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In this sub-section we suggest some resources and tools that you can use on an individual basis. When it's time and there's an opportunity to *do* something, the very best place to start is **YOU!** Of all the people and things you can hope to change – to inspire, to motivate, to get moving - you are the best candidate.

However, we are *not* asking you to take on a weight that you cannot bear. We are not asking you to change the world – *not yet!* In fact, we encourage you to think small! That's right! Save the BIG ideas for later.

We've learned that small actions –simple ones you can do *right now* with *existing* resources - can have a huge impact. It's not so much the size of the action, but the quality of its energy. If you are excited about something you can do that will make a real difference in your work with young people, then chances are that the action will energize you; that is, the idea will get you going and then the action itself will yield plenty of satisfaction. In fact, one of the main principles of youth engagement is that it needs to be *action-oriented*.

And... if that action is exciting to you, it's likely to excite and energize others as well. The kinds of action we are talking about here attract energy (i.e., others will notice what you are doing seems to be getting good results), generate energy (i.e., leads to more action), and ends up mobilizing others (i.e., inspires them to take action themselves or to join yours). So, the actions in this sub-section are very do-able and they are ones that you would be thrilled to make happen. Imagine that!

At a professional development workshop for Library staff, Darlene heard others say how important it is to connect with the young people who came into the Library – even if youth services are *not* your responsibility. Darlene resolved then and there to find out the names of those kids she was seeing every day. This was a small, but very important, first step. She later said that getting to know these young people really helped prevent problems, increased her tolerance for teen behaviour (some of which can be difficult), and built enough of a rapport with them that when problems did occur, they were a lot easier to resolve. (Darlene, Branch Operations Supervisor at the Keshen Goodman Branch of the Halifax Public Libraries, 2006)



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As a young man, Nasrudin, a very wise Mulla, decided that his wisdom was so profound that he could convince everyone to change, thereby making the world a better place for all to live. At mid-life, he had to admit that he had not achieved his goal – he had not even come close! So, he vowed that he would focus his attention on changing those nearest and dearest to him – his family, his friends, his neighbours, his followers. Surely that was possible! Towards the end of his life, he realized that he had not been able to accomplish his great purpose – he had not changed anyone! So, he decided that he would change the one person he could – himself! And, in so doing, he did indeed make the world a better place. (There are many stories about Nasrudin, both written and in the oral tradition. See: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nasreddin>)



BIG actions are really a whole bunch of small actions that have added up and have been organized into a coherent framework of action. No one leaves their home some fine morning and climbs Mt. Everest! World-class climbers estimate that it takes years of conditioning, much acquisition of skill, and the preparation itself – all the countless small details (i.e., small actions) – usually take about 6 months of dedicated time and energy by a team of people. Then you walk out your door some fine morning (i.e., your bright blue and yellow rip-stop nylon tent at base camp where you have been acclimatizing to the high-altitude for the past 2 weeks) and ascend to the summit!!³



QUOTES

We cannot solve our problems with the same kind of thinking that created them in the first place.

Albert Einstein

The definition of insanity is to continue doing the same thing over and over and expecting to somehow get different results.

Albert Einstein

Whether you believe you can do something, or believe you can't, you are absolutely right.

Henry Ford

If you want to change the world, rear your children differently.

Margaret Mead

Inside, I am still young.

Gertrude Stein – in her “elder” years

Your attitude determines your altitude...

Unknown source

90% of the game is half-mental.

Yogi Berra

FIND OUT WHAT'S GOING ON IN YOUR COMMUNITY

Individual research: assess attitudes...

This is a kind of informal research project we want you to do (i.e., there is no rigorous methodology, no timeframe, and no accountability – there's just you). We want you to take some time to wander through your organization – and/or community – and observe, talk with and listen to people, and think about what is going on with youth. All you have to do is pay attention!

Talk to people who have regular interactions with young people and try to discover the principles, values, and beliefs that underlie what they are saying. If you are a youth service provider yourself, then seek out and find perspectives different than your own. Try those on – how do they feel, in what ways do they fit, and how not? Notice what people are saying – are they positive, hostile, afraid, appreciative – about young people? How are youth generally portrayed in the local media – as “problems” or as problem-solvers? As service recipients or as contributors to the public good? As non-participants or as leaders? Check your own perceptions – to what extent do they jive with what you are hearing? In what ways are your views and values different? What does that tell you?

If you pay attention to all these indicators, you will get a sense of the *general* attitude towards youth in your organization or community. Attitudes tend to prescribe people's behaviour, which in turn determines what happens – what people do (e.g., activities, events, programs, practices, etc.). This is sometimes defined as the organization's “culture.” In this context, *culture* refers to how things are done around here. So, by paying attention to people's attitudes, you will probably get a fairly accurate idea of where things stand in your organization's or community's *culture*

regarding young people; i.e., to what extent it is *youth-friendly*. That should also give you some ideas of where change needs to happen and where there may be opportunities for innovation.

{Note: while you are out there looking around, you will probably notice many good things in your community for young people, such as positive relationships, inter-generational events, and programs or services that are working well. We'll talk about these in more detail in the next sub-section under “Group Research.”}

Have a conversation with a young person...

Talk to youth, especially ones with whom you might not normally have much contact. Find out their names, their interests, what matters to them, what inspires them, what they can do, what they want to do. Adult mentors of young people – and youth themselves – consistently say that the greatest gift an adult can give to a youth is taking the time to really *listen*.

A little self-assessment...



- So what are you doing – or not doing – for young people in your community? Not just your own children, friends, neighbours' kids – but all young people. Our youth!
- How much contact and interaction do you have with young people?
- Would you say that your interactions with them are, for the most part, “youth-friendly?” (that is, respectful, positive, appreciative, attentive, inclusive, and so on) How so? How not?
- How often do you take the initiative to find out their names, what their interests are?
- Are you comfortable or uneasy when you meet young people? Which age groups are you most comfortable with? Which ones are you least comfortable with? How come?
- When you talk to young people, what do you tend to talk about? What percentage of the conversation – generally speaking – involves you listening? 25%? 50%? 75%?
- If you could change one thing about your interactions with young people, what would it be?



There are a number of research reports that clearly illustrate the lack of listening by adults. The Public Health Agency of Canada (2000) indicated one of the most consistent youth concerns is that their voices are not heard, respected, or taken seriously by adults. A Health Canada Report stated that 51% of teenagers feel they were rarely or never listened to (2001). In 2005 HeartWood conducted research in HRM as part of a national initiative and heard from young people "... youth should have a say in the things that happen in the neighbourhood.... [governments should]...talk to the youth, see what they want and look into it more [and] come to our schools and ask us our opinions and involve us in community meetings" (Growing up In Cities Canada research, January, 2005)



Some tips for creating good conversations:

- Take / make the time for the conversation to happen (also, be open to impromptu conversations – sometimes they're the best!)
- Take turns, share the air time, and encourage the other person's contribution
- Contribute your own thinking; having said that, spend more time listening than talking
- Even if you think you know the answer, bite your tongue (especially for adults talking to youth) Focus on what matters (rather than getting side-tracked on minor issues) Have Fun!!



Get some information...

Ask a youth-serving organization for some current research or information emerging in the community youth development field.

HeartWood Centre for Community Youth Development

<http://heartwood.ns.ca>

HeartWood conducts research and produces numerous tools and resources for practitioners of youth engagement, most of which is available on-line.

John W. Gardner Centre for Youth and their Communities

<http://gardnercenter.stanford.edu>

The John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities works in close partnership with community members – both youth and adults – to build communities that work for youth and to develop young people who will grow up to lead them. They seek to develop new knowledge, practice, capacity, and leadership around youth development and learning.

The Gardner Center's main approach to this work is based on:

- Researching, developing, and prototyping community youth development best practices;
- Building community will and capacity to sustain these practices; and
- Being a resource and disseminating research, model, and tools to the greater community youth development field.

...and for deeper dialogue (Adapted from the World Café, see: www.theworldcafe.com)



Listen to learn

Enter the conversation with the goal of learning from the other person. Notice your own natural tendency to only partially listen as you get ready to express your opinions. Notice when you stop listening and then bring yourself back into the conversation. Approach the conversation as if you do not really know the answer, the outcome, what will be said – by you or the other person.

Listen for differences

Be curious: listen for differences, surprises, and challenges. Consider different perspectives and assumptions as gifts; even when they make us uncomfortable, they offer rich soil for discovering unforeseen possibilities.

Listen with support

Breakthrough thinking occurs most often when one person encourages another to take his or her thinking further. Link and build on the other person's ideas rather than going in random directions, or pursuing your own interests.

Listen reflectively

Sometimes it's helpful to intentionally pause between comments, allowing time for new ideas to surface.

...and more

You may want to check out a resource on the quality of listening that was created by Margaret Wheatley of the Berkana Institute. See: www.turningtooneanother.net/

International Youth Foundation

<http://www.iyfn.net.org>

The International Youth Foundation (IYF) is working in close to 70 countries and territories to improve the conditions and prospects for young people where they live, learn, work, and play. Established in 1990 to bring worldwide resources to young people in need, IYF works with hundreds of companies, foundations, and civil society organizations to strengthen and “scale up” existing programs that are making a positive and lasting difference in young lives.

Community Youth Development Journal

<http://www.cydjournal.org/>

CYD Journal promotes youth and adults working together in partnership to create just, safe, and healthy communities by building leadership and influencing public policy. This is probably the best reference source of current thinking and innovative practices in the field. Karen Pittman is a regular contributor to this Journal.

The Freechild Project

<http://www.freechild.org/>

The Freechild Project is a resource, training, and consultation program working with individuals and organizations around the world. They focus on a variety of topics, including youth voice, youth-led activism, meaningful youth involvement, and youth-adult partnerships.

Youth on Board

<http://www.youthonboard.org>

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. Youth on Board helps young people and adults think differently about each other so that they can work together to change society.

At the Table

<http://www.atthetable.org>

At the Table is a website initiative hosted by the Innovation Center for Community and Youth Development, and formed to facilitate a coordinated, sustainable national youth participation movement.

E-newsletters

These publications arrive by E-mail and contain news on trends in youth development, as well as informational resources that are being developed in the field.

In Canada, the *Ontario Provincial Consortium on Youth in Recreation* publishes a regular newsletter to a network of over 1000 youth service providers who share information, tools, and strategies in the fields of recreation, youth engagement, and community development. Contact Marion Price to subscribe at:

mprice@prontario.org To find out what kinds of resources have been previously published, go to **www.youthinrecreation.org**.

Based in the US, the *Forum for Youth Investment* is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to helping communities and the nation make sure all young people are ready by 21 — ready for college, work and life. This goal requires that young people have the supports, opportunities and services needed to prosper and contribute where they live, learn, work, play and make a difference. The Forum provides youth and adult leaders with the information, technical assistance, training, network support and partnership opportunities needed to increase the quality and quantity of youth investment and youth involvement. See: **<http://forumfyi.org/index.cfm>** where you will find information on how to subscribe to their E-newsletter, *Forum Flash*.





The idea of a *comfort zone* comes from experiential learning, or “learning by doing.” HeartWood refers to it as adventuresome learning. They ask a young person to try something new, or different, to see what happens, what can be learned. They might, for example, ask him to plan the canoe route for the group that day, or lead a group discussion. When an individual takes the risk – i.e., steps out of his comfort zone, of what is known to him – he is essentially exploring new ground, i.e., he doesn’t know the outcome. It’s an adventure! It’s also the place where he stands to learn the most.

BUILD CAPACITY...

Get some skills and information in youth engagement. Find out what professional development resources are available (the web sites listed on the previous pages – and in other locations throughout this document – are one source for such resources).

Think about it: if all you ever do is what you’ve always done, then all you can expect to get is what you’ve always got. So, trying new things, stepping off the edge, is bound to yield new experience, learning, insight, perspective, and understanding. HeartWood is also careful not to ask people to step out of their safety zone. That is, they believe that adventuresome learning is good for young people, but they would never ask them to do anything that is un-safe physically or emotionally.

Think of yourself as a learner...

Step out of *your* comfort zone and try a new or different way of doing your work. We all get into patterns of activity. Our work becomes routine, which is fine for certain tasks. Youth work usually requires an innovative approach, which means changing the way you do things. These acts of creativity will benefit you as well. For instance, what would happen if you organized your day around *conversations* that you want to have with people, rather than around meetings? Imagine that!

If you are used to developing and facilitating programs for youth, what would it be like if you started to help them develop and facilitate programs? In other words, to step back and coach them in something you know very well.

It’s not enough to “work” with the kids... you have to be in the community and in relationship with the families, organizations, schools. In short, you yourself have to be engaged!

Claudette “Claudy” Levy,
Area Coordinator, HRM



Innovative youth work may require different skill sets.

What if you shift your emphasis from building good programs (something you already know how to do) to building good relationships with young people? Here you might find yourself on new ground and into a steep learning curve as you figure out *how* to be in relationship with young people, how to learn from *their wisdom*, how to give up control!

Help youth join in and participate...

Within your sphere of influence – where you work or volunteer, your friends and family, your networks, your neighbourhood - provide opportunities for youth to get involved in meaningful ways. Some possibilities are:

- Invite them to participate in something that you are doing. Sometimes a young person just needs an in to connect them with what is going on. That initial experience may be the first step in a lifetime of involvement.
- Invite them to help out in your program, a service that you provide, or an organizational activity that falls within your area of responsibility. In short, open doors.
- Facilitate their participation in discussions and decision-making processes (re: a program, activity, service, etc.) where their input would be appreciated.
- Encourage and facilitate other adults to invite youth into their programs and activities.
- In particular, try to involve youth who may not otherwise be included. Strive for as much diversity as possible!



A diversity of youth, not just the select group that tend to stand out and speak up in their communities, is affected by government and organizational decisions. The vast majority of kids whom adults may call “non-leaders” are disconnected for want of an experience or opportunity. Inclusion requires recognizing that every young person has something to contribute, and that a strong, healthy youth community has a real mix of intelligences and backgrounds. Youth from a multiplicity of cultural and economic backgrounds, geographical areas, abilities, etc... deserve the opportunity to articulate their own concerns (Garrison, L., 2005, p. 31).

When young people have the opportunity to participate, they will develop participation skills, knowledge, and experience. This, in turn, will help them to:

- Build self-confidence to step out of their comfort zone and try something new or different
- Learn to work with others, both peers and adults
- Learn how to take action; i.e., to step up to leadership roles
- Develop an ethic of volunteerism and civic participation/contribution

Focus on the promotion of participatory skills for all, not just leadership skills for the few. Leaders will always emerge, but all children and young people need the chance to learn the multiple skills of listening and collaborating in groups if they are to discover that they can play very different roles in building communities and achieving change.

(United Nations, 2003, pp. 286 & 287)



Help youth connect to others...

...to peers, adults, elders, younger children – in short, to the community! In the same way that youth sometimes need an in to participate in the life of the community, they also may need something, or someone, to help them connect with others. You could, for example, organize events, tasks, and processes where people of different age groups can gather, talk, spend time together, or engage in an activity of common interest. These simple connections are the first steps towards building relationships that could last a lifetime and they help young people develop a sense of belonging and of being citizens in their own community.

The Canadian Primos is a Latin music ensemble of young Nova Scotian musicians that originated through the Los Primos cultural exchange project with young Cuban musicians. In February 2006 the Canadian Primos, a younger group called the Second Cousins, and their families organized an all-ages dance at a community centre to raise funds. There was a crowd of several hundred people that was incredibly diverse in age, language, race, and other less visible distinctions. Everyone had a great time together! Many people said, "We should have more of these kinds of events." For more information on this initiative, see: www.losprimos.ca (many thanks to Jeff Goodspeed, the founder of Los Primos, for the background information).



Taking action: when youth *step up*, adults *step back*...

When working with youth, adults are often challenged to restrain themselves from "taking over." The concept here is that as youth *step up* to take on more of a leadership role, the adults naturally *step back* to give them room. That means biting your tongue, even if you know the answer (or, think you know), and *not* taking responsibility for getting that particular job done, even if you've done it a hundred times before and can do it so much quicker. Every time you step back, a young person has the opportunity to try something new and to learn from the experience.

However, you don't want to step so far back that the youth is left without support or connection to resources in the community.

What you are doing is giving up a measure of your adult control. Not to worry! What you will gain from an empowering culture and a youth-friendly environment far exceeds what you give up with control. Still worried? In the next sub-section, *Action with Others*, we will introduce some tools (such as, community standards and youth-friendly meetings) that help guide youth behaviour and prevent the kind of problems over which you probably wish you had better control.

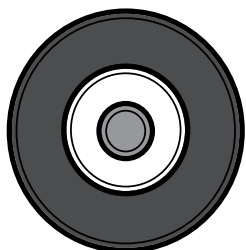


When a young person asks you...

Once the ball is rolling and youth perceive you as an adult who is interested and approachable, someone will inevitably ask you to do something that makes your hair stand on end; they may, for example, ask you to help with a project that probably means more workload for you and your plate is already too full. What to do! How can adults best respond to a young person who wants to take action in their community?

Here's a foolproof way of supporting youth creativity and energy without getting overwhelmed – *and* without saying, "No. You can't do that!" or, "Yes, but..."

Imagine 3 concentric circles that represent all the possible ideas that young people could propose to you, asking for your approval, support, and direct involvement.



The inner circle encompasses your particular mandate in the organization or community – what you are supposed to do. So, if a young person suggests something that falls into that circle, your appropriate response is to say, "Great. That's exactly what my job is all about. I will work with you on that."

The next circle of possibility is beyond your mandate but it is familiar ground nevertheless – you know from your networks in the community whose mandate it is. So, your response goes something like, "That idea goes beyond my capability, but I know exactly who can help you with that, so let's give her a call." Your role is to act as a bridge, or connector, to the resources in the community that may be unknown to the young person, but are known to you.

The third and outermost ring includes ideas that no one has yet encountered – the great unknown, no one's mandate, *the edge!* These are exactly the kinds of innovative things that young people will suggest. So, what can you do? Easy – you can listen, act as a sounding board, ask questions that will help the young people discover their own resources and solutions to figure it out for themselves. In short, you serve them by being supportive, without taking over the process, or taking a role that is way beyond your areas of responsibility.



BUILD RELATIONSHIPS

Be a coach, mentor, ally...

Coaching provides support to an individual or group as tasks/challenges are undertaken. It may take the form of physical assistance (e.g., transportation, helping out at the fund raiser, helping to build the new ramps at the skateboard park), guidance (how to get things done, how to get organized), connection to the community (who best to talk to about a particular issue, who might provide some resources for an initiative), as well as moral support (e.g., being there to back them up when they make their presentation to Municipal Council, taking the time to listen). As mentioned in the previous Tools, you might help them participate, connect, step out of their comfort zone, and so on. Maybe they want to do something, like writing a letter to government or a big corporation about an issue that inspires them. Maybe the young person is another Craig Kielburger about to start an amazing journey of global action (see www.freethechildren.org/).



CREATE AND CONTRIBUTE TO AN EMPOWERING CULTURE...

Change attitudes, behaviour, and practices...

One of the most effective youth engagement strategies that adults can undertake is to create an empowering culture for young people. You might assume that creating culture is not something that you can do as an individual. But culture (i.e., organizational culture, as explained on page 24) really begins – and ends – with individual action. What you say and do affects others and when they see what happens as a result of your initiative, they will be inclined to follow your lead. So, as an individual you can foster attitudes, arrange circumstances, provide opportunities, and create environments where youth feel welcomed, valued/appreciated, and safe to give their input, exercise their judgment, and take leadership roles in the community. In short, an *empowering* culture.

If we can perceive our young people not so much as dependents, service recipients, or problems, but as competent innovators and *problem-solvers*, then our attitudes, actions, and behaviour are more likely to support them as contributors to the community and as energized participants and leaders in social change initiatives.

Coaching can occur in many ways and in different relationships, including:

- Adults to youth
- Older youth to younger ones
- Adults to adults
- Youth to adults

That's right! It's possible for young people to mentor adults. Young people helping an adult organization figure out how best to engage or include youth in a new program, for example. Moreover, mentoring relationships are never one-way: both parties learn and grow. As a coach you can expect to be inspired and *changed* in your work with young people.

Giving support is a key ingredient in the coach/mentor relationship, but it's not *all* support! There is also an element of challenge, of encouraging the other to push himself and discover his capability. There needs to be balance between support and challenge – too much of one without the other is not good.

Young people also need positive role models to guide them in the development of their values and behaviour. It is extremely important, for example, that adults have cultural sensitivity when working with youth of a different race, ethnic origin, or language group. As well, wherever possible, young people need to be in relationship with older youth and adults who are of the *same* culture (i.e., race, ethnic origin, or language group).



Free The Children is the largest network of children helping children through education in the world, with more than one million youth involved in innovative education and development programs in 45 countries. Founded by international child rights activist Craig Kielburger – when he was 12 years old - Free The Children has an established track-record of success, with three nominations for the Nobel Peace Prize and partnerships with the United Nations and Oprah's Angel Network.



What *else* can you do?

What action, first step, or small change can you do right now that would make a difference in your work with young people?

What drew you into this work in the first place? What was your hope, dream, or inspiration at that time? What is calling you now? What action can you take to renew your vocation?