

RIGHTS. RESPECT. RESPONSIBILITY.®

ADVOCATES FOR YOUTH LAUNCHES THE CAMPAIGN

Advocates for Youth envisions a society where sexuality is treated as a normal, healthy, positive aspect of each person's life. In such a society, teenagers' sexual development will be recognized as natural and valuable. Young people will be considered partners in solving problems that affect them and adults will share – rather than censor – knowledge and information about sexuality.

In such a society, parents will play an essential role in helping young people to make healthy, responsible choices. Communication and partnership within the family will be the norm. Communities will fulfill their responsibilities, providing young people with a secure stake in the future and the information and services they need to protect their health and save their lives.

Advocates firmly believes that such a society will not face the three million new sexually transmitted infections among teens, the 6,000 new cases of HIV infection among those ages 13 to 24, or the more than 800,000 teenage pregnancies each year that currently occur in the United States. Adults will respect and support youth's right to act responsibly.

Rights. Respect. Responsibility.® These are the tenets that will animate such a society. The 3Rs are the foundation of Advocates for Youth's new campaign that will begin to change the way society views adolescents and their sexual health.

Over the next decade, Advocates for Youth is committed to promoting the values of Rights, Respect, and Responsibility. Specifically, we will

- Build support for the 3Rs among at least 14,000 youth-serving professionals and policy makers in at least six states, 10 national organizations, and four international agencies.
- Instigate progressive shifts in sexual health policy and practice at the federal level and in at least eight states, 10 national organizations, and four developing countries.
- Create a Youth Activist Network of more than 2,000 young people in the United States and more than 500 youth in developing countries, encouraging them to become leaders for improved reproductive and sexual health policies and services in their communities, states, and nations.
- Promote public understanding of and support for the goals and values of the 3Rs by reaching out to at least 25 million Americans annually via the entertainment and news media.

Advocates for Youth will also develop campaign materials to help you, our partners, spread the 3Rs approach in your schools, practices, agencies, communities, and families.

Won't you join us? This fall, we officially launch the *Rights. Respect. Responsibility.®* campaign. Together, we can work to promote honest, open communication about sexuality, safeguard young people's access to confidential health services, and encourage young people to emulate the youth that contributed to this edition of *Transitions* – advocates for change within their communities.

For additional information on the 3Rs campaign, or to become an organizational partner in this important initiative, contact Advocates for Youth at 202.419.3420, or visit our Web site, www.RightsRespectResponsibility.org.

TRANSITIONS

Transitions (ISSN 1097-1254) © 2001, is a quarterly publication of Advocates for Youth — Helping young people make safe and responsible decisions about sex.

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Media Project

A Project of Advocates for Youth & the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation
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North Hollywood, CA 91602
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www.themediaproject.com

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ADVOCATES FOR YOUTH ANNOUNCES ITS 20TH ANNIVERSARY CONFERENCE

RIGHTS, RESPECT, RESPONSIBILITY: A NEW PARADIGM FOR HEALTHY ADOLESCENT SEXUALITY

When: December 2 through 4, 2001

Where: Wyndham Washington Hotel in Washington, DC

For More Information about the Conference or a Registration Brochure – Visit www.rightsrespectresponsibility.org or www.advocatesforyouth.org or E-mail Advocates for Youth at conf@advocatesforyouth.org.

THE ACCIDENTAL ACTIVIST

By Brian Vincent Griffith, Online Peer Educator for www.youthHIV.org

I have often found myself wearing many different hats as I make my way through life and its various activities. In high school, I was known as Brian, the “Band Geek,” and Brian, the “Speech & Debate Nerd.” These were boring labels, I often found, and I looked forward to the days when I could attach classier labels to my name. Brian V. Griffith, Attorney at Law, always had an amazing ring to me; or, to please my parents’ secret desire for a scholar, Dr. Brian V. Griffith, professor of English; but Brian Griffith, Youth Activist? No way! This, however, has become my most recent incarnation of identity. This field is not a lonely one either, as I am only one of many youth working towards the goal of inclusion.

To borrow from a well-known cliché, it all began when I, and many others, walked through the front doors of the downtown Atlanta Hyatt for the 2000 United States Conference on AIDS. I was among the youth invited to attend by Advocates for Youth. I would be focusing my energies on an online peer education training session and on attending conference workshops, institutes, and plenary sessions. Within the first day, I became highly aware of the way in which youth were being “tokenized” on every level at the conference. Few workshops addressed the HIV/AIDS epidemic among the youth of the world. Even more disturbing was the fact that many of the conference participants were unwilling to permit youth even to participate in discussions held during workshops. We were young and didn’t know what we were talking about. We were nineteen and didn’t hold degrees. We represented the youth that account for 50 percent of all new HIV infections, and we were being silenced, time after time, by adults. We could not stand for this!

Immediately, not to my surprise, a group of concerned young participants began organizing, meeting to set out a list of concerns about the lack of youth’s involvement in the conference. We met in hotel rooms, and our group of concerned youth began to grow and grow and grow. By the second and third days of the conference, we had made enough waves to be granted a meeting with the Executive Director of the organization sponsoring the conference. After this meeting, we drafted a letter to the National Minority AIDS Council (NMAC) and other partner organizations that had participated in planning the conference. In the letter, the youth at the conference laid out complaints, concerns, and suggestions for the future improvement of the United States Conference on AIDS.

We did not stop mobilizing at this point either. We would not settle for a nod of the head and a cordial “thanks for the letter.” We continued our efforts after the conference. We set up an Internet listserv so we could keep in contact with each other as we brainstormed more ideas to present to NMAC. When it became apparent that we were not the kind of individuals who would easily fold up and go away, NMAC started giving our movement a little more thought. We organized conference phone calls to discuss pertinent issues, and we continued to circulate our letter of complaint to member organizations of the NMAC. We met youth at other conferences, including the Ryan White National Youth Conference on HIV/AIDS, and made our case more and more widely known.

Although this story continues to play out, there is definitely happy news about youth empowered activism. NMAC, after our continued prodding, recognized the weaknesses in its previous planning and is taking steps to improve future conferences. Youth have been given more opportunity to influence the future direction of the conference through a seat on the planning committee created for a youth representative. NMAC has also promised that more youth will be able to attend future conferences through scholarships and has pledged more youth-oriented, and youth-led workshops.

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I am only one of many youth working towards the goal of inclusion.

Brian Griffith

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R E S P E C T

MAKING WAVES AT THE UNITED NATIONS

By Naina Kaur Dhingra, Member, International Youth Leadership Council, Advocates for Youth

My father, a Republican, once asked why I hadn't picked the environment or saving whales as my "cause." My reply was that I had too much of a social conscience not to be affected by the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Since the age of 14, I have been involved with the issue of HIV/AIDS as a peer educator and, more recently, as a member of Advocates for Youth's International Youth Leadership Council.

The International Youth Leadership Council began in October 2000, with a mission to educate policy makers, the media, and the American public about the importance of increasing U.S. funding for global HIV/AIDS education and services and for international family planning. This June, Council members, Mai Pham, Sean Barry, and I, had the opportunity to attend the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on HIV/AIDS (UNGASS) together with Marcela Howell, Advocates' Director of Public Affairs.

The week I spent at UNGASS may have been the most emotionally, physically, and mentally draining of my life. A sense of urgency surrounded everything participants did. Emotions ran high, frustrations were apparent, and compromise was difficult to achieve. Mai, Sean, and I, together with other youth attending UNGASS, became oblivious to anything else.

At the preparatory meeting in May, I had been the only young person to represent a non-governmental organization (NGO). This time, there were about 65 young people from all over the world, including 20 youth activists from Africa that were sponsored by the United Nations Development Fund for Women and by the United Nations Children's Fund. Together, we formed a youth caucus to discuss the ways in which we could make the presence of young people felt, both at UNGASS and in the draft Declaration of Commitment. As debate raged amongst delegates to the General Assembly (who had not agreed upon final language for the Declaration), we worked as a unified bloc to highlight the youth-specific dimensions of HIV/AIDS. Our collaboration was as diverse and intense as that of the General Assembly. Young people from official country delegations and NGOs from South Africa, Yugoslavia, Zimbabwe, Argentina, Jamaica, and the U.S. worked late into the night to develop consensus, a true lesson in international cooperation.

Member states were at an impasse on two major areas very important to young people – the naming of vulnerable groups and the human rights of women. The naming of vulnerable groups became a major issue of contention, with the Rio Group (Latin American countries) battling for full inclusion of all groups, such as men who have sex with men, sex workers and their clients, and injection drugs users. However, many Islamic countries and the Vatican objected to naming these groups. Although there were no objections to naming 'young people' a vulnerable group, this was a critical issue for us because young people are also included in other vulnerable populations, such as sex workers and young men who have sex with men. Honestly acknowledging those most at risk is one of the greatest challenges to ending the pandemic.

The second controversial issue for the General Assembly centered on the empowerment of women. We found it extremely unsettling that this was an issue. The youth caucus felt that the empowerment of women was crucial because young girls are disproportionately infected with HIV in the developing world due to a lack of information and a lack of control over their own bodies.

In the end, the youth caucus decided to create a Youth Position Paper to address the most critical youth-related issues omitted from the Declaration of Commitment. Unlike the UN Declaration, the Youth Position Paper included a list of highly vulnerable populations. The Paper

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Naina Dhingra

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PASSIONATE CRUSADE

By Melissa Kay Palank, Community Co-Chair, Minnesota Community Planning Group

How did I get here? When did my crusade begin? Over two decades ago during open-heart surgery, my grandfather, John Greavu, received a blood transfusion tainted with HIV. My personal battle began in 1990, when my family thought it would be appropriate for me to learn the news. My grandfather was my inspiration and everything I wanted to be. It was devastating to watch him fight something that I did not comprehend. Instead of remaining in the dark, I decided to educate myself. Because I did not want any one else to go through what my family and I had faced, I became one of the youngest HIV/AIDS educators in the nation. I took my grandfather's story and information about the disease to others in need of education, encouragement, and support. I felt that, for every person I talked with, I could be saving one more life.

Right before my grandfather died in January 1995, I promised him I would always fight for him and the many others affected by this disease. I found that education was a cure for the ignorance surrounding HIV/AIDS. As I grew older, although I continued educating others, I felt I could accomplish more. Beginning my college career and pursuing a degree in political science, I decided to look into the public policy aspect of HIV/AIDS and volunteered with the public policy division of the Minnesota AIDS Project.

During this period of time, I also joined the Youth Advisory Council to the Minnesota Department of Health Commissioner's Task Force on HIV/STD Prevention and Planning (MN Community Planning Group) and worked on various planning and public policy issues. We wanted to reflect what the epidemiological data showed (that the disease was infecting youth in our state), and we were proud to have a voice in community planning. In 1998, the theme of World AIDS Day was "Youth, a Force for Change" and the members of the Youth Council proved this statement true. Not only have they earned the respect of the Community Planning Group members, but the Youth Advisory Council successfully changed meeting times so youth could attend meetings and be heard. In addition, the Youth Council members presented workshops at numerous conferences and assisted various Minnesota government departments with research about youth and HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). The Youth Advisory Council assembled a Youth Summit at the state capitol and created *STD Extravaganza* to educate at-risk communities about STDs and testing.

After four years of community planning, I needed a new role. So, I ran for Community Co-Chair for the MN Community Planning Group and was elected in the spring of 2001. Being the youngest Community Co-Chair in the state and probably the nation is important to ensure that the voice of youth is not lost. This disease has been with my generation from the beginning and, sadly, may be with us our whole lives. To ensure victory, the voice of youth needs to be continuously heard, and my duty is to make this possible.

As I begin this new course, I always keep in mind what we are fighting for and remember all of those who have fought and who have died. I keep alive the memory of my grandfather and others, because they fought the most important battle of all; they fought for their own lives and for the lives of others. My motivation also comes from the words of Margaret Meade. "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed people can change the world: indeed, it is the only thing that ever has!"

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed people can change the world: indeed, it is the only thing that ever has!
Margaret Meade

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YOUTH WORKING WITH YOUTH ONLINE

HELPING YOUTH IN HIGH RISK SITUATIONS

By Jessie Gilliam, Program Associate, LGBT Initiatives, Advocates for Youth

Adena, a young bisexual woman from New Jersey, is one of 15 youth who serves as an online peer educator for *InsideOUT*, the online peer education program for Youth Resource, Advocates for Youth's Web site for gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and questioning (GLBTQ) youth. Every morning, she and her colleagues, peer educators on Advocates' three current Internet intervention sites, open their inboxes and read E-mail from young people across the country who are looking for support, resources, and information. E-mail comes from young people who have visited *InsideOUT* and read the personal stories of the online peer educators. Youth write with questions such as "Where can I find a youth support group in my area?" "How can I start an activist group in my high school for GLBTQ youth?" "Where can I find sexual health information for Latinas?" The peer educators answer youth's questions and provide research, information, links to pertinent and useful Web sites, and materials developed by Advocates for Youth. Online peer educators also give a personal touch that lets young people know they are not alone.

Online peer educators form the heart of Advocates for Youth's online interventions programs. They serve on www.youthresource.com, www.youthHIV.org, and on www.youthshakers.org. Soon, two additional sites will offer online peer educators, www.mysistahs.org and www.ambientejoven.org. Besides answering youth's questions about issues they face, online peer educators also mobilize young people, develop monthly features, and refer youth to sites and services. Advocates' peer educators are a diverse group – geographically, ethnically, and across gender and sexual orientation – with experience working on sexual health issues. Chosen through a careful, online application process, they come together each year for several days of training on working with young people over the Internet, addressing sexual health issues, and working together to produce a relevant and current Web site.

Online peer educators differ from "real life" peer educators because they work in a virtual world with young people who may never walk through the door of a student health center or seek a "real world" support group. Online peer educators receive E-mail in which youth ask questions they may have asked no one else. The online peer educators feel a responsibility to provide youth with resources and information that will help them become comfortable with themselves and the sexual health issues in their lives.

Advocates' several sites are tailored for specific populations. My Sistahs, a Web site for young women of color, takes a holistic approach to HIV education and prevention. Young visitors will build an online community around activism, culture, health, relationships, style, and other issues that affect their sexual and reproductive health. Youth Resource provides support, information, resources, and message boards directed towards the issues of specific communities, including young gay men, lesbian and bisexual women, transgender youth, and GLBTQ youth of color. Youth HIV is a Web site for HIV-positive youth and for HIV prevention peer educators. It hosts stories, advocacy opportunities, and general information about sexual health. Youth Shakers provides information about advocating for sexual health rights and the rights of young people around the world. Ambiente Joven provides community and support for GLBTQ youth of Latino background and culture, whether the youth's first language is Spanish or English.

InsideOUT online peer educator, Sean Lloyd, a young gay man from Arkansas, says it best. "It brings me great joy when I can help someone with a problem or educate them on something they didn't know." Invite young people in your area to log on to Advocates' sites – online peer educators are here to help!

Being an online peer educator means that I can reach out to GLBTQ students all over the world who feel like they have no one to talk to. It wasn't long ago when I felt very alone/depressed and turned to the Internet for advice. Putting myself out there on the net is one way that I can be there for others in return.

Adena, age 17

THE INTERNATIONAL YOUTH LEADERSHIP COUNCIL YOUTH

By Stephanie Kvasnik, Project Coordinator, Youth Council, Advocates for Youth

Last year, Advocates for Youth formed the International Youth Leadership Council, comprised of young people from around the world interested in working to improve the health and well-being of their peers. Members of the Youth Council participate in educating policy makers, the media, and the American public about the importance of increasing U.S. funding for global HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment and for international family planning. Council members serve as peer educators, advocates, and spokespeople on issues of adolescent reproductive and sexual health. They develop media campaigns, conduct policy forums, and participate in advocacy visits to policy makers.

In April, the International Youth Leadership Council launched a year-long campaign, *My Voice Counts*, to mobilize college and high school students to pressure the United States Congress to increase funding for international family planning and global HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment. The campaign includes a petition drive, advocacy days in Congress, Web site organizing, campus rallies, a World AIDS Day march, and a national media campaign.

Students can sign up and obtain the *My Voice Counts* campaign kit, including letters to Congress, advocacy tips, fact sheets, petitions, and *My Voice Counts* stickers. For the kit, contact myvoicecounts@advocatesforyouth.org or call Stephanie at 202-419-3420. The petition is on page eight; please feel free to copy and distribute it.

HELPING EVERYONE

There are over one billion young people between the ages of 15 and 24 worldwide. The decisions these young people make today will affect the health and well-being of the world for decades to come.

Continued from Page 3

I am now able to sit back and admire, with some amazement, the accomplishments of a group of determined peer educators that were able to sway the system. I am proud to have been among the youth who were not willing to take a back seat and accept the pat on the head that adult conference attendees tried to hand us. I am glad to see that progress is being made, albeit slowly, towards recognizing the importance of youth in the battle against HIV/AIDS. Brian V. Griffith, Youth Activist, is a label to hang proudly on my bedroom door, and my chief concern for the time being is finding a cute pair of shoes to go with this brand new hat!

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focused on issues of youth leadership and youth empowerment; prevention, treatment, and access to care; the socioeconomic impact of HIV/AIDS; and human rights. The Youth Position Paper stated that young people “must be involved in initiating, designing, and implementing programs and strategies to fight HIV/AIDS” and that programs for youth must not be initiated, designed, and implemented by adults alone. The United Nations may talk about young people and HIV, but youth still do not have a voice that reflects both the impact of the epidemic on our age group and the role we have in determining how to reach our own generation effectively.

The Youth Position Paper is a tool young people can use to lobby for change in governmental policies that negatively affect young people. Even more importantly, it is a tool to mobilize our peers around the world. The Paper is a call to action to young people to change the world if adults do not have the courage and the conviction to do so.



MY VOICE COUNTS



I am **one young person** among the **one billion young people** worldwide between the ages of 15 and 24. Each day, **7,000** of my peers get HIV. In the United States, **50 percent** of all new HIV infections occur in young people in my age group. Worldwide, young women ages 15 to 19 are twice as likely to die from unsafe abortion and childbirth than women in their 20s.

- I have the **RIGHT** to information that will keep me healthy and safe. I should have resources and education that will help me prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS, sexually transmitted infections, and unintended pregnancy.
- I deserve **RESPECT** in making my own decisions concerning my personal health. When I seek out information and services, they should be low cost, easily accessible, and confidential.
- I will be **RESPONSIBLE** for my actions. With all necessary information concerning effective means of preventing HIV/AIDS, sexually transmitted infections, and pregnancy, I will make informed decisions with regard to my health and safety.

Together, we the undersigned:

Urge President George W. Bush and Congress to **increase** funding for **international family planning** and **global HIV/AIDS**.

Urge President George W. Bush and Congress to **abolish the global “gag” rule** that restricts family planning organizations receiving U.S. funding from providing a full range of reproductive health services to women. It is an **infringement on human rights** that an organization must choose between providing people with complete medical information or receiving funding. The gag rule means that if a counselor tells a woman with an unintended pregnancy that one of her available **options** is abortion (just as one option is adoption), then the clinic risks having its U.S. family planning funding **revoked**. The gag rule would be **unconstitutional** in the United States.

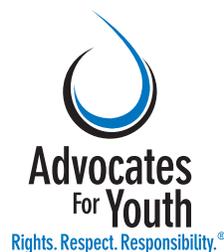
Urge President George W. Bush and Congress to ensure that **all** HIV/AIDS treatment drugs and future vaccines will be easily accessible to less developed countries at **low cost** without unreasonable **restrictions from trade and patent laws**.

(signature)

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Please Return Petitions to: International Youth Leadership Council ♦ c/o Advocates for Youth
♦ Suite 750 ♦ 2000 M Street NW ♦ Washington, DC 20036 ♦ 202.419.3420 ♦
202.419.1448 fax

To sign online and to get additional petitions, go to www.advocatesforyouth.org.

Advocates for Youth is an international nonprofit organization based in Washington, DC, that creates programs and supports policies that help young people make safe, responsible decisions about their sexual and reproductive health.

Our Lives are on the Line

Every minute, five young people
are infected with HIV



Today, 10 million people ages 15-24 are living with HIV/AIDS worldwide. And 50% of all new HIV infections occur in young people. We are at risk, but we are not being heard.

It's time for the United Nations to give **Us** a say



Sounding the Alarm for Our Lives

For more information, contact Advocates for Youth at www.advocatesforyouth.org

©2001 Photo: Steve Haskins/Photo

Many adults still hold negative stereotypes about the perceptions and capabilities of teenagers. As these stories of activist youth have shown, teenagers and young adults have acute perception and immense capabilities. How, then, can adults tap into youth's energy, passion, and commitment? How do youth become involved in issues and actions like those described here? The key is adults' partnering with youth.

BUILDING EFFECTIVE YOUTH-ADULT PARTNERSHIPS*

By Jane Norman, Program Manager for Youth Empowerment Initiatives, Advocates for Youth

What Is a Youth-Adult Partnership?

A true partnership is one in which each party has the opportunity to make suggestions and decisions and in which the contribution of each is recognized and valued. A youth-adult partnership is one in which adults work in full partnership with young people on issues facing youth and/or on programs and policies affecting youth. In addressing adolescent sexual health issues, youth and adults can work together in a number of ways. Together, they can conduct a needs assessment, write a grant proposal, raise funds, design a program, train new staff, deliver services, implement ideas and projects, oversee a program, collect data, evaluate a program's effectiveness, improve unsuccessful aspects of a program, and replicate successful programs.

Sharing with youth the power to make decisions means adults' respecting and having confidence in young people's judgment. It means adults' recognizing youth's assets, understanding what the youth will bring to the partnership, and being willing to provide additional training and support when youth need it (just as when including other adults in making decisions). Both youth and adults may need to embrace change in order for the partnership to work. For example, adults may need to modify their ideas about what will and will not work and about times and conditions under which work proceeds. Similarly, youth may need to understand the limitations and realities that affect a program's development, operation, and evaluation.

Why Are Youth-Adult Partnerships Important?

Youth-adult partnerships arise from the conviction that young people have a right to participate in developing the programs that will serve them and a right to have a voice in shaping the policies that will affect them. In addition, advocates of youth-adult partnerships argue that programs are more sustainable and effective when youth are partners in their design, development, and implementation. Proponents also assert that evaluation results are more honest and realistic when youth assist in gathering and providing the data on which evaluation is based.

Little research has been done on the effects that youth-adult partnerships may have on youth, adults, organizations, or the processes that these partnerships affect. Research provides some evidence, however, that partnering with youth and respecting their ability to contribute may provide important protective factors for young people. The Innovation Center for Community and Youth Development (a division of National 4-H Council) conducted one of the few existing studies on the effect of youth-adult partnerships. The study showed that "involving young people in decision making provides them with the essential opportunities and supports (i.e. challenge, relevancy, voice, cause based action, skill building, adult structure, and affirmation) that are consistently shown to help young people achieve mastery, compassion, and health."¹

Few links have been explicitly identified between resiliency research and the youth-adult partnership movement. However, research has identified many factors that help young people resist stress and negative situations. These factors (discussed below) are produced and facilitated by effective youth-adult partnerships.

* Different terms may refer to similar concepts. 'Youth involvement' and 'youth-adult partnerships' may be used interchangeably. Advocates for Youth prefers the partnership language because, for some, 'involvement' may imply tokenism or detachment.

First, resiliency research has identified ‘protective factors’ that seem to account for the difference between those young people who emerge from high risk situations with positive results and those who do not. While research shows that many factors influence health behaviors, resilient children, in particular, display some important characteristics, including:

- Social competence, including responsiveness, flexibility, empathy, and caring, communication skills, a sense of humor, and other pro-social behaviors
- Problem solving skills, including the ability to think abstractly, reflectively, and flexibly and the ability to arrive at alternative solutions to cognitive and social problems
- Autonomy, including a sense of identity and an ability to act independently and to exert control over one’s environment
- Sense of purpose and future, including having healthy expectations, goals, an orientation toward success, motivation to achieve, educational aspirations, hopefulness, hardiness, and a sense of coherence.²

Second, research identifies an internal locus of control, or the feeling of being able to have an impact on one’s environment and on others, as a key protective factor possessed by resilient youth. In this regard, opportunities for meaningful involvement and participation – such as are found in youth-adult partnerships – may provide youth with opportunities to develop and/or strengthen his/her internal locus of control.³

Third, research shows that contributing to one’s community has many positive outcomes. One study found that college students who provided community service for credit significantly increased their belief that people can make a difference and that people should be involved in community service and advocacy. They showed significantly increased commitment to performing volunteer service. Finally, they became less likely to blame social services clients for their misfortunes and more likely to stress a need for equal opportunities.⁴ Contributing to one’s community is the heart of most youth-adult partnerships.

Work in the field of youth development supports these findings. Youth development is defined as *the ongoing growth process in which youth are engaged in attempting to meet their basic personal and social needs to be safe, feel cared for, be valued, be useful, and be spiritually grounded, and build their skills and the competencies that allow them to function and contribute in their daily lives.*² Youth development is facilitated when young people have consistent opportunities to:

- Feel physically and emotionally safe
- Build relationships with caring, connected adults
- Acquire knowledge and information, and
- Engage in meaningful and purposeful activities in ways that offer both continuity and variety.²

These opportunities are abundantly present in genuine youth-adult partnerships.

Proponents of both youth development programs and youth-adult partnerships have in common a belief that youth are caring and capable individuals. Rather than seeing youth as problems to be managed, youth development proponents view young people as valued resources with individual assets. Proponents of youth-adult partnerships see young people as individuals with the capacity to make positive and wide-ranging contributions when they receive support and the opportunity to develop their skills.

Behavior change theory and research on resiliency suggest that, while the types of activities offered by successful youth development programs vary, “the emphasis lies in providing opportunities for active participation and real challenges.”⁵ Similarly, youth-adult partnerships offer youth immediate opportunities for active participation and real challenge. Few things can more concretely demonstrate a belief in young people’s capabilities than when trusted adults share with youth the power to make decisions.

Who Else Benefits?

It would be a mistake to assume that the only benefits from these partnerships accrue to youth. Adults and the organizations in which these partnerships operate also benefit from youth adult partnerships. Adults:

- Experience the competence of youth first hand and begin to perceive young people as legitimate, crucial contributors.

- Find their commitment and energy enhanced by working with youth.
- Feel more effective and more confident in working with and relating to youth.
- Understand the needs and concerns of youth, become more attuned to programming issues, and gain a stronger sense of connection to the community.
- Receive fresh ideas from different perspectives.
- Reach a broader spectrum of people.
- Develop more relevant and responsive programming and services.
- Share knowledge.
- Increase creativity.
- Break down stereotypes about both youth and adults.¹

The same study also identified positive outcomes for the organizations:

- Young people help clarify and bring focus to the organization's mission.
- The adults and the organization, as a whole, become more connected and responsive to youth in the community, leading to programming improvements.
- Organizations place a greater value on inclusion and representation and see programs benefiting when multiple and diverse voices participate in making decisions.
- Youth's making decisions helps convince foundations and other funding agencies that the organization is truly committed to meaningful youth development and/or involvement.¹

What Is Not a Genuine Youth Adult Partnership?

Youth-adult partnerships are *not* ways to hide or obscure the fact that programs are designed, implemented, and run only by adults. Tokenism is not partnership. Tokenism can appear in many forms. Tokenism could include such actions as:

- Having young people around with no clear role to play
- Assigning youth only those tasks which adults do not want to fulfill
- Having youth make media appearances without any voice in developing the messages, programs, or policies that the youth are expected to talk about
- Having one youth on a board of directors or council to point to as "youth involvement."

Tokenism will leave young people feeling used rather than empowered. The key to avoiding tokenism is to share with youth the power to make real decisions.

What Are Important Elements of Effective Youth-Adult Partnerships?

It can be challenging to build effective, sustainable, genuinely collaborative youth-adult partnerships. Successful partnerships have some important elements in common. Effective partnerships:

- Establish clear goals for the partnership. The youth and the adults must understand what their roles and responsibilities will be in achieving the goals.⁶
- Share the power to make decisions. If youth have no power to make decisions, their participation is not one of *partnership*.
- Get the highest levels of the organization to commit fully to youth's participation in the organization's work.
- Ensure that each adult and young person enters the partnership with a clear understanding of everyone's roles and responsibilities. Not all adults will want to work with youth and not all youth will want to work with adults in a partnership capacity.

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BARRIERS TO BUILDING EFFECTIVE YOUTH-ADULT PARTNERSHIPS

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Why aren't more organizations leaping to establish youth-adult partnerships?

The fact is that adults, youth, and organizations must recognize and dismantle significant barriers to working across age differences. If barriers remain in place, they will undermine the best intentions and waylay even the best-laid plans.

Attitudes as Barriers

Many adults still believe that young people's opinions don't matter, that youth are not capable of contributing in a valuable way, and that adults have nothing to learn from youth. Moreover, cultural norms may prevent adults from even realizing that these attitudes are *biased*. One way of approaching the issue of changing adults' attitudes about youth is to deal with it as one would any other issue of cultural diversity. Firsthand, personal experience often provides the most effective and far-reaching results in terms of changing people's opinions. One of the benefits of involving young people at high levels of responsibility and decision making is that it enables adults to see teens as thoughtful and contributing people. When anyone comes to see a formerly undifferentiated group as varying and diverse, that person is much more open to disbelieving and refuting negative stereotypes about the group and to valuing the individuals within the group.

Power dynamics, usually rooted in cultural norms, may make it difficult for young people and adults to feel comfortable working together. Formal instruction in school often teaches youth to expect answers from adults, and youth may expect adults to ignore, deride, or veto their ideas. Adults frequently underestimate the knowledge and creativity of young people and may be accustomed to making decisions without input from youth, even when youth are directly affected by the decisions. Therefore, joint efforts toward solving problems can be difficult, requiring deliberate effort on the part of both adults and youth.

One researcher developed the *Spectrum of Attitudes* theory and identified three different attitudes that adults may hold toward youth.¹ These attitudes affect adults' ability to believe that young people can make good decisions. These attitudes also determine the extent to which adults will be willing to involve young people as significant partners in decisions about program design, development, implementation, and evaluation.

- *Youth as Objects* – Adults who have this attitude believe in a myth of adult wisdom. They believe adults know what is best for young people. They attempt to control situations involving youth and believe that young people have little to contribute. They may feel the need, based on prior experience, to protect youth from suffering the consequences of potential mistakes. Adults who see youth as objects seldom permit youth more than token involvement. An example of this attitude might be an adult writing a letter to an elected official about an issue pertinent to youth and using a young person's name and signature for impact.
- *Youth as Recipients* – Adults who have this attitude believe they must assist youth to adapt to adult society. They permit young people to take part in making decisions because they think the experience will be 'good for them.' They assume that youth are not yet 'real people' and need practice to learn to 'think like adults.' These adults usually delegate to young people trivial responsibilities and tasks that the adults do not want to undertake. Adults who see youth as recipients usually dictate the terms of youth's involvement and expect young people to adhere to those terms. An example of this attitude might be adults extending an invitation to one young person to join a board of directors otherwise comprised solely of adults. In such a milieu, a young person's voice is seldom raised and little heard. Adults do not expect the young person to contribute, and the young person knows it and that adults deliberately retain all power and control.
- *Youth as Partners* – Adults who have this attitude respect young people and believe that young people have significant contributions to make now. These adults encourage youth to become involved and firmly believe that youth's involvement is critical to a program's success. They accept youth's having an equal voice in decisions. They recognize that both youth and adults have abilities, strengths, and experience to contribute. Adults who have this attitude will be as comfortable working with youth as with adults and enjoy an

environment with both youth and adults. Adults who see youth as partners believe that genuine participation by young people enriches adults just as adults' participation enriches youth and that a mutually respectful relationship recognizes the strengths that each offers. One example might be hiring youth to participate from the beginning in designing a program to meet the needs of a community's youth.

Logistical and Organization Barriers

Good intentions are not enough to create genuine partnerships. Adults who endorse the concept of youth-adult partnerships must also be willing to identify and alter the organizational environment where institutional barriers can be especially significant for young people. Institutional barriers that make genuine youth-adult partnerships difficult include:

- **Hours for Meetings and Work** – An agency's hours of operation usually coincide with times when young people are at school or work. To engage youth, program planners must find nontraditional times at which to hold important meetings. Often, scheduling conflicts can be difficult to overcome. However, compromise is vital if an organization is to create youth-adult partnership. For adults, this may mean altering schedules to hold meetings in the late afternoon, early evening, or on the weekend. For youth, this may mean using school community service hours to attend a daytime meeting.
- **Transportation** – Many young people do not have assured access to a vehicle. Program planners should schedule meetings in easily accessible locations. They should also provide youth with travel vouchers and/or immediate reimbursement for the cost of travel.
- **Food** – Few young people have the income to purchase meals in business districts or dinners in restaurants. When a meeting occurs at mealtime, the organization should provide young people with food or with sufficient funds to pay for the meal.
- **Equipment and Support** – Agencies should provide youth with the same equipment as other employees, such as computer workstation, mailbox, voice mail, E-mail, and business cards. Failure to do so carries a powerful message that these youth – whether they are volunteers, interns, or peer educators, full-time or part-time – are not important or, at least, are not as important as adult employees.
- **Procedures and Policies** – With input from both youth and adults, organizations should develop policies on youth/adult interactions. For example, if a program involves overnight travel, youth and adults should be clear about their roles and responsibilities in traveling together. The policies will need to respect youth's desire for independence and, at the same time, address the legal liability of the organization, the comfort level and legal responsibilities of adult staff, and parental concerns about security. Organizations may consider establishing policies requiring the consent of parent or guardian for youth's participation, for staff's driving young people somewhere, etc. The setting and purpose of each youth-adult partnership will help determine other institutional factors that may need to be addressed in the organization's policies and procedures.
- **Training** – In agencies that have always operated from an exclusively adult perspective, staff may need cultural competency training. Staff – whether working directly with youth or not – will need to accept young people's perspectives and ideas and adapt to changing workplace rules to meet the needs of youth. Each organization and each staff member must make determined efforts to let each young person know he/she is valued.

It is work to achieve youth-adult partnership, and it is not easy work. However, the benefits are enormous for youth and for organizations that care about young people. When youth and adults keep the potential benefits in mind, they will find that the work is worthwhile. It may even turn out to be easier than they thought it would be.

This article is drawn, in part, from Klindera K and Menderweld J. *Youth Involvement in Prevention Programming*. [Issues at a Glance]. Washington, DC: Advocates for Youth, © 2001.

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1. National 4-H Council. *Creating Youth/Adult Partnerships: The Training Curricula for Youth, Adults, and Youth/Adult Teams*. Chevy Chase, MD: The Council, 1997.

TIPS FOR WORKING WITH YOUTH

*Developed by Advocates for Youth's Teen Council
With assistance from the Young Women's Project, Washington, DC*

1. Be open to and nonjudgmental about young people's insights and suggestions. Let them know that their involvement is important.
2. Take advantage of the expertise that teens offer. Young people know about, and should be encouraged to share the needs of their community. Affirm this input.
3. Make sure youth will participate in meaningful ways. Young people should be involved in making decisions from the beginning of the project. Actively ask teens' opinions.
4. Be honest about expectations for the project, what you want the teens to contribute, and how you hope to benefit from teen participation. Don't expect more from a teen than you would from an adult. Keep expectations realistic; hold young people to your expectations. Do not patronize youth by lowering expectations.
5. Integrate young people into group and coalition efforts. Schedule meetings when teens can attend and in a location accessible to teens. Like everyone else, keep young people informed about plans and meeting times.
6. Treat teens as individuals. Don't assume one teen represents the views of many teens. Assure the young person that you are interested in her/his individual opinion and don't expect him/her to speak for an entire population.
7. Be prepared ahead of time to offer support. Think about kinds of support (financial, logistical, training, emotional, etc.) it will take to involve teens in the project, and who will be responsible for providing this support.
8. Make the work interactive, fun, and valuable. Like adults, youth are more likely to get involved and remain active in projects that are interesting and fulfilling.
9. Many youth feel intimidated by adults and are not used to participating in discussions with adults. Some may feel they have nothing to contribute. It will require time and commitment to get the input of these youth. Be aware of this factor and work to overcome it.
10. Don't make assumptions about what individual young people are like.
11. Don't move too fast. Remember that it takes time to develop trust and rapport with youth because some youth are unsure about adults' intentions. Take the time and make the effort to develop a good relationship with youth *before* expecting much. Remember, too, that this work is often new to youth; take the time to explain why actions are being taken. Youth may interpret adults' being abrupt and hurried as a sign of disinterest in youth's participation; so go slow and explain what's going on.
12. Remember that there are times when youth need to say, "No." They have many competing interests and responsibilities in their lives. Their education is important. Their relationships and communities are important. Having fun is important. They need time and energy for these interests and responsibilities.

TIPS FOR WORKING WITH ADULTS

*Developed by Advocates for Youth's Teen Council
With assistance from the Young Women's Project, Washington, DC*

1. Most adults have good intentions. Remember that they are simply not used to working in partnership with young people.
2. Criticism doesn't necessarily mean condescension or that an adult doesn't value your contribution. It may mean the adult is treating you the same way he/she would an adult colleague. Remember that adults are used to critiquing each other's work and offering constructive ideas to improve a project. Just because an adult doesn't agree with someone, it doesn't mean that he/she disrespects that person.
3. Adults may not be aware of the capabilities of young people. They can be told a hundred times that young people are mature, but showing them is the best way to make the case.
4. Adults often feel responsible for the success or failure of the project. This is what makes it hard for them to share power. They may need reassurance that you are willing to share in both the successes and the failures.
5. Adults are just as uncertain as youth. They have just learned to disguise it better.
6. Sometimes adults use phrases and expressions, whether consciously or not, that annoy young people and are red flags that they aren't treating youth as partners. Like an annoying drip of water, these phrases and expressions can erode a relationship. Be prepared to call adults on their language.
7. Don't be afraid to ask for clarification. Adults often use words, phrases, and acronyms that you might not understand. Adults new to the program may also not understand them either. The language of the non-profit sector is riddled with terms that may bewilder any newcomer.
8. Don't be afraid to say, "No." Adults will understand that you have other important commitments, like your education, family, friends, hobbies, and sports.

GIVE US OUR RIGHTS.

SHOW US RESPECT.

WE'LL TAKE RESPONSIBILITY.

International Youth Leadership Council
Advocates for Youth

LESSON PLAN

The River

Purpose: To remind adults of the pressures that teens may be facing
Materials: A blindfold, masking tape, several pieces of newspaper, index cards, newsprint and markers
Time: 20 to 25 minutes

Planning Notes:

Prepare index cards with suggested character roles (as provided immediately below). Depending on the size of your group, use as many or few of the characters as appropriate. Be sure that one person gets the “Young Person” role.

1. **Young Person** – Listen to all those who are trying to guide you down the river.
2. **Parent/Foster Parent** – You know best. Tell the Young Person what to do, keeping his/her best interests in mind. Use phrases like, “When I was your age ...” Feel free to be creative in your role!
3. **Grandparent** – You know best. Tell the Young Person what to do, keeping his/her best interests in mind. Use phrases like, “When I was your age ...” Feel free to be creative in your role!
4. **Minister** – You are the moral guide for the Young Person. Feel free to be creative in your role!
5. **Friend** – You are the “good” friend. You truly care about the Young Person. Feel free to be creative in your role!
6. **Teacher** – Stress the importance of school. Give guidance where you see fit. Feel free to be creative in your role!
7. **Social worker** – Give advice to the Young Person around issues such as drug use, sex, family, school, etc. Feel free to be creative in your role!
8. **Media** – Think of all the influences in the media (TV, movies, magazines, etc.) Some examples of media messages may include sex, violence, money, etc. Feel free to be creative in your role!
9. **Friend** – You are the “bad” friend. You are a bad influence on the Young Person. Feel free to be creative in your role!
10. **Health care provider** – Give advice to the Young Person regarding his/her health and general well-being. Some examples: talking about smoking, sex, nutrition, weight. Feel free to be creative in your role!

Procedure:

1. Explain that too often, as adults, we forget what it is like to be a teenager with competing pressures and influences in our lives. This exercise is an effective way to understand some of the pressures that teens face.
2. Set up “the river,” laying out two long pieces of masking tape to form it.
3. Ball up several pieces of newspaper and scatter them throughout “the river” to form barriers. Be creative, calling them alligators, lava, white water, etc.
4. Ask for volunteers for the roleplay. Select up to 10 volunteers and distribute an index card with a character role to each participant.
5. Give volunteers about two minutes to think about their roles.
6. Explain that there are many conflicting influences in the lives of youth, today more than ever. These influences may affect the decisions that young people make, including decisions about sexuality.
7. Ask all of the volunteers to come up to the front of the room and stand on either side of “the river.”
8. Ask the Young Person to come forward and blindfold him/her.

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- Are selective. Young people vary widely in their development and in their readiness and willingness to assume responsibility. Being clear about the goals of the partnership and the roles that youth will play will help in identifying young people who are committed, reliable, and effective. At the same time, effective partnerships are selective about adult participants. The adults must believe that young people are assets and be willing and able to advocate on behalf of youth when stereotyping or negative assumptions about teens arise.
- Provide capacity building and training. Effective partnerships don't set young people up for failure by throwing them into situations for which they are not prepared. Youth may need training in communication, leadership, assertiveness skills, interviewing, etc., as well as in specific areas of expertise, like HIV prevention education. Similarly, effective partnerships don't set adults up for failure by throwing them into situations for which they are not prepared. Adults may need training in communication, collaborative work, interviewing, or working with youth as well as in specific areas of expertise, such as HIV prevention education.
- Are aware that different styles of communication do not imply disrespect, disinterest, or different goals and expectations. Youth and adults say that the best way to resolve conflicts that arise out of different communication styles is to ask questions when one does not understand what is being said or why it is being said. Keeping the common goal in mind can also help resolve conflicts arising out of different communication styles.
- Value youth's participation and what they bring. Effective partnerships hold high expectations for participating youth and are not afraid of holding youth accountable for their responsibilities.
- Value adults' participation and what they bring. Adults frequently offer the partnership knowledge, experience, and access to resources. Effective partnerships guard against discounting potential adult allies, assuming that all adults hold negative stereotypes about youth, or believing that adults will have nothing of value to contribute to a program intended for youth.
- Include room for growth – next steps. Where can youth and adults go next? For example, peer education programs are often great vehicles for empowering young people and helping them develop important skills. However, these programs seldom include opportunities for advancement or for peer educators to assume more responsibility over time. Effective programs ensure that youth and the adults who work with youth have opportunities for advancement. Both youth and adults will have valuable experience and insights to bring to more senior positions in the organization.
- Remember that youth have other interests and priorities. Too often, adults will enthusiastically enlist the participation of a particularly effective and articulate young person in an overwhelming number of obligations and commitments. Check in often with partnership youth to ensure that they are taking on only as much as they can manage without neglecting other important aspects of their lives, such as family, friends, and education. Try to assist youth in recognizing when it is wise to say, "No," and support their decisions.

Youth-adult partnerships offer much to youth, adults, and organizations that participate in them. Effective partnerships may be difficult to achieve. However, the benefits they offer are wide-ranging and significant. The first step is to acknowledge that youth have value and that their contributions have value. Commitment to youth's rights and a determination to recognize their rights and to hear their voices is the beginning of building effective youth-adult partnerships.

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RESOURCES ON YOUTH-ADULT PARTNERSHIPS

- *Youth Involvement in Prevention Programming*, a title in Advocates for Youth's series, Issues at a Glance, is available free in English, French, and Spanish at www.advocatesforyouth.org or call 202.419.3420.
- The Activism 2000 Project, founded in 1992 as a private, non-partisan organization, encourages young people to speak up and pursue lasting solutions to problems they care deeply about. For more information, visit www.youthactivism.com or call 1.800.KID.POWER.
- The National 4-H Council's Innovation Center for Community and Youth Development provides training and resources, including the *Creating Youth Adult Partnerships* curriculum. Contact Amy Wiesenbach at 301.961.2894 or <http://www.fourhcouncil.edu/CYD/att>.
- Youth on Board provides training and resources to help revolutionize the role of young people in society. For more information, visit www.youthonboard.org or call 617.623.9900.
- The Prevention Marketing Initiative produced *Youth Involvement*, a publication available from the CDC National AIDS Clearinghouse at 1.800.458.5231.
- *Senior Year* is a documentary series, produced by Displaced Films. The 13-part series, premiering in spring 2002 on PBS, gives voice to a group of diverse students in their senior year at Fairfax High in Los Angeles. Designed and managed by Outreach Extensions, the complementary national outreach campaign will provide information and resources to young PBS viewers and encourage them to reach out to and educate their peers. The series explores issues relevant to young people's lives, including diversity, self-esteem, self-sufficiency, sexual orientation, love and dating, sexual and reproductive health, and peer, family, and community relationships.

Senior Year will provide a special Web site, and Advocates for Youth's Web sites will carry features relevant to topics covered in *Senior Year* as well as resources to help youth find information and/or support online and in their local communities. The goal is to provide a voice for youth. For more information on this exciting new series and outreach effort, please contact Outreach Extensions, Lee Allen at lrallen@verizon.net or Advocates for Youth, Jessie Gilliam at jessie@advocatesforyouth.org.

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9. Explain that the various characters must guide the Young Person down "the river," helping her/him to avoid the danger spots (alligators, lava, white water, etc.). Give the other characters about 10 minutes to guide the Young Person down "the river."
10. Conclude the activity using the discussion points.

Discussion Points:

1. What did you think of this exercise? Was it realistic? Why? Why not?
2. How did it feel to be the Young Person?
3. Were you faced with similar pressures and influences when you were a teen?
4. How do these influences affect a teen's ability to make decisions?

MORE INFORMATION ABOUT *RIGHTS. RESPECT. RESPONSIBILITY.*®

Each summer, Advocates for Youth sponsors study tours to Europe to explore the policies and programs that positively affect adolescent sexual health outcomes. Study tours include seminars; site visits; interviews with educators, health and social services providers, and media professionals; focus group research with adolescents and parents; and time for cultural exploration in each country. To apply for a future study tour, visit www.advocatesforyouth.org.

Information gathered during past study tours is presented in the publications listed below.

- *European Approaches to Adolescent Sexual Behavior & Responsibility* examines the roles of family, media, community, public policy, sexuality education, and health care in promoting responsible sexual behavior among teens in the Netherlands, Germany, and France.
- *Teens & Sex in Europe: A Story of Rights, Respect, & Responsibility*, a video that captures youth in Europe and the United States candidly sharing their attitudes toward sexual health.
- *Adolescent Sexual Health in Europe and the U.S.—Why the Difference?* This six-page fact sheet provides statistical data on adolescent sexual health indicators in four countries.

To order any of the above publications, call 202.419.3420. To view the video or download PDF files of the publications, visit www.advocatesforyouth.org.



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