ACTIONS FOR THE WHOLE COMMUNITY...

These are strategies (i.e., action that is complex) that are long-term with varying time-frames, involve multiple partners at various "levels," and that are designed to have a deep impact on the whole community, the system (like child welfare, education, health, etc.), or between sectors (like public, private, and not-for-profit/voluntary). You begin by imagining the possibilities and talking to each other about how it *could* be done. First thing you know, everybody is working together to re-new (build, create) their community!

The theory of living systems…

Like other "living systems" (e.g., a forest, the weather, a human body), a community's natural structure is formed of inter-connecting networks – a vast web of relationships, resources, and informal associations. The science of living systems tells us how they thrive. So, a community will be stronger (i.e., able to survive, renew, and sustain itself) when it is more diverse (i.e., can draw upon a wide repertoire of skills, knowledge, and life experience), when it is innovative (i.e., takes risks to act, explore, and experiment; that is, tries new ways of doing things and then incorporates its learning into success strategies), when it collaborates (i.e., makes best use of its diverse connections and relationships to do things that cannot be done single-handedly), and when it exercises informal leadership in a diffuse, or decentralized, manner (i.e., when local groups and associations take initiative to make things happen) as well as formal leadership in its more hierarchical structures (such as Municipal Council). So the key activities in a living system are inter-connection, relationship building, taking innovative action, and learning (i.e., developing capacity) from all those interactions and experiences. (primarily adapted from Brenda Zimmerman's book edgeware)

Find out What's Going on In Your Community...

Once you have a better knowledge of what's going on in your own community, it might be helpful to find out what *other* municipalities are doing to engage youth. There is, not surprisingly, a great diversity of innovative approaches being taken in communities large and small, urban and rural, all across Canada and the U.S.

Here are some web sites you can check out to learn about their experiences, resources, and strategies:

Child and Youth Friendly Ottawa (CAYFO)
http://www.cayfo.ca/corporate/main.php
CAYFO recognizes the power of youth to be effective leaders and contributors in their communities and country. Thus, they support youth initiated projects, promote partnerships between youth and adults, recognize successes, talents and accomplishments of youth, highlight citizens and institutions that support youth, and involve young people in civic engagement and decisions that affect their lives.

The Regional Multicultural Youth Council, Thunder Bay, Ontario
http://my.tbaytel.net/manwoyc/
The Regional Multicultural Youth Council (RMYC) has 13 members between the ages of 14 and 18, fifty percent of whom are native or new immigrants. RMYC outreaches to youth in the small, isolated communities of Northwestern Ontario, promotes youth involvement in activities that foster their wellbeing, and develops programs that improve quality of life and social conditions in these communities, i.e. business and entrepreneur training, stay-in-school initiatives, youth-to-youth leadership and development training, multicultural programs that celebrate diversity. Members of the RMYC also sit on various advisory boards, i.e. Thunder Bay City Council's Race Relations Committee.

City of Vancouver Youth Outreach Team
http://www.vancouveryouth.ca/
In 1995, the City of Vancouver formally committed to engaging youth in city decision-making by developing its Civic Youth Strategy policy. The policy includes a commitment to employing a team of youth, the Youth Outreach Team, as city staff (Blanchet-Cohen, N. & Cook, P., 2005).

The Toronto Youth Cabinet (TYC)
www.torontoyouth.com/youth_cabinet
The TYC is an example of a youth advisory council. The TYC's volunteer members are mostly high school students, but range in age from 13 to 25 (S. Hansen, personal communications, July 29th, 2005 as cited by Garrison, L., 2005, p. 23). They are advocates for Toronto youth, and advise city councilors on a variety of youth issues including affordable housing, public transit, youth programs and access to recreational and public space.

Sault Ste. Marie Youth Council
http://www.saultyouth.com/content/youthcouncil/
Sault Ste. Marie formed a Youth Opportunities Task Force to carry out the Youth Opportunities Assessment Project (YOAP). One of the results of this project was the creation of a concrete strategy for the development of a sustainable youth advisory committee/youth cabinet. For information on this strategy, contact YOAP at 945-1600 Ext. 233. The youth council in Sault Ste. Marie consists of six executive members and twenty general members, whom represent youth and advocate for youth concerns.

National League of Cities Institute for Youth, Education, and Families
http://www.nlc.org/IYEF/
The YEF Institute is a national resource for municipal leaders, providing strategies and tools municipal officials have direct access to a broad array of strategies and tools that can help them strengthen families and enhance the well-being of children and youth.

Hampton Youth Commission
http://www.hampton.gov/youth/gametime/getinvolved.html)
Hampton's Youth Commission has a $75,000 annual budget. The Commission advocates youth needs to city council, other municipal departments, and community groups, and grants funds to community youth initiatives. The Commission liaises with the planning department, which hires and pays two youth as staff, and the Neighbourhood Advisory Board.

Youth Affairs Council of South Australia
http://www.yacsa.com.au/cgi-bin/wf.pl
The Youth Affairs Council Of South Australia (YACSA)

- Is a non-Government, incorporated body, which is not aligned with any political party or movement
- Is working toward supporting meaningful improvements in the quality of young people's lives
- Provides support to the youth sector
- Advocates to Governments and community on the range of matters which affect young people lives
- Is a source of information and referral on the interests and issues of young people

Ongoing dialogue...

On a regular basis, provide formal opportunities to consult with young people to hear what they have to say on issues of importance to them, to get their feedback on programs and services, and so on. These can be the same kinds of structured processes as mentioned in the other sub-sections, i.e., interviews, surveys, focus groups, youth forums, World Cafés, Town Hall meetings, etc. As well, youth service providers and advocates can make it part of their *practice* to consult with young people *informally;* i.e., by having impromptu conversations in the hallways of the school, at the outdoor basketball court, as you are doing something together (like a youth/adult community service), and so on.

One of the *indicators* for successful youth engagement (see below in *Section III)* is that some practices need to be institutionalized; i.e., that what we are starting to do with youth to ensure their full and meaningful participation in the life of the community, is just as important as any other practice we have become accustomed to seeing in our communities. For instance, no Municipal Council would consider selling off a popular park area to a private developer without a thorough consultation with the public beforehand – they just wouldn't do it! Similarly, the practice of regularly consulting and including young people, and engaging them in dialogue, needs to be just as commonplace.

Some communities are changing their notion of *public space.* That is, how can we design these spaces to facilitate greater connection and interaction between people. There might be more mini-parks and green areas where people can sit and talk, play a game of checkers, or just *sit on the grass.* Perhaps these ideas can be taken further so that young people, adults, and elders have more opportunity to come together.

The City Repair Project is an all-volunteer grassroots organization helping people reclaim their urban spaces to create community-oriented places.
See: http://www.cityrepair.org/wiki.php

Port Hope, Ontario, is developing an "intricate mapping of intentional youth development" so that by the time youth are 18, they've had some influence in decision-making (B. White-head, personal communications, August 2nd, 2005, as cited by Garrison, L., 2005, p. 24). They have a youth advisory committee (YAC) specifically for Parks, Recreation and Culture, one youth representative on city council every school year (non-voting member), a county-wide youth advisory council (serving seven municipalities), and TEAM Youth Engagement Strategy. The youth advisory committee is a mix of adults and youth, who give advice and make recommendations to Parks and Recreation for city council to consider, i.e. a community skate park (Garrison, L., 2005. p. 24).

The youth council in Berlin-Reinickendorf, Germany, created issue-oriented action groups to increase the numbers of young people involved (Garrison, L., 2005. p. 26).

The Youth Connections program at the United Way in Winnipeg, Manitoba is run by a youth council and funds youth driven projects that aim to change the public's perception of young people (Garrison, L., 2005. p. 26).

The PACT research project in the City of York, England, outreaches to youth with disabilities. City staff hires and trains young people as researchers to consult youth with disabilities about social policy issues, i.e. housing, transportation, and employment. The youth researchers collect the data, write it up, and present it to the city council for consideration, allowing youth with disabilities a direct avenue to decision-makers (Garrison, L., 2005. p. 32).

The Town of Parrsboro, Nova Scotia, has had a youth council since 1997. One of the town councilors serves as a mentor to the youth and provides a connection between the youth town council and the adult town council. The youth council is funded and supported to carry out projects, one of which was the development of a skate park. The towns of Bridgewater and Truro are currently working to initiate youth councils as well (Garrison, L., 2005. p. 41).

Get information...

The term *civic engagement* describes the meaningful involvement of citizens in the essential tasks and processes of the community. As the American Psychological Association states "…one useful definition of civic engagement is the following: individual and collective actions designed to identify and address issues of public concern. Civic engagement can take many forms, from individual voluntarism to organizational involvement to electoral participation. It can include efforts to directly address an issue, work with others in a community to solve a problem or interact with the institutions of representative democracy. Civic engagement encompasses a range of specific activities such as working in a soup kitchen, serving on a neighborhood association, writing a letter to an elected official or voting. Indeed, an underlying principal of our approach is that an engaged citizen should have the ability, agency and opportunity to move comfortably among these various types of civic acts." *(see web site listed below)*

Below are some web sites that are disseminating general knowledge about *civic engagement*. Amongst these, there appears to be a growing interest in how young people learn civic skills and take leadership roles in the "adult" community.

The Saguaro Seminar strives to develop a handful of far-reaching, actionable ideas to significantly increase Americans' connectedness to one another and to community institutions.

http://www.ksg.harvard.edu/saguaro/

Among their core activities, the Mississippi Center for Community & Civic Engagement strengthens democratic ideals by fostering sustained partnerships that improve educational opportunities and achievement. They promote civic engagement as broad, inclusive, and direct participation in the search for the public good that renews and enriches earlier conceptions of democracy.

http://www.usm.edu/ccce/

The American Psychological Association has a web site that introduces faculty, teachers, students, researchers, clinicians, and community partners to the connections between psychological work, the pedagogy of service-learning, and issues of civic engagement. The information you find on this website represents the work of many people, a grassroots effort to bring service-learning and civic engagement to the discipline and the larger community.

http://www.apa.org/ed/slce/home.html

The Center for Communication and Civic Engagement in the Department of Communication in the University of Washington is dedicated to research, the creation of citizen resources and student-designed learning experiences that develop new areas of positive citizen involvement in politics and social life. Our primary focus is to understand how new information technologies can supplement more traditional forms of communication to facilitate civic engagement.

http://depts.washington.edu/ccce/Home.htm

The Sustainable Communities Network says that "…communities with the greatest and most diverse citizen participation are often resilient and strong. Engaging citizens to address common issues is essential for educated decision-making."

http://www.sustainable.org/creating/civic.html

California Center for Civic Participation and Youth Development
Established in 1972, the California Center for Civic Participation is a nonprofit, nonpartisan youth development organization that enables middle and high school students to create positive social change in their communities, cities, and state. Through our programs and projects, California youth gain valuable leadership, communication, and critical thinking skills that empower them to see themselves as integral parts of their democracy, and to understand perspectives different than their own.

http://www.californiacenter.org/

BUILD CAPACITY
Of adults...

Once you have participated in relevant professional development experiences, accessed coaching resources, explored innovative ways of serving young people and the community, thought long and deeply about *how* you do your work, and strengthened your supportive relationships as a team, what else can you do? Is there anything left?

We believe the next natural phase of this professional development process – of you as an individual and as a team – is to create the kind of organizational culture where innovation, support, service, relationship building, reflection, dialogue, learning, action – become *qualities, organizational beliefs,* and *practices* that are deeply engrained in the everyday experience of the organization.

To a certain extent, meaningful youth engagement has been an entry point, or a place to start, for organizational renewal. By involving young people – and all of their energy, passion, skill, commitment, and high ideals – in the life of the organization, there occurs a transformation. Many organizations that have gone this route report that involving youth was the best thing they could have done for the health and vitality of the organization. It helped them revitalize their vision, re-commit to their mission, and discover once again the same kind of creative energy that helped build the organization in its early days.

The other thing that is commonly reported is that when teams start to closely examine their purpose and performance – in order to "better serve the young people" - the experience of reflection, dialogue, and innovative action that results has a huge and positive impact on the team. They are then empowered to better serve *all* their clientele – not just youth – and the community as a whole.

Youth engagement can be a very deep change initiative for an organization. So, in the same way that a young person may need self-confidence to step out of his comfort zone to try something new, an organization must find the courage to step forward to explore new ground with the hope of re-creating, or re-generating, its organizational vitality.

One of the concepts being used to describe organizational change is the regeneration cycle, which comes from the study of living systems. For example, in a mature forest one of the reasons that new growth is restricted is because the canopy blocks sunlight from reaching the ground level. However, a forest fire will create clearings – called "sun spots" – where new growth begins to appear. This is the forest regenerating itself and it is considered to be a healthy phenomenon that yields a stronger mix of species, a diverse age range, clears out deadwood, etc. Similarly, organizations are created with high energy and a great deal of innovation (i.e., entrepreneurial experimentation) as they learn how to survive – and thrive – in their environment. When they mature, this super growth tends to level off because they are inclined to rely on proven strategies for success, procedural and structural methods for maintaining production, habits of mind, and so on. To a large extent, they have gotten over the hump and much of their work can now be routine. However, that may also mean a loss of their competitive edge, a downshift in creative energy, and a slackening of entrepreneurial spirit. What may be needed is a period of "creative destruction" where the organization critically examines its activities and processes to weed out what is not essential, to let go of favorite programs and services that are no longer in line with organizational mission but still sequester resources, thereby denying their availability for new and emerging ideas. In effect, this creates organizational "sun spots" where innovation can happen; that is, people will explore new ground, try different methods, all the while learning from what happens. In short, the creative energy and vision of the early days is re-captured; i.e., the organization re-news itself. One way to initiate this transformation is to meaningfully engage young people in the essential tasks and processes of the organization. (For a full presentation of these concepts, see article by Marc Langlois at:
http://www.heartwood.ns.ca/resources.shtml)

From an organizational perspective, the success of this service delivery shift (of the HRM YES) will require:

- That all staff see youth as people with skills, talents, energy and insight who care about people and their communities. Youth must be viewed as assets.
- That a clear and consolidated vision of this shift be communicated to other HRM Business Units and community youth service providers.
- A conscious shift in management's preference about the way staff work and how they manage their time. This shift is from task-oriented administration to process-oriented change and is focused on engaging youth and the community and building relationships.
- Staff shift their attitudes and energies from task-oriented, results-driven projects to relationship-building with youth and the community.
- Continued professional development on the Community Youth Development Model for staff and management.
- Clarification of job descriptions (staff and management) to clearly communicate the new expectations.
- A heavier emphasis on collaboration between Geographical Areas (HRM is divided into 6 Areas) and shared leadership among Geographical Area staff.

(HRM Youth Engagement Report, 2005. p.37)

The other thing you can do to increase your capacity is to connect with other groups and organizations in the community who share your interest in youth engagement.

Innovative practice is telling us two things:

- There are some outcomes where you can achieve more working together than you can alone.

- For some tasks and initiatives, you simply can't go it alone.

When diverse groups and organizations come together around a shared interest, they quickly find common ground on which they can take collaborative action. They also see links and connections between the work that they are each doing and, from that, they are able to devise ways and means of sharing existing resources, jointly developing *new* resources and tools, and helping each other from their particular areas of expertise as they explore innovative approaches to their work.

Much learning happens in this process, in two primary ways:

- The partners share a *collective* learning from the exploration and innovation that occurs; i.e., how to do their work in new and more powerful ways

- They learn *how* to work with each other, in much the same way that people within an organization can learn how to work more effectively as a team.

The Sheet Harbour Library (part of the HRM Public Library System) wanted to organize a Leading Readers program where older youth volunteers would mentor younger children reading books. They soon realized that the program would be successful only if they enlisted the co-operation and support of the school. Their partnership has resulted in a program that might not have been possible otherwise.

One tip: when partners are first starting out, it would be wise to choose a *small* initiative (i.e., highly do-able, uses existing resources, has a short time-frame, etc.) of great interest to all and that has a high probability of success. In other words, use it as a learning experience (as described above) from which bigger collaborative projects can grow. Part of what is happening here is that the partners are building (or, re-building) their relationship through a process of collaborative learning and action.

You might also attempt – if you are not doing so already – to create effective partnerships around youth engagement that involve groups, organizations, and agencies from the public, private, and not-for-profit/voluntary sectors. Then, an even greater reach and depth of impact could be achieved in the community.

Youth participation and connection…

This tool continues the theme of participation. Just to review: we started out suggesting that *you* – the adult, the youth service provider – could provide more opportunities for youth to get involved, playing a facilitative role in doing so. Then, as we moved along, we saw young people taking more initiative and responsibility for their participation in the community, as adults naturally stepped back into a more supportive kind of relationship.

This progression illustrates the current shift that youth-serving organizations have increasingly been working to achieve; that is, facilitating participatory involvement, decision-making and leadership with youth, rather than relying upon their (i.e., the adults') ability to deliver services to youth (Milburn, 2000). Municipal government departments and youth-serving organizations will increasingly be expected to integrate these practices into their work.

So, this tool hopes to challenge your thinking a bit more. Here, we suggest ways and means for young people to:

- Share equal responsibility with adults for certain organizational/community tasks and processes
- Assume primary responsibility for some others
- Assume full responsibility for ones that belong to them alone

Although it was entirely appropriate – and, probably, necessary – in the early stages for the adult to "provide opportunities" or to "open the doors" in order for youth to get involved, as the young people take on more leadership, the language of "providing," "giving," and even "facilitating" implies a certain degree of *one-upmanship*. That is, it is the adult's prerogative to bestow certain benefits on the young person. So, genuine and progressive youth engagement will entail a giving up, or - at the very least - a *sharing*, of power between adults and youth.
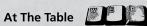
Many young people will require skills and competency development in order to gain confidence and comfort in sharing decision-making power with adults. Just as adults may not *recognize* youth right to participate, youth may not *realize* that they have a right to participate in processes and decisions that affect them. Helping youth develop a positive identity, know their strengths, and their potential to participate in decision-making, is key to building youth capacity. (Garrison, L., 2005, p. 34)

…more meaningful choices and roles in the activities in which they are involved, shifting from receiving knowledge to creating knowledge and from being service recipients to being program planners and deliverers … the commitment to youth participation translates into an organizational commitment to involve young people in all aspects of decision-making – from programming to fund development to personnel to governance.
(Pittman, K., Irby, M., Tolman, J., et al., 2003, p.7)

All of these more advanced forms of youth participation can be described by the term "governance." *Governance* is the responsibility for directing the decision-making and policies of an organization or a municipality. Youth participation in governance is different than youth participating in a program, volunteering, or contributing service to an organization, or community. While these activities are also important, youth in governance implies *power sharing* between adults and youth and requires that youth have equitable access to the decision-making processes that affect their lives, their communities, and matters of importance or interest to them (Youth Affairs Council of Victoria, 2004). Thus… youth participation in governance means youth have equitable access to and play an active role in making decisions, setting policies, and influencing outcomes on matters relevant to their lives at the municipal, organizational, and program level.(Garrison, L., 2005, p.11)

Youth on Boards…

Youth on Boards refers to meaningful youth representation on governmental and organizational Boards of Directors (Garrison, L., 2005, p.22). This goes well beyond the tokenism of asking "a young person to represent all youth" by taking one seat on the Board. Many organizations have learned the value of youth voices at the Board table and the incredible contribution of energy, insight, and skill that they bring with them. Boards, however, are wise to plan for effective youth inclusion; i.e., how they go about bringing the young person on board, so to speak, how the Board prepares itself (both as individuals and as a group), and how they conduct their business (e.g., decision-making procedures).

A Few Best Practices
- Youth are 25%+ of total membership
- Youth have voting rights
- Equal contribution from youth and adult members
- Well-defined roles and responsibilities for youth
- Opportunities for youth to see the results of their time and energy (outside of meetings and discussions)
- Outreach to a diversity of youth

(This resource comes from At the Table)

At The Table

Grounded in the conviction that institutions and communities benefit from the voices of young people, a growing national movement of youth and adults is working to secure a place for youth "at the table" where decisions are made that affect them. AttheTable.org is designed to provide resources and information about how to involve young people in decision-making.

At theTable.org is a project of the At the Table initiative. Hosted by the Innovation Center for Community and Youth Development, At the Table was formed to facilitate a coordinated, sustainable national youth participation movement. We work together with partners across the country to educate and inform about the value of youth participation as well as to prepare youth and adults to work together to create positive change.
www.atthetable.org/resources.asp

The Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Youth Project (LGBYP) in Halifax, NS exemplifies many of these practices in their Board structure. LGBYP is comprised of the Board of Directors, which has 25% youth representation, and the Youth Board. On the Board of Directors, youth and adults share responsibility for budgeting, policy-making, legal and financial projects. The Youth Board defines programs and services. They have their own budget, develop their own code of conduct and youth policies, decide which projects they will develop, which social events they will coordinate, and who they will hire (Garrison, L., 2005, p. 22)

Youth on Board

Youth on Board prepares youth to be leaders and decision makers in their communities and strengthens relationships between youth and adults through publications, customized workshops, and technical assistance. Since 1994 Youth on Board has:

- Trained more than 12,000 people
- Sold over 6000 Youth on Board manuals, books, and videos
- Consulted to over 380 schools, organizations, and government agencies
- Provided services in 45 states and 11 countries

www.youthonboard.org

Youth Advisory Councils…

A Youth Advisory Council (YAC) is made up of youth members, who represent and advocate for youth needs in their community to a governing body, i.e. City Council. YACs give youth a greater capacity to have input and make change at the municipal government level. There is sometimes a risk that the YAC is set up as a token symbol of youth engagement that makes city council "look good." Two of the greatest challenges of a youth advisory council are engaging youth from a broad spectrum of communities, and developing a direct relationship between youth and government (Garrison, L., 2005, p. 25)

A Few Best Practices

- Direct linkage to power
- Youth and governments become partners
- Core funding
- Resource supports
- Longevity of council
- Specific roles and responsibilities for youth
- Engage youth from a broad spectrum
- Consistent mentor

(Geggie, L., 2003; S. Hansen, Toronto Youth Cabinet, personal communications, July 29th, 2005; Youth Opportunities Assessment Project, no date, as cited by Garrison, L. 2005, p. 23)

In Virginia, Hampton's Youth Commission has a $75,000 annual budget. The Commission advocates youth needs to city council, other municipal departments, and community groups, and grants funds to community youth initiatives. The Commission liaises with the planning department, which hires and pays two youth as staff, and the Neighbourhood Advisory Board (Garrison, L., 2005, p. 24)

…if we're dealing with an issue at the youth commission level and we say we really want to get a feel, kind of a pulse for the kids in the community, we just shoot it over to the Neighbourhood Youth Advisory Board. And they've got their hands on hundreds of kids who are their peers in the neighbourhood, and we can get good feedback from them (Cindy Carlson, Director of Youth Services, Hampton, Virginia in National League of Cities, 2002).

Utilizing a combination of formal structures (such as Youth Action Councils) and youth action teams (as mentioned in the second sub-section) to engage youth in governance can ensure youth have direct links to power and that larger numbers and more diverse youth communities are engaged. For example, the youth council in Berlin-Reinickendorf, Germany created issue-oriented action groups to increase the numbers of young people involved (Golombek, S. 2002). The Youth Connections program at the United Way in Winnipeg, Manitoba is run by a youth council and funds youth driven projects that aim to change the public's perception of young people (Bridgman, R., 2004).

Youth-run organizations…

Youth-governed organizations differ from youth-run programs because youth are founding members and directors of the organization, and *all* of the primary governance and decision-making powers are in the hands of youth. Those that function best have consistent mentorship and support from an experienced adult or youth-serving organization, sustainable funding, a consistent working space, and an effective strategy to provide continuity as youth come and go. (Garrison, L., 2005, p. 28)

The Nova Scotia Secondary Schools Students' Association (http://www.nsssa.ca/index.htm) is a non-profit organization run by student leaders. Its focus is leadership development at the high school level. Every year, the NSSSA hosts a conference to help students learn more about themselves and their abilities. The Association is divided into two main groups, the Provincial Cabinet and the Conference Committee. In addition to its responsibility for the day-to-day running of the organization, the Provincial Cabinet meets once a month with the Minister of Education to discuss student issues and school matters. The Conference Committee, as their name implies, takes care of running the annual conference (Garrison, L., 2005, p. 42)

Taking action…

Youth engagement strategies that create significant changes in the community (or, the system) involve complex actions by many people working in numerous ways on different levels. Some of this action is intentional; i.e., planned and directed. A group, for example, might organize a project or initiative that will establish youth action teams throughout the community. They will plan their approach and enlist others to support their efforts. A great deal of coordination and communication occurs as they move forward.

Some action, however, is *un*-planned! That is, you start off with an idea or objective, but you're not too sure how to make it happen. So, you try some things, learn from those, make adjustments in your strategy, and figure out the rest as you go along. In a very real way, the action evolves in response to the circumstances. A momentum builds as the energy and good ideas *ripple out* into your networks in the wider community. Then, actions start to happen spontaneously and without any centralized "leader," or leading group, directing or coordinating the flow and direction.

The theory of living systems…

Specific, detailed plans of action are not very effective with work that is complex and innovative, which is often the nature of community youth development. Detailed action plans are designed for times and situations that are certain and predictable (i.e., everybody is agreed that such and so is going to happen just like we planned), but they can't keep up with a fast-paced and changing environment. It is better to have a framework of action that holds it together – more or less – as people move towards a good enough vision or goal. The "plan" is very open to change as individuals and teams experiment, explore, take action, learn, reflect, and discover new and better ways to proceed; in short, the strategy will emerge as you go along – and sometimes go along quickly indeed! Similarly, exact and detailed role descriptions (which are typically built around chain of command organizational structures, or hierarchies) cannot cover all the circumstances that will arise, but what will be effective is an emphasis on guiding principles (i.e., although circumstances, actions, and strategies may change, the underlying principles tend to be constant), _action ⇔learning_, and supportive, interdependent _relationships_ between all members of the team. Individuals and groups are empowered and supported to take innovative action in response to local circumstances. Living systems concepts and tools work best in these kinds of evolving environments. _Primarily adapted from Brenda Zimmerman's book: edgeware_

There were five principles used in the design of the overall methodology for theYouth Engagement Strategy (YES):

- An appreciative approach would be used – find out what was working well, how RTC was making that happen, and then build on that work.
- Youth would be involved in the strategy at the earliest possible opportunity.
- The YES Steering Committee would explore innovative approaches whenever possible.
- That _"the Plan"_ would emerge – rather than formulate a detailed plan at the outset, a general direction and framework for action would be agreed upon and then the most effective strategies would be discovered along the way.
- That resources and tools would be developed/provided as the need arose so that no time or energy was wasted in devising tools that were not needed.

(HRM Youth Engagement Report, 2005. p.5)

Santropol Roulant is a youth-run meals-on-wheels service in Montreal. The young people prepare the meals and get them out to their clients hot and fresh. Their web site states: "…we believe strongly that a social service such as ours can be a catalyst for social change. This year we saw demand for our service remain constant at 80-90 meals per day, by far the highest of any other independent meals-on-wheels service on the Island of Montreal. We also see over 100 volunteers a week who are committed to making a difference in their community. Our goal is to respond to the basic needs of a vulnerable population and to do so with dignity. It is also to inspire and equip young people to identify and address the issues they see around them with imagination and passion – to get involved, to participate and together to work towards the changes we want to see."
http://www.santropolroulant.org/en/home.html

BUILD RELATIONSHIPS

So far, we have described a progression in adult/youth relationships, starting with adults lending a hand, being supportive, taking on the roles of coach/mentor/ally, and in the last sub-section, being on an equal footing of youth adult partnerships. This current tool takes that last idea just a bit further.

Youth-led initiatives, programs, and organizations may – or may _not_ – seek adult support in their work. If they do, it's often in a partnership relationship as described previously.

Does this mean that adults no longer have a role at this level of youth engagement? We suggest that it is proper and fitting for adults – and the organizations they lead – to be flexible enough that they themselves can be supported and led by young people. In a sense, to be served! They may, for example, learn from young people, be coached, or be included in a network that they might not normally be able to access. Adults might rely on the youth organization to offer a service to the community that they are uniquely suited to provide.

CREATING – AND CONTRIBUTING TO – AN EMPOWERING CULTURE

This tool goes beyond the culture change that organizations may experience – *singly* and *separately* - as they make shifts to accommodate youth engagement within their organizational structures and processes. That is, it intends to facilitate a similar, but wider, shift in the culture of the *whole* community.

There are many ways to shift culture. Here, we address five of those:

1) Changing attitudes

2) Changing practices

3) Policy development

4) Creating a shared vision of a youth-friendly community

5) Facilitating informal processes of community building

Changing attitudes…

In the first sub-section of the Tool Kit we began with an assessment of public attitudes to get a sense of the general perception of young people. So, we are back to where we started. Again, attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs are *huge* because they are the underlying determinants of people's behaviour, which then translates into practice; i.e., whether the community appreciates young people, gives them opportunities to participate and contribute, attends to their particular needs and interests, or provides facilities and services that makes them feel welcomed and that they belong.

In Bartholomew County, Indiana, the local newspaper has a regular section to cover youth contributions to the community (National League of Cities, 2002).

Youth-serving organizations in the Region of Waterloo in Ontario have a history of partnering. Their most recent initiative has been a collective attempt to change public perceptions of young people. One of their projects has been a poster campaign. There are several posters that individually depict a close-up photo of a "typical" young person – as they are seen by adults. One young man, for example, has facial piercings. Below the photo is a caption suggesting that the viewer "look deeper" than surface appearances to see the value of the individual. Their objective is "…to make sure that as a community we don't lose sight of who our children are and what they're capable of. See: http://www.preventingcrime.net/community/visiblyvaluing/

Changing practices…

Although professional development – typically referred to as "training" - often gets the most attention – and *credit* – for facilitating change in practice, what is probably more important is the opportunity for peers, teams, networks, and community partners, to come together to talk about what matters most in their work with young people. It is the appreciative approach again, i.e., finding out what is working well and how, specifically, we are making that happen. We also need to go deeper in our work, by taking notice of where we are being *nudged*, how we are being challenged, and then asking ourselves what *more* can we do, how best can this work serve the interests of the whole community. In other words, to not allow ourselves to be content with what works!

Coming together to reflect and engage in dialogue could become a professional practice where people regularly take – or *make* – the time to do that.

Policy development…

Policy development can go hand-in-hand with practice; i.e., one ought to complement the other. Policy can affirm that the best practices, which have evolved through innovative work, will be safeguarded as organizational priorities shift.

One example is when different government departments – *and* different levels of government - take a comprehensive approach to serving young people with employment programs, recreation facilities, youth health services, and so on. That is, they have discovered through practice that they are able to achieve better results collectively than they are by going it alone. This approach is then sanctioned as a policy direction so as to avoid future dysfunctional duplication and to make best use of all resources.

The Rural Communities Impacting Policy (RCIP) http://www.ruralnovascotia.ca/)

RCIP is currently managed by the Coastal Communities Network in Nova Scotia. It has some excellent resources on the value and purpose of policy, as well as specific tools for its development.

Creating a shared vision…

Communities that are able to envision the kind of community they want are more likely to make it happen! When youth and adults participate together in creating a shared vision, the result is often better than one that is simply adult-driven. Youth are natural visionaries. They can imagine – i.e., *see* – how their community can be better, healthier, stronger, more vibrant and inclusive.

The young do not know enough to be prudent, and therefore they attempt the impossible, and achieve it, generation after generation.

Pearl S. Buck

The process of *creation* and *sharing* are more important than the vision itself. There are several methods for developing a shared community vision, including:

- Appreciative inquiry (see page 22)
- Future Search (www.futuresearch.net/)
- National Civic League has an excellent and free resource on Community Visioning and Strategic
- Planning, which can be downloaded at: www.ncl.org/

Making Dreams Come True…

Three brick masons were busy at their trade, working side by side, when along came a curious tourist. "What are you doing?" the traveler asked.

"Laying bricks," the first mason shot back. "What does it look like?"

Undaunted, the traveler repeated his question. "What are you doing?" he asked the second mason.

"Building a wall," the dutiful worker replied.

"And what about you?" the traveler asked again. "What are you doing?"

"Me?" The third mason looked up, and a slight smile crossed his face. "I'm building a cathedral."

Source unknown

Facilitating informal processes…

You know the culture has shifted when you start to notice the difference in a 1001 ways every day – especially *informal* practices and processes.

One example of this – sorry, we don't know the source – talks about community development from your front porch. Just the simple act of sitting on your front verandah, saying hello to passersby, finding out their names, having a conversation – puts a sparkle into their day – and *yours!* This is the simple art of connecting with people, stepping out of your comfort zone, and finding out who is in your community. It's an art that we may have lost, but immediately recognize when it appears again because it is such a positive part of our lives.

James Vollbracht is a trainer with the Search Institute (the organization that has developed the Framework of 40 Developmental Assets, see: www.search-institute.org/training/). He has authored a book called, *Stopping at Every Lemonade Stand: How to Create a Culture That Cares for Kids.* It's a concept of community building; i.e., it doesn't really matter if you are thirsty, or even if you like lemonade. What's most important is that you stop, engage with the kids, and let them know that an adult is paying attention and willing to take some time to chat. His five great ways to show you care are:

- Be the kind of adult you hope children will become. Model acts of kindness every day: open doors, be courteous, be forgiving, be giving.
- Go beyond saying "Hi" to kids; ask "How's school (soccer, etc.)?"
- Be home on Halloween and give out memorable treats.
- Keep a joke or riddle in your pocket for younger kids.
- Lighten up with teens. (They think adults are much too serious.)
  (Vollbracht, J., 2001, p. 36)

SECTION III
CONCLUSION

Indicators of Success...

As part of the Youth Engagement Strategy, HRM commissioned a literature review with a focus on youth engagement in governance. After reviewing a wide range of strategies and best practices, the author, Laena Garrison, was able to identify a list of *success indicators* that are shared in common by the most authentic, meaningful and active practices of youth participation (for more detail on some of these indicators, see the Youth Participation in Governance at: www.heartwood.ns.ca/tools.shtml). That is, the more that these qualities or principles are present, the more likely the success of the youth engagement initiative, whatever it may be. We have adapted these items to fit the context of this Tool Kit and, taken together, they can serve as a "check list" as you design – or evaluate – your activities, programs, services, and strategies.

Principle-based programs and services.
When programs and services are based on core values and guiding principles that have been proven effective, the programs themselves are more likely to be successful.

Using an appreciative approach.
Based on Appreciative Inquiry, Asset Based Community Development, and HeartWood's community youth development model, this places attention squarely on what is working well, how can we build on that, what else can we do, and so on. It is possibility thinking grounded in action. It encourages a positive attitude towards young people and a confidence that communities have the ability and

the knowledge to make changes and solve their own problems. It taps into both the formal and the informal processes of community building

Youth inclusion.
Some young people are naturally included in the essential tasks and processes of the community. Some are not for a variety of reasons. Good youth engagement practice will demonstrate effective outreach strategies so that all youth have the opportunity to participate. A diversity of youth involvement means a diverse – and, *therefore,* healthier and stronger – community.

Oriented towards action.
Young people have minimal patience for the endless discussions that adults often have about what we *are going to do!* They want to act now and they want to see the results sooner, not later. So, programs, services, and initiatives need to be designed and delivered with this in mind. If you know that it's going to take a while, tell them that so they know what is happening. As well, if the action is used as a learning experience that is also fun, then even better!

Support > challenge > empowerment.
As young people step up to take on responsibility, the adults step back to give them room, but not so far back that the young person becomes disconnected from support systems and community resources. It is based on supportive relationships that also challenge the young person to grow and develop. In short, it is a process of empowerment that eventually leads to youth-initiated action, programs, policy, initiatives, and organizations.

Increase in capacity: adults, youth, and together.
Most youth have to develop or acquire the basic *participation* skills that will allow them to join in, work with others, take action, and learn from their experience. In exercising these skills, youth often find themselves in leadership roles.

A relationship-based orientation.
Likewise, most adults need to acquire a different skill set as they move from a *youth services*

approach, to *community youth development* work. It involves a shift away from a task-oriented, "results" focus to one of *process* and being in relationship with young people. In short, instead of building good programs to serve the needs of young people, they are building good relationships *with* young people. This simple shift will facilitate the young person's ability to connect to peers, older youth, adults, the community – and their own hopes and aspirations. It will also lead to healthy youth/adult partnerships that benefit the community as a whole.

Meaningful contribution.
Young people desire a higher purpose – to leave their mark in the world. Being of service to others is a powerful way of helping them learn how to do that.

The community is supportive.
There are many ways in which the community can support its young people – individually and in groups, formally and informally.

Here are some of those:

- Providing active support for youth initiated action projects and youth-run organizations.

- Making sure that activities, programs, services, and opportunities to contribute don't present barriers to youth participation; i.e., scheduling, transportation, and child care support for young parents

- Because young leaders age out and youth groups constantly have to deal with turnover, the community needs to support continuity of youth participation (i.e., gaps in youth leadership are identified so that adults help the youth group bridge the gap and re-group). To some extent, this also means that the community helps create a "stable environment" for youth; e.g., a funded youth gathering place, leadership development programs, youth health centre services, opportunities for youth to participate in municipal governance, and so on.

- Youth participation in community tasks, processes, and events is so commonplace that adults naturally support it in every way they can. In a sense, it becomes "institutionalized."
- A positive collective public attitude is nurtured so that youth are valued and welcomed.
- There is ongoing dialogue and consultation with youth to hear their point of view. This also means opportunities for reflection and evaluation so that everyone – youth and adults - is learning from the experience of youth engagement and are constantly evaluating progress to identify what is working and what needs to be addressed.
- Youth need to hear about opportunities and know how they can access various programs and services. Adults need to use youth-friendly ways and means of communicating this information; e.g., MSN, word of mouth, and community radio. As well, the community ought to support youth in communicating to other youth; e.g., zines, public art, youth pieces in the mainstream media that have a youth *look* to attract attention.

Youth participation must become an integral component of local, national and international policies for youth, and should provide the framework for decisions and actions that affect the daily lives of children and young people. Only then will the traditional approaches towards youth begin to evolve and the oft-stated, commitment to their participation, begin to have meaning.
(United Nations, 2004, p. 287)

Things you do not have to do... or be

By now you probably realize that there are lots of things that organizations (and communities, systems, etc.) can do to achieve genuine youth inclusion and meaningful youth engagement. There are also things you *don't* have to do, such as:

- Being an expert on youth engagement. The skills and knowledge you already have will serve you well. The most important thing is your *desire* to really connect with them. Remember: the greatest gift you can give a young person is the time and the attention to listen.
- Being young or *cool!* Be yourself - because that is the only way you will be able to create an authentic relationship with another.
- You do not have to be part of the *youth services team*. No matter what your role or position, you can do some thing that will make a difference! As Peter Benson, from the Search Institute, says, "If you can breathe, you are on the team." (Keynote address to Thrive! the Canadian Centre for Positive Youth Development, National Conference, May 2005. See: http://www.thrivecanada.ca/)
- You do not have to create new programs or services. Instead, focus your energy and creativity on building new relationships with youth within your existing programs.
- Likewise, you don't need to attract more youth to your services. Serve the ones you already have in new or different ways.
- You do not need a "bag of tricks" – like this Tool Kit, for example. After all, we didn't have it when we started out. You'll create your own tools and strategies, ones that work really well in your community with *your* young people, while making best use of your resources.
- All of the elements of success do not have to be in place before an organization or municipality begins a youth engagement initiative. If you wait until you are *ready*, you may never get started! There will always be fumbling in the initial stages and development of projects, programs, or structures that enable youth participation. This is OK! People are just figuring things out – it's all part of the learning process.

When you think about it, you are probably already doing lots of things that are working well. You are half-way there - maybe more. Keep up the good work and let us know what happens!

References...

The Tool Kit has permission to make liberal use of Laena Garrison's literature review, entitled *Youth Participation in Governance* (2005). This resource was created as part of the HRM Youth Engagement Strategy, as was this Tool Kit. The literature review can be found at the HRM web site (www.hrmyouth.ca/) and the HeartWood site (www.heartwood.ns.ca/tools.shtml) and on the Toolkit CD.

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