership development within their ongoing programs. Others add a whole component of youth-run community improvement projects, aiming to make tangible, visible, and significant contributions to the community. Nothing builds pride and skill as much as the success of these projects.

IDENTIFYING POTENTIAL YOUTH LEADERS

Adapted with permission from Dorothy Stoneman, Leadership Development, 1988.

The first step in youth leadership development is identifying the potentially outstanding leaders. As noted above, these are not always the most outspoken, popular, or assertive young people. Adults need to watch every situation for the expression of leadership qualities and skills.

For instance, if a young person raises his hand, wordlessly indicating: "I want to give my time participating in that activity, because it will improve the program, the community, the world, or will teach me something about how the world works," chances are good that behind that raised hand lies a deep yearning for real leadership responsibility.

After meetings in which young people are involved, adults can encourage leadership by taking the opportunity to speak personally to individual youths, and offer positive comments such as, "I was very impressed with your participation in this group. Everything you said was thoughtful, and very smart, and you obviously care about what happens here. I hope you will get more involved, because you have real leadership abilities."

THE ROLE OF ADULTS IN DEVELOPING YOUTH LEADERS

Adapted with permission from Dorothy Stoneman, Leadership Development, 1988.

Adults play the key role in identifying, nurturing, educating, encouraging, counseling, advising, and inspiring young leaders. Unfortunately, there is a widespread shortage of adults who are available for real friendships with young people. Youths, often unconsciously, yearn for a relationship with an adult who could be trusted with confidential information, lend a hand, provide guidance and reassurance, and lift adolescent depression with caring confidence.

Adults who possess authority, give approval, and become real friends to young people can have unexpected influence. Frequently, adults are surprised at how little intervention it takes to establish a significant relationship with young people, and to be embraced as a "mother," "father," or "mentor."

Most of us who are now adults can count on one hand – if we can count anybody at all – the number of grownups outside our immediate family who took a personal interest in us. The teacher, minister, professor, social worker, godparent, friend of the family, neighbor, or coach who noticed and took time, who welcomed and praised us, who offered us a home telephone number, who took us aside for a personal conversation, who invited us to his or her home – these unusual people and events stand out in our memories. This is an indication of how important our personal involvement is to the young people we can care about.

WHAT ARE THE OBSTACLES?

"The best youth participation projects are the result of successfully matching the needs in the community and the ability of youth to devote their energies, ingenuity and imagination to meeting these needs. This ideal match is frequently hard to achieve: parents and other adults working with youth often do not sense the potential of young people to make significant contributions at the community level. Some of the major causes of this are obvious: youth are segregated in schools where their actions have little direct consequence for others; they are largely cut off from the adult world; and gradual introduction to the world of work is no longer a normal pattern for youth. Thus, many youth do not develop confidence in their ability to make a difference, and thus, many adults are even less aware of their potential contribution."

> *– National Commission on Resources for Youth, 1978*

OVERCOMING THE OBSTACLES

Adults who work closely with young people can help them to understand that there are obstacles to creating community change.

First, youth often lack knowledge of technical community issues, or practical skills in program-planning, or attitudes that are conducive to creating change. They tend not to perceive themselves as a group that could plan programs of their own choosing, or that could make much of a difference in the larger society.

Second, youth who take initiative and organize themselves have fewer resources than do their adult counterparts. Adults have ongoing organizations, institutional infrastructure, and extensive experience in the community. Young people often act as individuals, lack organizations that sustain themselves, and participate only occasionally and, even then, without much influence.

Third, youth who take initiative often encounter adult resistance to their efforts. Adult resistance can take various forms, including counterforce in which they discipline the organizers, isolate them from their peers, or deny them access to systems of power; or reform, in which they make symbolic concessions, channel their participation through safe methods, or find ways to re-integrate the dissidents. Resistance is normal in response to most efforts at changing the status quo, but special circumstances arise in the presence of adultism that amplifies the pattern of adult dominance and youth subservience.

It is no surprise that young people may question their own legitimacy, doubt their own ability to make a difference, or "internalize the oppression" of adults and the limitations that they place upon them. The "culture of silence" is common among oppressed groups, although its causes are not of their own making.

You can help young people to understand that there are obstacles to creating community change; that the obstacles are a normal part of the process; that their causes do not originate in themselves but in the larger society; and that there are examples of successful efforts at overcoming them. Obstacles offer opportunities for learning!

ADULTISM

Adapted with permission from Dorothy Stoneman, Leadership Development, 1988.

To work with young people successfully, it's necessary to tackle the pervasive existence of adultism. Adultism refers to all of the behaviors and attitudes that flow from the assumption that adults are better than young people, and are entitled to act upon young people in many ways without their agreement.

Except for prisoners and a few other institutionalized groups, young people's lives are more controlled than those of any other group in society. In addition, adults reserve the right to punish, threaten, hit, take away "privileges," and ostracize young people when they consider it beneficial in controlling them or "disciplining" them.

If this were a description of the way a group of adults were treated, society would quickly recognize it as a form of oppression. Adults, however, generally do not consider adultism to be oppressive, because this is the way they themselves were treated as youth; the process has been internalized.

The essence of adultism is that young people are not respected. Instead, they are less important and, in a sense, inferior to adults. They cannot be trusted to develop correctly, so they must be taught, disciplined, harnessed, punished, and guided into the adult world.

Consider how the following statements are essentially disrespectful. What are the assumptions behind each of them? How would a young person hear them?

> "You're so smart for 15!"

> "When are you going to grow up?"

> "Don't touch that, you'll break it!"

> "As long as you are in my house, you'll do it!"

> "Go to your room!"

> "You are too old for that!"

> "What do you know? You haven't experienced anything!"

> "It's just a stage. You'll outgrow it."

A handy way to determine if a behavior is "adultist" is to consider the following questions: "Would I treat an adult in this way? Would I talk to an adult in this tone of voice?"

The liberation of young people will require the active participation of adults. A good starting place is to consider and understand how we – today's adults – were mistreated and devalued when we were children and youth, and how we consequently act in adultist ways now.

As youth develop in their leadership roles, they will increasingly demand that adults end their adultist attitudes. To do this, adults will need to support each other in changing their ways, listening when the young people point out disrespect, interrupting the adultism that the youth themselves have internalized. Adults have central roles in the liberation of young people.

WHAT WAS IT LIKE BEING 15 YEARS OLD?

This exercise offers opportunities for adults working in pairs to recall their own youth, as preparation for a subsequent larger group discussion of the forces that facilitate or limit participation. It generally is most effective when used as an icebreaker at the start of a meeting.

(1) Ask group members to form pairs for speaking and listing.

(2) Tell group members that they will participate in an exercise to get acquainted and recall their own experience as a young person.

(3) The first speaker will speak for about 10 minutes in response to some of the following questions,

- What was it like being 15 years old?

- Where did you live?

- What did you look like?

- What made you different?

- What were you thinking about?

- How did you feel?

- Who were the young people who participated actively in the community?

- What were they like?

- What did they do?

- What kept you from participating more actively in the community?

- What could you have done to participate more actively?

- Who were the adults who worked well with young people?

- What were their qualities or characteristics?

- What could adults have done to help you to participate?

(4) Once the speaker is done, the listener will paraphrase what was heard, and ask questions if clarification is needed.

(5) The speaker and listener will switch roles and repeat the procedure.

(6) Bring everyone together to discuss what was heard and summarize the lessons learned for helping youth to participate more actively in the community.

ASSESSING ADULTS AS ALLIES

1. How would you assess your own present level in the following ways of working with young people? (Circle one number for each question.)

Truly respecting their ideas	1	2	3	4
Giving encouragement	1	2	3	4
Providing resources for activities	1	2	3	4
Listening carefully	1	2	3	4
Promoting active participation	1	2	3	4
Dealing with bureaucracies	1	2	3	4
Building community support	1	2	3	4
Helping them get organized	1	2	3	4
Encouraging critical thinking	1	2	3	4

2. Add the numbers circled and put the total here.

3. Underline the items that need the most improvement.

4. Circle an item you could start changing today.

5. Compare your total with other adults and discuss the results.

ADULTS AS ALLIES: WHAT IS THE ROLE?

Adapted with permission from Dorothy Stoneman, Leadership Development, 1988.

The adult organizer must genuinely respect the ideas and abilities of the teenagers, and must make this constantly clear. In meetings, the role is to draw out the ideas of every member of the group, take them utterly seriously, compliment them, and let them make the decisions themselves. In action, the role is to stand back, let the young people do the work and make the decisions, but provide essential information as needed so they can make informed decisions.

This is not easy for most adults. Most adults fall into authority roles without even noticing it. They consider their opinions and mode of operation to be automatically superior to those of teenagers. The adult organizer must be an exception to this pattern.

TAKING ADULTS ASIDE

Adults, even ones who are aware of adultism, are sometimes insensitive to their own behavior in interactions with young people. Despite their best intentions, adults still tend to speak more often than young people, interrupt their sentences, frustrate their involvement, and cause them to withdraw from participation.

One way to intervene is to take adults aside before an intergenerational meeting with young people and to form some guidelines or norms, as follows:

> (1) Take adults aside before an intergenerational meeting with young people.
>
> (2) Remind them that there are attitudes and behaviors that arise from adultism in society. Remind them that the goal is to create an atmosphere conducive to open discussion and nonadultist interaction in the meeting.
>
> (3) Ask the following question: "What are some common courtesies or guidelines for open discussion and nonadultist interaction that we, as adults, should follow in our meeting with young people?"
>
> (4) Record the responses on newsprint paper for everyone to see.
>
> (5) Following the information sharing, review the list to make sure each item is understood; reflect upon the whole list for any patterns or themes; and discuss the implications for the impending interaction.
>
> (6) Following the meeting with youth, reconvene the group to describe what happened, discuss how it went, analyzethe lessons learned, and assess how it might be improved next time.
>
> (7) As a variation, take the young people aside, reverse the roles, and follow the same procedures.

WORKING WITH GROUPS

Community change is a group process. An individual can take initiative and have a significant impact, but lasting change comes from people working together in groups.

Facilitation is a fundamental function of working with groups. A facilitator is not a director, but a person who asks questions, makes suggestions, and helps people achieve their goals.

Adult facilitators can help young people work in groups more effectively, although adults are no substitute for youth who do it themselves. Here are some hints for group facilitators:

- Begin by reviewing the process and content objectives for agreement among the participants.

- Pose the problem or issue in a constructive way.

- Encourage active participation, rather than permitting domination by a few.

- Promote new and different ideas or viewpoints.

- Stay on the topic, by summarizing occasionally and by letting group members know when discussion is drifting.

- Record the results in a form that fits the group.

- Remind people that feelings and disagreements are acceptable.

- Conclude by taking a few minutes to discuss what happened, how it went, and how it might be improved next time.

SETTING GUIDELINES FOR INTERGENERATIONAL GROUPS

The purpose of this exercise is to help youth and adults set some norms or guidelines for working together in integenerational groups.

(1) Tell group members that they will participate in an exercise enabling them to work together more effectively.

(2) Ask the group members to think about an intergenerational group of young people and adults that stands out in their minds because it functioned very well.

(3) Ask group members to say why it worked well, and post their responses on newsprint paper.

(4) When the posting is completed, ask them to review the whole list, make observations, draw conclusions, and to draw lessons for future group participation.

(5) As a variation, instead of asking group members about why a group worked well, ask them to identify one that worked badly, analyze why it functioned badly, and discuss how it could have been improved.

USING STRUCTURED ACTIVITIES FOR WORKING WITH GROUPS

Working with groups is vital to creating community change, but group facilitation is a skill that develops from experience. Young people may lack the experience that comes from years of practice, but adults can help them develop group skills by using structured activities.

Structured activities are techniques that enable people to start things off, get acquainted, reduce inhibitions, raise consciousness, clarify values, provide feedback, and make transitions from one part of the program to another. They can provide meaningful participation in a low-risk way, an opportunity to test ideas and learn from others, and a source of support for better problem-solving. They usually take a small amount of time, little advance preparation, are simple to implement, and are flexible enough to be used with an unlimited range of topics.

Structured activities do, however, require skill in making decisions that affect the entire group. For example, what difference does it make if the group is large or small in size, or if group members sit in rows or circles, or if they have a spokesperson and a recorder to post the results on large newsprint paper?

Using structured activities effectively will depend upon the composition and expectations of the group, the nature and length of the program, the culture of the community, and the style and personality of the facilitator.

CHECKLIST OF STRUCTURED GROUP ACTIVITIES

How would you assess your present level in using the following structured group activities?

Put a check before ones you feel adequate in using, two checks before ones you need to practice, and three checks before ones with which you are unfamiliar and want more information.

        __ Working with icebreakers

        __ Using dyads and triads

        __ Developing lists

        __ Sharing personal incidents

        __ Buzz groups

        __ Fishbowls

        __ Role-playing

        __ Using games and simulations

        __ Small-group exercises

        __ Team-building

        __ Flipcharting

        __ Using handouts

        __ Learning from case studies

LEARNING FROM CASE STUDIES

Case studies allow adults to simulate situations that arise in working with young people, deal with specific facts rather than generalities, and work cooperatively. They also help look at situations in different ways, and discuss alternative solutions and action plans.

There are various types of case studies and various techniques to maximize learning from them. In general, however, the method includes steps to

(1) Read the case;

(2) Ask each person to jot down some ideas;

(3) Form small groups to discuss the case;

(4) Report back to the whole group; and

(5) Discuss the reports and address the issues arising.

Here are some case studies to discuss with others:

Case Study 1

YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEM-SOLVING

Southwest Side is a predominantly low- and moderate-income area in an industrial city. Eastern Europeans migrated to its large factories and small houses in the 1920s and 1930s; African-Americans from the rural South followed in the 1940s and 1950s; Latinos and Latinas arrived in the 1960s and 1970s; and increasing numbers of wealthy white professional families are rehabilitating older houses in a corner of the area today. The area has the largest concentration of Arab peoples outside of the Middle East.

Despite the reputation for diversity, each group tends to focus inward rather than to view the area as a single neighborhood. Each group has its own extended family and friendship networks, educational and religious institutions, community organizations and business districts. Each group has its own cultural values, social behaviors, and styles of participation.

Southwest Side Youth Center aims to strengthen social diversity and multicultural participation among teenagers in the overall area. Adult advisors work with small groups of teenagers to solve problems, plan programs, and involve youth in community service.

One such group – an adult advisor and 20 teenagers – heard a talk about environmental hazards, and learned that a waste site with thousands of barrels of hazardous chemicals is located a few blocks from the youth center. They know that these wastes can contaminate the water supply, that there are large holes in the protective fences, and that young children play on the barrels.

Group members want to take action before it is too late. They conducted an informal neighborhood survey and found that few residents are unaware of the problem. They visited the health department and were told that nothing can be done. They want to mobilize the various groups in the area, but are unsure how to proceed and are asking for your assistance.

What should they do?

Case Study 2

INVOLVING YOUTH IN COMMUNITY PLANNING

Northern Neighborhood has been declining in recent years. Economic recession, changes in industry, and reductions in federal and state services have contributed to deteriorating infrastructure, inadequate services, and withdrawal of people and institutions. Those who remain live in poverty and appear alienated from the community.

However, some residents are organizing against decline. Health and welfare agencies, community development corporations, neighborhood-based organizations, and local churches are trying to rebuild the area. Some of the city's most powerful institutions – including large corporations, universities, banks, and hospitals – have shown interest in revitalization.

Northern Neighborhood Association has announced plans for a major initiative to improve the environment for young people in the area. Building upon a traditional commitment to child welfare, they have designated staff and resources for projects that emphasize "youth and community."

Association leaders have formed a committee to assess local conditions, set priorities, and formulate plans for implementation. Committee members include agency administrators, health workers, school officials, neighborhood leaders, youth advocates, and a few young people. They have formed task forces for education, health, housing, and other functions to make recommendations within one year. They have expressed a commitment to "youth participation" and invited a few student leaders to join committees and attend meetings, but these youth tend not to attend or say much.

Committee members want to increase involvement of young people in the planning process, but are unsure how to proceed and are asking for your assistance.

What should they do?

PLANNING WORKSHOPS

Workshops offer opportunities for young people to develop substantive knowledge and strengthen specific skills that can be mastered or practiced on the spot. They can analyze the root causes of problems, assess alternative solutions, and plan programs for future action.

Following is a description of a special statewide workshop that was designed to help young people plan programs of their own choosing in three different communities. It is offered only for purposes of illustration, but may generate some ideas for your community.

Background

Community youth programs are increasing in scope and quality, but the level of youth participation varies from one area to another. In some communities, people are formulating plans and taking actions, whereas in others they have ideas but are unsure how to proceed, or they want to proceed but lack information for implementation.

Purpose

The purpose of the workshop was to prepare young people for planning and implementing a program of their own choosing, to strengthen their representation in existing programs, and to increase their active participation in the community.

Advisory Committee

An advisory committee composed of adults and youth participated in all stages of planning, implementation, and evaluation of the workshop. Committee members participated in planning the agenda, identifying the teams, selecting the speakers, arranging the transportation, facilitating the sessions, and supporting the participants.

Location and Date

The workshop was planned for an accessible location, on a weekend during the school year, starting before dinner on Friday and ending before lunch on Sunday. Because of busy schedules and competing activities, it was important to obtain sincere commitments in advance.

Participants

Participants came in teams from three communities – an urban neighborhood, an area of small towns, and two rural counties in a distant area of the state. They were expected to come to the workshop with ideas in mind, and to leave with written plans in hand for implementation upon return home.

Each team had young leaders or potential leaders from an "established" or "emergent" school or community group, and an adult sponsor who helped coordinate the team's participation and provide support before, during, and after the workshop. The emphasis on teams was intended to identify youth who already had some group cohesion, who worked well together, and who were in a position to do something with what they learned.

Each team designated a team facilitator. This person was expected to attend a training session before the workshop, facilitate the team planning meetings, and make a final presentation to the whole group. They were sent cameras and asked to take pictures of his or her community that would help others understand where they were coming from.

Each team had an adult sponsor who would help coordinate the team's participation and provide support for implementation upon return home. The sponsor was asked to accompany the team to the workshop and serve as their contact person; review and enforce the workshop guidelines; assign roommates and stay in a room on the same floor as the team; arrange transportation to and from the workshop; designate one youth as a team facilitator; and encourage team members to develop and implement their plans.

Participants were expected to have a high level of motivation, respect for their peers, and interest in taking initiative. They did not necessarily have to hold positions of leadership, but had to have potential for leadership and willingness to increase their involvement. Young people 15-17 years old were expected to benefit most from this experience.

Preplanning Process

The preplanning process included local meetings designed to assess the needs of prospective youth participants in the three communities. Participants introduced themselves, described the purpose of their group and hopes for the next year, and discussed the content and process that best fit the needs and interests of the group. Each meeting was arranged by advisory committee members from that area.

The local meeting held in the urban neighborhood was noteworthy. Participants introduced themselves as individuals, drew pictures illustrating the central themes of the group, and brainstormed lists of ideas for the workshop. In response to a question about group priorities in the subsequent year, several participants said that they hoped to "stay alive."

Following this meeting, group members were invited to a special day of activities at an outdoor recreation program. This day included low- and high-ropes challenges designed to promote personal growth, team building, and group development. The activities had a significant impact on the scope and quality of their subsequent participation in the workshop, at which they successfully planned a project for a community garden.

Workshop Design

Because each person learns in a different way, the workshop included a variety of activities, including plenary presentations; small-group discussions; team problem-solving and program-planning exercises; case studies of successful youth programs; practical skills sessions; indoor and outdoor recreational activities; open, unstructured time; and closing presentations of team plans for implementation upon return home. The workshop emphasized experiential learning of specific skills that could be practiced on the spot. The program included:

- Preworkshop meetings to orient youth to roles as facilitators and evaluators, and sensitize adults to issues of adultism.

- Plenary sessions by presenters with something to share with the whole group. These included a high school motivational speaker, a college student who had planned a successful program, young people from a community nonviolence training program, and an intergenerational panel on adultism.

- Concurrent sessions on successful community-based youth programs. These included groups that implemented anti-racist learning activities for younger children in the schools, established their own business enterprise, produced written and electronic media programs on social and political issues from a youth perspective, and served on a council that assessed local conditions and awarded grants to youth groups proposing projects that served unmet community needs.

- Indoor recreational activities to help participants get acquainted, build relationships, and strengthen teamwork.

- Unstructured time for getting acquainted and developing relationships.

- Team planning meetings with exercises aimed at helping participants to (1) discuss community needs and strengths, (2) develop action plans for a positive impact, and (3) present team plans to the whole group. These meetings enabled participants to build working relationships, generate ideas through creative thinking, and develop written plans.

Three team meetings were designed to address the following carefully worded questions:

- What is the purpose of your group?

- What, in the long run, do you want to accomplish?

- What are some various ways to accomplish your purpose?

- Which of these is your priority?

- How will you accomplish your purpose?

- What are some specific steps you could take?

- What resources do you need to accomplish your purpose?

- How will you get the support you need?

These meetings were held in a large room with youth participants working on the floor in teams, and adult advisors accessible as needed on the outside of the room. Each meeting was organized around the specific planning questions; employed experiential exercises; and followed a workbook prepared for the purpose. Each group prepared a written proposal with an action plan and budget.

Concluding Presentation

One person from each team was asked to present the plans – and thus report on what they wanted to accomplish – to the entire workshop.

Several other participants also were asked to prepare a brief statement on what they would do with what they learned at the workshop, and the floor was open to any participant wanting to share his or her own ideas.

Following the Workshop

Six months following the workshop, participants sent written reports on their progress . Each report included information on what the team had done since the workshop, what they wanted to do in the next few months, and other information they wanted to share with everyone. These reports were compiled in a newsletter that provided a continuing source of exchange among the three communities.

Evaluation

Young people conducted the workshop evaluation in accordance with the principles of participatory evaluation.

The evaluation process was facilitated by a university student enlisted as a consultant. The student had minimal experience in evaluation and was selected to assure that "process" would model "content" in a project emphasizing participation by young people.

The evaluator attended advisory committee meetings, observed local planning meetings, and met with evaluation staff of the sponsoring foundation. She formed an evaluation team with youth representatives from each of the communities to plan the evaluation, formulate the questionnaire, conduct the interviews, and analyze the results.

EVALUATION

Evaluation helps people assess their activities and accomplishments. It can occur during a project, after a project, or as an ongoing process throughout the project. When evaluation is ongoing, it is a continuous source of information and learning.

Young people are evaluated extensively by adults, but they rarely are the evaluators of their own projects. Yet this process can contribute to personal involvement, organizational development, and community change.

Adults can demystify evaluation by providing information on the various methods from which to choose, including (1) individual interviews, (2) group discussions, and (3) written questionnaires. The process can be as simple as asking participants to give "one word" that describes their activities, or asking them to restate their purpose and assess their accomplishments. Here are some sample questions to help young people in evaluation:

1. What are you trying to accomplish?

2. What have you done so far?

3. How well are you doing?

4. What are the strengths and weaknesses of your project?

5. How could you improve the project?

6. Are there changes which should be made and, if so, how?

7. What makes this project stand out?

8. What are the lessons learned from the project?

RESOURCES, RESOURCES, RESOURCES....

Community youth programs are increasing in number, but the level of planning and participation varies from one area to another. In some communities, people are formulating plans and taking action, whereas in others they have ideas but are unsure how to proceed. Here are some additional resources for adults who work closely with young people:

Training Materials

These materials include specific strategies and practical tools for young people creating community change. They provide step-by-step instructions and checklists, role plays and simulations, small-group activities and experiential exercises.

Barry Checkoway, Kameshwari Pothukuchi, and Rogeair Purnell, Training *Materials for Community Youth Programs*. Ann Arbor: School of Social Work, University of Michigan, 1992.

> A comprehensive guide and annotated bibliography of training materials and practical tools for people organizing and planning community youth programs.

Daniel E. Conrad, *Learning from Field Experience: A Guide for Student Reflection in Youth Participation Programs*. New York: National Commission on Resources for Youth, 1982.

> Provides suggestions for encouraging young people to reflect on their experience, including daily journals, weekly reports, and project products.

Stuart Langton, *Teen Power: A User's Guide to Youth Community Involvement*. Medford: Lincoln Filene Center for Citizenship and Public Affairs, Tufts University, 1989.

> Practical information on conducting community forums, running effective meetings, using the telephone, making persuasive presentations, and publicizing projects.

Barbara A. Lewis, *The Kid's Guide to Social Action: How to Solve the Social Problems You Choose – and Turn Creative Thinking into Positive Action*. Minneapolis: Free Spirit Publishing, 1991.

> Provides case studies and practical materials on letter-writing, interviewing, fundraising, media coverage, petitions, proclamations, letters and news releases.

Peg Michels, Suzanne Paul, and Harry Boyte, *Making the Rules: A Guidebook for Young People Who Intend to Make a Difference*. Minneapolis: Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs, University of Minnesota, 1991.

> Includes stories, lessons, and exercises for making a difference in public life.

Dorothy Stoneman, *Leadership Development: A Handbook from the Youth Action Program of the East Harlem Block Schools*. New York: Youth Action Program, 1988.

> Based on the prototype program for Youth Build USA, this handbook includes information on adultism, oppression, and the elements of leadership development.

Youth Planner's Bookshelf

These materials include scholarly and popular books, articles, reports, and other publications from the field.

Barry Checkoway, Kameshwari Pothukuchi, and Rogeair Purnell, *Community Youth Planner's Bookshelf*. Ann Arbor: School of Social Work, University of Michigan, 1992.

> Up-to-date summaries of scholarly and popular books, articles, reports and other publications.

Barry Checkoway, *Youth Participation in Neighborhood Development*. Washington: Academy for Educational Development, 1994.

> Analyzes major strategies of involving young people in neighborhood development.

Barry Checkoway and Janet Finn, *Young People as Community Builders*. Ann Arbor: School of Social Work, University of Michigan, 1992.

> In-depth case studies of young people who plan innovative programs and create community change.

Judith B. Erickson, *Directory of American Youth Organizations: A Guide to Over 400 Clubs, Groups, Troops, Teams, Societies, Lodges, and More for Young People*. Minneapolis: Free Spirit Publishing, 1992.

> Describes organizations that serve children and youth of high school age and under.

National Guide to Funding for Children, Youth and Families. Washington, DC: The Foundation Center, 1990.

> Provides information on grantmakers and sample grants in youth development, child welfare, juvenile delinquency, family services, and other fields.

Dan Conrad and Diane Hedin, "School-Based Community Service: What We Know From Research and Theory." *Phi Delta Kappan* 72 (June 1991): 743-749.

> Reviews research on the impact of school-based community service on educational reform, academic learning, and psychosocial development.

Ruthanne Kurth-Schai, "The Roles of Youth in Society: A Reconceptualization." *The Educational Forum* 53 (Winter 1988): 113-132.

> Argues that current views of the roles of youth – as victims, as threats, and as learners of adult society – discourage their contributions, and that new conceptualizations will strengthen their active participation and create social change.

Barbara A. Lewis, Kids with Courage: *True Stories about Young People Making a Difference*. Minneapolis: Free Spirit Publishing, 1992.

> Presents stories of youth who take social action, fight crime, work to save the environment, and perform heroic acts.

Milbrey W. McLaughlin, Merita A. Irby, and Juliet Langman, *Urban Sanctuaries: Neighborhood Organizations in the Lives and Futures of Inner-City Youth*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1993.

> Explores the strategies that community leaders and their organizations use to create and sustain youth programs in spite of enormous challenges.

Community Change Books

Barry Checkoway, "Six Strategies of Community Change." *Community Development Journal* 30 (January 1995): 2-20

> Distinguishes among mass mobilization, solid action, citizen particapation, public advocacy, popular education, and local services development as strategies of creating change.

Paulo Friere, *Pedagogy of The Oppressed*. New York: Seabury Press, 1970.

> Presents the author's influential ideas about "education for critical consciousness."

Anne Hope and Sally Timmel, *Training for Transformation: Handbook for Community Workers*. Gweru, Zimbabwe: Mambo Press, 1984.

> A compilation of concepts and techniques for individual involvement and community empowerment.

Si Kahn, *Organizing: A Guide for Grassroots Leaders*. Silver Spring: National Association of Social Workers, 1991.

> The basic steps in grassroots organizing, including methods for strengthening social diversity.

John Kretzmann and John McKnight, *Building Communities from the Inside Out: A Path Toward Finding and Mobilizing a Community's Assets*. Evanston: Center for Urban Affairs and Policy Research, Northwestern University, 1993.

> Provides practical steps on mapping assets and building relationships between youth and other groups in the community.

Greg Speeter, Power: *A Repossession Manual. Amherst: Citizen Involvement Training Project*, University of Massachusetts, 1978.

> A manual for organizers and members of community organizations, with successful models, typical obstacles, and steps involved in organizing for power.

David Werner and Bill Bower, *Helping Health Workers Learn*. Palo Alto: The Hesperian Foundation, 1982.

> A collection of methods, aids, and "triggers of the imagination" for community workers who may have limited formal education, who identify with the working people, and who feel that their first responsibility is to the poor.