



Guide to Being a Supportive Ally For Youth



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*This guide was compiled and edited
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With contributions from YouthScape HRM,
HeartWood Centre for Community Youth Development,
and Seeds For Change*

Section I

**How To Be A
Supportive Ally for Youth**

“Be the change you want to see in the world.” Ghandi

For more information, please contact YouthScape HRM
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Introduction

This guide was created to accompany the workshop entitled, “How to be a Supportive Ally”.

Working with young people on youth-led community projects offers an immensely rewarding opportunity to nurture youth engagement, leadership, responsibility and values. To watch young people engage in something meaningful can fill adult allies with hope and enthusiasm.

The youth who have chosen to participate in these community projects may be highly motivated and inspired young people, with previous experiences in community involvement. They may also be attempting something like this for the very **first time**. If they seek your help or support, embrace the opportunity.

Being an ally need not be a daunting or intimidating experience. These young people stepped forward because they care. As an adult ally, you stepped forward because you care. Already, you have that in common. Build on your strengths and ideas and always remember that with your support, these young people can change and impact their schools, neighborhoods and communities.

You **CAN** do this! Good luck!

How did we create this guide?

YouthScape HRM staff regularly collect and compile tips, tools and resources that support meaningful community development and edit them into this ever-improving guide! This guide is dedicated to all those who wish to become a more informed, compassionate and supportive ally for youth. For more information on YouthScape, please visit our website at **www.youthscapehrm.ca**

Inside this guide, you'll find contributions from several sources including HeartWood Centre for Community Youth Development. HeartWood is a not-for-profit organization whose mission is to work with youth to develop their skills and confidence as community builders. They also work with adults and community agencies so they can support meaningful youth participation in their communities.

This guide is stronger because of the expertise they bring with them and the wealth of youth-friendly tools, activities and resources they have to share with us.

For more information on HeartWood Centre for Community Youth Development, please visit our website at **www.heartwood.ns.ca**

Basic Steps to Becoming an Effective Ally



Getting Started

- Listen to the young person's ideas and plans, and resist making judgments.
- Maintain a distance from the projects to allow for youth ownership.
- Help the young person locate valid and constructive resources and prompt them to look for new ways to tackle issues.
- Encourage them to get feedback and ideas from their community at the outset and all along the way.
- Have the young person identify other allies from their community. There may be other community members who could help support, sponsor or help out to ensure the young person's idea is a success.

Along the Way

- Be accessible to them. Be supportive of their views and ideas. Be a safe place for them to turn to for a brainstorming session. Check in occasionally and chat with them about any successes and challenges they may be facing.
- Be willing to ask for help from staff or other allies, if you need it. We are all there to help make this a success and you are never alone. Whether that means a chat now and then, a brainstorming session or additional supports or expertise that you may want to help your group access, just ask.

Wrapping It Up

- Encourage participants to discuss their project after it is finished. Points of discussion could include strengths and challenges and how these issues can be resolved the next time they plan an activity.
- Support future efforts by young people to continue the community work they have already started or to find a new issue to tackle in their school, neighborhood or community.

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How We Treat Others

(Excerpted from HeartWood Resource)

We see young people as having real ambition, energy, valuable ideas and experiences, and dreams. In short, we see them in terms of their assets, not as “problems.” We encourage them to be their “own” person and we’ll help them in that process by providing some guidance.

When we are engaged in a learning relationship with youth, rather than solving their problems for them, or showing them how to do things *our* way, we provide them with experiences where they figure it out for themselves. In fact, we learn from them... how to design programs and deliver services.

What we’ve learned together:

We recognize the influence that a caring adult can have in the life of a young person.

We need to treat each youth as an individual with his/her own life experience, gifts and needs;

We need to show respect and interest in the individual; listening and hearing what they are saying; providing and accepting feedback.

We recognize that it’s important to give young people a chance when others won’t.

Appreciative Approach (Strengths-based)

Excerpted from HeartWood Resource

An appreciative approach focuses attention on strengths, potential, and possibilities.

It increases capacity in individuals, organizations, and communities by identifying resources they already have - including their own knowledge and life experience - and building on that. Everyone has some kind of gift they can contribute. In a community development context, it means using all our assets, local skills, and existing resources first to create solutions, before seeking additional resources or relying on outside “expertise” to fix problems.

In fact, an appreciative approach is quite different than the usual problem solving strategy. Many of us have learned to use a negative focus – what’s wrong, what’s not working, reasons why a new idea won’t work, etc. This way of problem solving tends to limit outlook, stifle creativity, and sap energy and enthusiasm. We often end up looking for someone to blame, which causes people to feel defensive. Worst of all, we tend to stay stuck in the ways we’ve always done things.

If, instead, we focus our attention on getting the results we want, then we put a spotlight on what is already working. We look for and create possibility, we cultivate involvement, and we generate energy and enthusiasm as we naturally move towards our goal. In the process, we create the best thinking environment for coming up with innovative ideas and solutions, while viewing obstacles in our path as opportunities for personal and organizational transformation.

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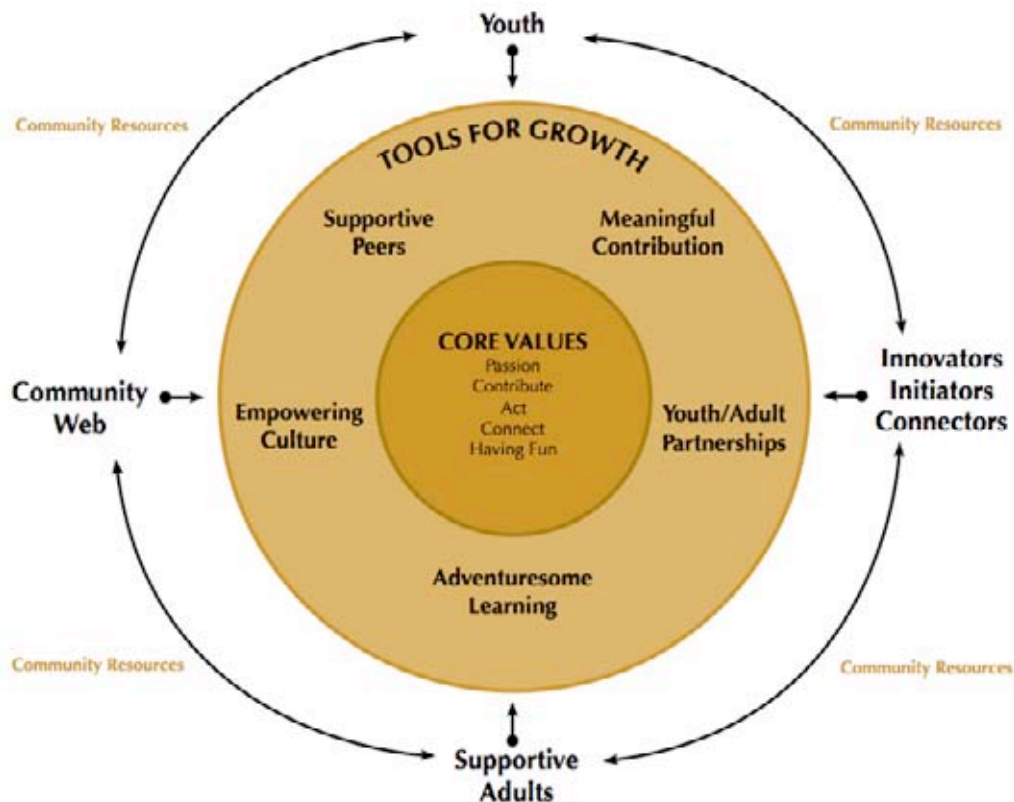
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YouthScape HRM's Approach *(Based on HeartWood's Community Youth Development Framework)*

HeartWood has identified **five** key tools for successful community youth development.

- **Meaningful Contribution** : Taking action to meet a genuine need.
- **Adventuresome Learning** : Engaging, real life experiences that challenge individuals to step outside their comfort zones to learn and grow.
- **Peer Support** : Creating the atmosphere that fosters a strong peer team where individuals feel connected, appreciated and supported by others.
- **Youth-Adult Partnerships** : Gaining inspiration, support and guidance through a relationship of mutual caring and respect.
- **Empowering Culture** : Providing opportunities to initiate, commit, plan and choose paths to work together with peers and the community as active citizens.



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HeartWood's framework also identifies **four** community resources that are necessary to put the program tools into action. The foremost resource is the untapped potential of youth. However three other resources are important to engage youth in the community development process. These are pictured around the circle.

- ◆ **Initiator, Innovator, Connector:** can be an individual, a group of people (youth and/or adults), or an organization that has a specific interest or motivation and is a bright light or energy source to see increased youth engagement in the defined system.
- ◆ **Youth:** meaningful roles for youth participation in the system.
- ◆ **Supportive Adults:** meaningful roles for supportive adults to help young people navigate the system.
- ◆ **Community Web:** a linking of other youth serving and/or community based organizations, government agencies and individuals who can play a role towards increased youth engagement in the system.



YouthScape HRM creates opportunities for youth and adults to work together to build stronger, healthier, more diverse, inclusive and resilient communities.

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Key Qualities of Meaningful Contribution

'I am needed'

- A sense of accomplishment
- Feeling needed
- Meeting a genuine need
- Appreciation from others
- New personal relationships
- Mutual two-way learning
- A belief that individuals can make a difference
- An increased commitment to organization and community
- New respect for others
- New opportunities growing out of simple acts
- An enriched community



Key Qualities of Adventuresome Learning

'Learning is fun'

- Risk taking, uncertainty, going into the unknown
- Engagement, feeling alive
- Fun and play
- Focusing on feelings and values as well as thoughts and actions
- Magic, creativity, zest and inspiration
- Sense of personal safety
- Sense of personal accomplishment
- The freedom to express oneself, experiment and make mistakes
- Finding unexpected and teachable moments
- Action coupled with time and space for reflection

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Key Qualities of Peer Support

'I am accepted'

- Feeling connected, appreciated, and understood by others
- Deeper self-understanding gained through team interaction
- Appreciating and celebrating differences
- Giving and receiving feedback
- Freedom to be oneself and express needs
- Meaningful communication and support
- Healthy expectations for each other
- Sense of personal safety and willingness to take risks
- Confidence to take on challenges that seem insurmountable alone



Key Qualities of Youth/Adult Partnerships

'I am supported'

- Caring what happens to each other, reciprocity
- Mutual respect and listening
- Sharing and exploring together
- Providing personal support
- Being a role model
- Being a resource
- Sharing experience, an interest, or expertise
- Lending a helping hand
- Personal safety and trust

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Key Qualities of an Empowering Culture

'I am worth it'



- The freedom to express oneself
- Making conscious decisions on how to be together
- Taking initiative
- Having control over planning and decision-making
- The ability and opportunity to challenge others
- Contributing to a vision and direction
- Making choices
- Following through on plans
- Interest in solving problems
- Mutual commitment to the vision
- Holding others accountable

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Section II

Helpful Tools to Try

*If you never did you should.
These things are fun and fun is good. (Dr. Seuss)*

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Reaching Out To Youth

Creating YouthScape HRM has presented many successes and challenges over the last year. Engaging such a diverse group, with such complex needs and relatively minimal resources for such a large geographical area has been challenging.

Our work with any new group begins with relationship building. This requires a great deal of time and commitment on behalf of the staff to connect with each community member individually up to **three** times usually before they can see the relevance and connection to what they care about.

Next, we identify all the possible reasons why individuals may not be able to participate and then attempt to remove barriers such as timing, location, transportation, food and fees. In the case of young people, they are often facing other barriers including personal issues at home, at school or living in a community that has not yet recognized their potential. Depending on their backgrounds, they may even be looking for a second chance to prove themselves. We're learning locally that attitudes and perceptions play a big role in how young people engage in their surroundings.

We work hard to find activities that will draw new community members into the group, the discussion or the Initiative. Once we get community members to our circle, we do everything we can to support them in the hopes they stay and participate. This means creating a safe and supportive environment to grow, learn and share and being really flexible to better meet their needs.

Each new sector or community brings its own successes, challenges, experiences and attitudes to our circle. Having a diversity of perspectives within our Initiative really helps us to understand and meet the needs of such diverse participants.



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Ways We Communicate with our Community

We use a variety of methods to communicate with our diverse youth and community members who have very different preferences.

Some individuals prefer one method over another, and some prefer we communicate everything several ways to ensure they remember meetings, events or deadlines.

Also, because many of our community members share information through their networks in specific ways, we need to ensure they receive information that they can share easily.

The benefit in doing this is that our community is well informed on our activities and opportunities and they can help us to reach out to as many youth, adults, organizations, agencies, businesses and regions as possible.

Therefore, in HRM, we are using the following methods to communicate effectively with the community...

- **Email** - To share information and/or seek feedback, for group discussions and reminders and also as a way to connect with individuals who may be hard to reach by phone.
- **Phone** - For follow-up calls and reminders, regular check-ins with youth to see how they're doing and to encourage or motivate them.
- **Facebook** - To create events and invite community members to attend, share photos and videos, share links, documents and information, write notes on specific subjects, change status to appear in others' updates, write on a young person's wall to check-in with them or congratulate them, while promoting YouthScape and getting people to ask our youth, "What's YouthScape?"
- **Website** - To have a youth-friendly online space for community members to connect with YouthScape HRM, to scope out staff and management team bios and to access local and national resources.
- **Visits** - To have personal time with some of the youth to get to know each other better and build trust, to catch up and hear their news or to talk about issues that may be causing them difficulties in being able to commit to projects, teams or meetings.
- **Meetings and Events** - YouthScape teams regularly come together to share, learn and create. The Coordinator also regularly attends community meetings or events to connect with new youth, organizations, agencies and businesses. The goal is to share YouthScape and engage them in the Initiative by making it relevant to them and explaining the numerous benefits.

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Community-friendly Language

Using clear and concise language is vital to keeping individuals of **any age** engaged in meetings and events. Diversity in ages and backgrounds can mean a diversity of terms and definitions. It is important to look at everything from the perspective of someone new and how they may read it. Our goal is to ensure they understand what they are reading and hearing.

YouthScape HRM has sought out and received feedback from community members to make our writing a little more community-friendly. They have taught us to use fewer words, a more conversational tone and terms that are clear or can be explained in a line or two. This works well for adults as well as youth, and can create a more safe and supportive environment for everyone to participate in the discussions and decisions being made.

Before proceeding with a document, ask yourself a few questions...

- 1 - If I were new to this group, would I understand this document? If not, what needs to be clarified?
- 2 - Could I have said the same thing with fewer words or would it lose the message if I did?
- 3 - Is the document laid out in a way that is easy on the eyes? Is there space between bullets and paragraphs? Are the headings bolded or italicized? Are there graphics to help emphasize the message visually?

Using a more community-friendly approach to language may take a little longer initially, but the long-term benefits will have a greater impact on participation and engagement within your organization, group, business or family.



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Tools for Your Project Team Making Decisions Together

This section was excerpted and edited from Seeds For Change Resource

What is Consensus?

Consensus is a decision-making process that works creatively to include all persons making the decision. Instead of simply voting for an item, and having the majority of the group getting their way, the group is committed to finding solutions that **everyone** can live with. This ensures that everyone's opinions, ideas and reservations are taken into account. But consensus is more than just a compromise. It is a process that can result in surprising and creative solutions - often better than the original suggestions.

People are often inactive because they feel that they have no power in the system and that their voice won't be listened to anyway. In consensus every person has the power to influence the decisions.

Another benefit of consensus is that all members agree to the final decision and therefore are much more committed to actually turning this decision into reality.

How Does Consensus Work?

There are a few conditions that have to be met for consensus building to be possible:

Common Goal: All members of the group need to be united in a common goal. It helps to clearly establish what this overall goal is and to write it down. In situations where consensus seems difficult to achieve, it helps to come back to this common goal and to remember what the group is all about.

Commitment to Consensus Building: All members of the group must be committed to reaching consensus on decisions taken. Consensus requires commitment, patience and a willingness to put the group and its common goal first.

Sufficient Time: All members of the group need to allow the necessary time for making decisions as well as learning to work in this way.

Guidelines for Consensus Building

- ◆ Make sure everyone understands the common goal and the process for build consensus.
- ◆ While building consensus make sure everyone is following, listening to and understanding each other. Be respectful and trust each other. Think before you speak and listen before you object.
- ◆ Ensure that all members contribute their ideas and knowledge related to the subject. Remember that we all have different values and opinions, behaviors and experiences. (Our diversity is a strength!)
- ◆ Differences of opinion are natural and to be expected. Be open and honest about the reasons for your viewpoints and do not change your mind simply to avoid conflict. (When agreement seems to come too quickly and easily or members are not contributing to the discussions, be suspicious. Explore the reasons and be sure that everyone agrees for basically similar reasons. Many of us are scared of open disagreement and avoid it where we can. Easily reached consensus may cover up low confidence or lack of safety for some people to express their disagreements openly.
- ◆ Allow enough time for the process of building consensus. Being quick is not always a sign of quality. Thinking issues through properly needs time.

Remember...

Consensus is about participation and equalizing power. It can also be a very powerful process for building communities and empowering individuals. Don't be discouraged if the going gets rough. For most of us consensus is a completely new way of making decisions. It takes time to unlearn the patterns of behavior we have been brought up to accept as the norm. Consensus does get easier with practice!



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A Tool Toward Consensus Building - Green, Yellow, Red Light Method

Imagine that there is such a thing as a decision-making traffic light that gives you a green, yellow, or red.



For each traffic light, there is a message:

(Green Light) Yes! I can support this idea!

(Yellow Light) Whoa, I can see this idea has potential but I need more information!

(Red Light) No, this idea does not fit with our common goals right now.

Once your group has chosen its common goal (e.g. creating a free drop-in program), and identified its question (e.g. does this idea have the potential to achieve our common goal?), this method serves as a place to begin the discussion.

Each member uses their color cards (or on conference calls-their color word) and chooses the one the best fits the way they feel towards the question. The group members should then be encouraged to share why they chose the color they did. Everyone should have the opportunity to share, so for larger groups a highlight or two are sometimes the best way to ensure everyone has a voice.

Someone must take the lead in capturing the highlights of the discussion, regardless of the colors chosen. This ensures that the decisions can later be explained to those affected (e.g. a team member who may have missed the meeting).

If consensus can be reached easily and sincerely, while respecting everyone's feedback and suggestions, then the group can move on to other business. If more discussion is needed to reach consensus, then this should be encouraged while keeping in mind the guidelines for consensus building, listed on page 16.

At the end of the process, group members should feel comfortable with the decisions made and solutions found. In other words, they should be "green".

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Game To Try

Games are useful when you want everyone to have a little fun, a few laughs and a chance to get to know one another. We have included one of our favorites, but there are many more out there!



Move Your Butt

- 1 - Form a large group circle, with everyone sitting down
- 2 - Ask for a volunteer to start in the middle of the circle. Remove their chair, so there is one less chair than participants in the game.
- 3 - The person in the middle says, "Move your butt if ...". The statement they choose must be true for them. For example, "Move your butt if...you love watching episodes of LOST!"
- 4 - Everyone who the statement rings true for, then jumps up and scrambles for a seat. The person in the middle meanwhile is also scrambling to get a seat. Since there is one less chair than participant, someone will be left in the middle again and you start over.
- 5 - Play as long as you want, but a minimum of 10 minutes is desirable.

Creating Community Standards

What is it?

Community Standards can be the most valuable part of an entire program. It is an opportunity for the participants to create standards or guidelines on how they want to work together!

All groups need some form of community standards and they can look like lots of things: a mural, poem, list, or a sculpture created together! The process of creating community standards can be fun, interactive and an invaluable experience for any group!

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Objectives:

- To create a set of standards (guidelines) that participants will strive to live by
- To provide participants with a voice to express their needs within the program

Outcomes:

- Empowering and inclusive experience
- A challenging team-building experience
- Increase in trust between participants and facilitators
- A sense of ownership for the experience

How to Create Community Standards with a Group:

- Each Community Standards session is totally different and depends on things such as the size of the group, objectives of the program, length of program, participant population, physical location...
- The timing of the Community Standards session is crucial. It has to be after the group has had some time to get to know each other and feel comfortable having this conversation, and should not be so late that expectations and community guidelines are not clear and people do not feel safe.
- For safety and legal reasons there are certain foundational standards that the facility and your organization have to provide, such as no drugs, no violence, no sexual harassment... be clear and upfront about these (ideally before the participants arrive). Review these static standards and explain them as the foundation to build your community and explain to participants that by choosing to attend this event, you have agreed to these as a minimum.
- Start with asking easy questions that lead to bigger questions. Here is an example:
 1. Ask the group to list some communities or groups they are a part of (school, sports teams, family, friends, neighborhood...)? What are the characteristics that make these communities work (or not)? Lead into a discussion on how during this program we are community and what would you like it to look like...?
 2. Lead into discussion on what is a standard? (define and examples) who sets our standards for us? (in our home/school/community) What are standards that we agree/disagree with? Why are these standards set? This is an opportunity to set and live by our own standards...

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- Depending on numbers, it may work to split the group into smaller size (5-6 per group). Each group is to come up with a list of standards that will be presented to entire group or you can give each group categories (safety, behaviors, space...)
- With a smaller group, it can work well to ask: “What is of most importance to you in how this group works together?”
- However it is organized, by the end there should be a visible representation of the standards and some form of a commitment that everyone will try their best to live by these standards
- Discuss consequences. It is important that the notion of consequences be explored as part of the Community Standards session or community meeting, and that they are clearly defined and understood. The group as a whole can generate these, and it may be necessary to coach them to suggesting consequences that are connected and in proportion to the standard broken. Consequences need to be enforced, or participants can feel disrespected.
- Introduce *community meetings* as a way for anyone to revisit community standards. If this is not happening naturally, as a facilitator you should create time to revisit the standards and make sure they are working.



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Helpful Hints

- Do something playful or light after Community Standards, to keep energy of group up.
- Keep an eye on participant energy level. If you anticipate that it will be a lengthy process, set a time limit at the outset that everyone is aware of, and have a backup plan to end the conversation.
- Think about Community Standards session as a container that can change size according to the population, decide beforehand how big to make the container, and how much the group will be able to decide for themselves (things like language...)
- If the group will be working together over a long period of time, it's wise to have a copy of the standards provided to each person, to be included in their journal, etc.
- Get Creative! Community Standards do not have to end up as just a list of guidelines. It can involve anything; music, play-doh, poetry, theatre...

Leadership Questions

These are a few questions that we use to stimulate discussion around a young person's leadership skills or their desire to achieve them. You can write your own based on your needs, just ensure that you are using simple, community-friendly language.

1 - Reflect on someone you admire or respect...

2 - Why? List the qualities that you respect about them.

3 - How does this person make you (or others they lead) feel?



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World Café

The World Café is a creative tool used to create conversations around questions that matter. It is a more structured way of organizing conversations, but with the fun twist of a Café atmosphere.

Tip: Have hot chocolate and treats during the café, and use colourful tablecloths to make it more fun and true to its name.

Groups of 4-6 join each other at a Café-style table (tablecloth, paper and markers should be included on each table) to explore a question or issue. Others are sitting at nearby Café tables exploring similar questions at the same time. You won't be sitting for too long, however, because half the excitement of being part of a World Café conversation is the opportunity to move to another group or Café table, to visit with new people and share ideas and insights.

As participants move around, the conversations connect together and knowledge and ideas grow and evolve. A sense of the bigger picture becomes real.

In our experience, Cafés can be a lot of fun when you allow adequate time for conversation between participants, and keep the questions simple. 3-5 questions per Café is usually about right, depending on your group.

For more information on creating your own, please visit: www.theworldcafe.com

Community-Friendly Open Space

Open space is a really easy way to have small group conversations on what people want to talk most about. It allows flexibility and an easy flow of ideas and conversation.

Tip: It works especially well when you have participants who may not be comfortable talking about certain topics, because in an open space setting, participants choose the topic or theme that best suits their interest and comfort level.

Here's how it works:

1. First, invite people to brainstorm topics they want to discuss. Keep it short, and topics should be general. Example: "Transportation", instead of "Bus Issues in Timberlea". This will allow for everyone to participate and feel included in the discussions.
2. Help the group decide on the top 5-6 themes that seem to be coming out of the brainstorm. Choose themes or topics with the most energy and interest.
3. Get them to write down the topic or question on tent cards (or letter size paper folder over), assign a table for the conversation and place the tent card on the table.
4. Assign a suggested time frame for discussions. (A minimum of 30 minutes)

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5. You can suggest a few basic questions to get them thinking, but remember they are only suggestions. Open spaces need to be environments where conversations can happen based on the people at the table, and not the facilitators' needs. (Example: One of our questions for this workshop's open space is "What's left to learn?")
6. During the conversations, have someone take notes to capture all the great information and stories being shared.
7. Report back to the larger group.



Community-friendly Evaluation

Because evaluation is important to ensure your methods and strategies are working for your group and because YouthScape understands the need for it to be fun for your group, we are suggesting the following evaluation tools for your team to try.

They are simple to use, easy to remember and can focus on the strengths of an event or activity while allowing for suggestions of improvement.

Apples and Onions

In a circle, each participant shares something they liked (an apple) and something they would like to improve for the next meeting or event (an onion, though not most people's favorite veggie, could be improved if deep-fried. Onion rings!)

The goal of this is to hear their feedback in an appreciative way that focuses on the strengths of the event. (e.g. "My apple was being able to share my ideas on the project and feeling like my feedback was valuable. My onion was that next time I hope we have more youth attend.")

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Apples and Onions is NOT a way to vent personal frustration at any particular person. (e.g. my onion is that Brian listened to my ipod without asking.) It is meant to be focused on getting some quick, easy and useful feedback, delivered in a constructive and supportive way.

Tip: This can be a great way to end a meeting.

First Impressions

Ask the group to draw or write their first impression of an event, group or place, etc. Then at a later point ask them to draw or write their current impression. Compare both.

Tip: This can be a great tool to explore the role that trust and stereotypes play in a team. It can provide you with a good sense of how the youth might be feeling about the adults in the group when they first join your team. Then do your best to learn more about each other, have fun together and build a relationship. Then try the activity again and talk together about the differences in an appreciative way.

Collages

Use a variety of materials such as newspapers, magazines, construction paper, pipe cleaners, playdoh, paint, markers, sticks, foam shapes, stickers, glitter and glue sticks to create a picture or story of what happened.

Tip: This can be a useful activity when talking to them about their school or community and how they see it.



**** On behalf of the YouthScape HRM Team, we want to thank each of you for taking the time to get involved in this initiative. Thanks!***

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