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# TIPS

**For Working  
with Youth in  
Community  
Development  
Projects**

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Health Canada  
Ottawa, Ontario  
K1A 0K9

Tel: (613) 954-5995  
Fax: (613) 941-5366

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# Tips

**For Working with Youth  
in Community Development Projects**

**Office of Alcohol, Drugs and Dependency Issues  
Health Canada**

 **canada's drug strategy**



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# Introduction

As part of Phase II of Canada's Drug Strategy, Health Canada undertook a number of initiatives to address the needs of youth who live in high-risk conditions. Youth-at-risk can include youth having trouble with the law, youth who have dropped out of school or are at risk of dropping out, those having problems with alcohol and/or other drug use, those experiencing depression or having thoughts of suicide, victims of abuse, those living on the street or involved with street life, those with HIV/AIDS or at risk of contracting HIV/AIDS through injection drug use or involvement in the sex trade, and other youth defined by the community and themselves as being at risk.

In 1993, a series of workshops was organized across Canada for federal government employees, service providers and youth to provide information on issues and program strategies from across North America to address issues affecting youth-at-risk, and to get communities working on forming adult/youth partnerships to identify and address local problems.

Nineteen community groups, including service providers and youth, were formed out of the workshops, which were held in Northern Ontario, Alberta and Manitoba. These groups were given some basic community-planning skills and were encouraged to continue their planning and partnership building once they returned to their own communities.

Of the 19 groups formed, 13 stayed together for a year or longer. All of the groups were made up of both youth and adults. Three types of activities came out of these groups:

- ✓ to build better youth/service provider networks in the community,
- ✓ to develop community education and awareness programs on youth issues, and
- ✓ to improve individual youth agencies or service system delivery.

In January 1994, all of the 165 youth and adult participants at the original workshops were sent a questionnaire asking them for their opinions about the effectiveness of the workshops and the follow-up work done at the community level. Interviews were also conducted with 19 service providers and Health Canada staff and 17 youth involved in the original workshops. These "tips" for working with at-risk youth in community development activities came out of this experience.

These tips were further refined with input from the participants in the National Youth-at-Risk Community Development Project, which took place from late 1994 until early 1996. The goal of the project was to assist various sites in Canada to undertake community development processes and activities, to document their challenges and successes, and to make this information available to other Canadian communities interested in undertaking similar processes. This document is a complement to the report "Meeting the Needs of Youth-at-Risk in Canada: Learnings from a National Community Development Project".

## Starting Out    Helpful Information for Project Development

- ▶ Both youth and adults should be involved early so that they can learn by going through the stages of group development together. Adults should never meet first without youth present to set the terms of reference and/or parameters of the project.
- ▶ Long distances between group members or project sites can make starting a solid project difficult. The project goals and methods of reaching those goals will have to change to take these distances into consideration.
- ▶ Prior to initiating projects, a thorough community analysis should take place, including an assessment of the issues and inventory of existing resources and commitment levels (particularly among the youth – i.e., they have to see the issues as important).
- ▶ Community change is more likely to happen when that change is supported by policy at the federal, provincial/ territorial and community levels.
- ▶ Policy makers should be aware of how important it is to projects that the contributions made by youth are respected.
- ▶ The chance of project success is better when the partners in the community development process agree on values. This includes knowing the issues, agreeing on the importance of youth issues, having a good mix of people in the project, and being able to agree on important decisions.
- ▶ Projects should be aware that group members will come and go and that turnover among youth participants will be particularly high. In small communities, this turnover probably will not happen as often. In large communities, continuity can be kept by regular recruitment, orientation and training activities.
- ▶ Projects in which youth and service providers are trying to have an impact on the service system stand a greater chance of success where:
  - ◆ there is some community history of cooperation between agencies,
  - ◆ the system has dealt with difficult and complex issues,
  - ◆ the system has cooperated in communications, planning, case information-sharing, referrals, etc.,
  - ◆ citizens participate in system decisions,
  - ◆ government and other key players are involved in system decisions,
  - ◆ there is leadership development within the group,
  - ◆ there is a history of youth being involved in policy and decision making,



- ◆ there is interest in becoming involved in the existing youth-based project,
  - ◆ the system has decision and policy makers who are “champions” of the changes suggested, and
  - ◆ the service system decision makers are involved in the planning body.
- ▶ When there is no history of the service system working together, the success of a youth/service provider partnership is greater in single agencies than in larger systems. For the best chance of success, the partnership should work in those agencies most willing to work with youth in the change process.
  - ▶ If the sponsor agency and agency members of the steering committee are respected in the community and the human service field, the project has a better chance of success.
  - ▶ The project will be more successful if there is a strong “champion” working on behalf of the group to meet its goals. The champion’s role is even stronger if that person is both a respected insider and a key decision maker. The champion uses his or her influence to get youth issues on the community’s agenda and persuade other service providers and community leaders that youth issues are important.
  - ▶ The support of respected community leaders is key to the success of a youth-based community development effort. Since youth themselves would have difficulty getting this support, it becomes an important role of the champion, sponsor or other adults involved with the project.
  - ▶ Project objectives in a youth project will have more success if they focus on practical and recognizable solutions which are defined by the people involved rather than by someone on the outside.
  - ▶ The project will probably be more successful if it focuses on something that the community already sees as an important issue. When this is not the case, the group should try to increase public awareness of the issues. The group should spend time at the beginning of the project to develop a communication strategy to get the issue on the community agenda.
  - ▶ Projects which address health promotion strategies are more likely to achieve success in communities that are already practising healthy lifestyles. Risk reduction strategies are more acceptable in communities where risk conditions are seen as being prevalent in the youth population.
  - ▶ The project and its organizing committee will have more credibility with youth when:
    - ◆ the project has good leadership from youth members,
    - ◆ there is an active group of youth in the project,
    - ◆ there is participation from agencies which have credibility with youth, and
    - ◆ people think there is a chance for the project to succeed.

- ▶ Community development efforts will be more successful when local specialists provide services to the project and local people contribute resources to the project.
- ▶ The chance of success for the community development effort is better when the project tries to involve the community in planning, identifying needs, setting priorities and putting the project into action.
- ▶ Projects which are trying to make changes in the service system should try to create or strengthen existing, self-run, local institutions, rather than depend on outside resources.

## **Organizing and Managing the Project**

- ▶ It is very important to provide time at the beginning of the project for trust building and skill development. The group should become a community within itself. Projects which have a goal where youth are expected to work with the community should be at least 18 months long.
- ▶ The opportunity for open discussions, dreaming and realistic discussions on solutions to issues is important to youth. Strict concentration on objectives may not meet youth process and participation needs.
- ▶ Project goals seem better pursued when youth work closely with adults. Adults may think that youth want to function without adult involvement; however, youth will not often seek organizational commitment and community goals on their own.
- ▶ Successful youth participation programs are designed with the following ideas in mind:
  - ◆ they involve youth in activities which are challenging and interesting,
  - ◆ they give youth the training they need,
  - ◆ they have youth involvement in planning and decision making,
  - ◆ youth and adults work closely together, and
  - ◆ there is an opportunity for youth to think critically about their own activities.
- ▶ A clear sense of direction and role for the project is necessary. Project personnel should develop the skills needed to manage funding, steering committees and, in some cases, their communities, to keep control of their projects and keep their goals on track.
- ▶ Youth-based organizations should be imaginative and open, encouraging creativity and having honest, realistic discussions about the issues facing them.
- ▶ Respect for differences and individual values must be part of the group process.

- ▶ Keeping the membership growing should be an important objective of the group. This objective will bring in new ideas and help to keep the members from becoming too focused on what's happening inside the project. This is particularly important in groups where there may be a high turnover of youth participants.
- ▶ It is important that new members of the group (particularly youth) get a solid introduction to the group's work before being expected to perform group tasks.
- ▶ Both adults and youth need to put time and energy into the project to feel that they "own" it. Ask everyone involved in the project to take on jobs that they are able to do with a deadline for completion. Groups are strengthened by members' commitment to the project.
- ▶ Before any tasks are assigned, provide a good introduction and skill-training session about the task being given. This is particularly necessary for people who may not have the self-confidence to take on a job themselves and work independently.
- ▶ Extra time and resources will have to be given to maintaining off-site locations in projects that cover a wide geographical area. Identify and select at least two youth from each community, and try to match them with adults and resources from the community they are serving. Project communications will have to be set up so that the off-site locations are kept well-informed and involved.

## **Project Goals and Objectives**

- ▶ Some youth workers think that it is important to look at and understand community attitudes and beliefs about youth issues as a starting point in project goal setting. Seek information about potential support and roadblocks before the project starts up. This will allow for a better understanding about difficulties the project might encounter.
- ▶ The goals of the project must be realistic and within the imagination and understanding of the youth involved. Adults should work with youth to set project goals and objectives. This goal-setting process should not take an undue length of time; youth and adults alike tend to get frustrated by lengthy delays.
- ▶ The goals must provide an opportunity for personal development and growth to keep youth interested and involved.
- ▶ The project should be seen as a series of stages of group development and community change. The way things are done in one phase of the project may be different from the way things are done in another. At different stages, the project may become a public educator, a community developer, an advocate, a lobby group or a training body.
- ▶ If a project goal has already been determined, it is better to begin planning within that goal, rather than having participants think that there is an open-ended agenda. In this case, the goals and objectives of the project should be clearly outlined and explained at the beginning of the project.

- ▶ If youth and adults work together to set their own goals, the goals they seek will be within the reach of the people involved. Groups will not seek a future beyond their own ability to imagine or visualize it.
- ▶ Groups should try to come up with ways to seek change that are practical and involve cooperation between groups. This effort will have the effect of bringing together youth needs with service providers.
- ▶ Sometimes, the goals and direction of the project need to change. This may require the assistance of an objective outside person who is familiar with group dynamics and the intent of the project to assist the group in working through this change.
- ▶ The project group will have to develop different skills so that it can deal with changes that may happen when the project is being implemented. These skills might include community education, dealing with the media, facilitating discussion groups and workshops, and one-on-one interventions.
- ▶ The more quickly the project group moves toward the production of something that the community and youth see as important, the more youth will stay involved and the more the project will move toward its desired goal.
- ▶ Wherever possible, the project should try to create opportunities for job creation and skill development. These opportunities will help keep youth involved by tying the community goals together with personal development.
- ▶ Projects should always be thinking about ways in which the project can continue after funding has run out. This thinking should begin early in the project.

## **Taking Care of Youth Participants**

- ▶ Adult participants must quickly develop a sense of when to help fix a problem, when to allow the youth to do it on their own and when the solution should be found together. Youth need to go through the learning that comes from success and failure but not at the cost of feeling they have been abandoned or are being controlled by adults.
- ▶ All youth-based projects need to build in a self-help capability to allow members to deal with personal issues at the same time they are dealing with the larger community issues.
- ▶ Project coordinators should try to meet youth needs for leadership development, creating supportive youth networks, building or supporting family and community networks, fostering spiritual and cultural development and providing role-model opportunities.
- ▶ Gathering information can be an empowering activity for youth. Youth should be involved in all phases of assessing needs, planning, implementation and evaluation.

- ▶ Many youth involved with community groups have a personal history of dealing with survival needs. As such, they have had to live in the present and may lack skills in planning for the future. These skills should be developed.
- ▶ Some youth will have a long history of living without conventional rules or structure. They may find it difficult to be involved in a structured environment. Projects will have to find a way to accommodate these youth within the structure needed to move the group forward and keep the adults involved.
- ▶ The group process should provide the youth with:
  - ◆ a sense of ease and security,
  - ◆ group solidarity,
  - ◆ friendship,
  - ◆ training in social skills,
  - ◆ opportunities to express opinions and make decisions, and
  - ◆ activities in which they are interested.
- ▶ The group leader should be willing to bring sensitive issues to the surface so that the group can become a community. Sensitive issues include conflict or differences of opinion, unacceptable conduct, counterproductive behavior, etc. Talking circles are an effective way to start discussions on sensitive issues.
- ▶ Open discussion about the cultural differences between adults and youth should be a regular part of the group's development.
- ▶ The forming of smaller groups within the larger project group (particularly among youth members) is often a positive development which is healthy for the members. These smaller groups may provide a less threatening environment for some of the youth.
- ▶ One of the most important functions of the group is to provide a place for youth to discuss the issues affecting them.
- ▶ Structure is needed by youth to help them feel safe and secure; but for some, too much structure can be a negative reminder of experiences they may have had in family, school or jobs. The balance required by the group between structure and flexibility is a judgment call by the project coordinator.
- ▶ The basic and immediate needs of youth have to be met in the work or activities of the group; otherwise, those youth who are not motivated may return to street life where the gratifications are more immediate.

- ▶ The practical needs of the project's youth members should be considered, including:
  - ◆ arranging transportation to and from meetings;
  - ◆ holding meetings and events in a safe location;
  - ◆ having lots of food available with as much choice as possible;
  - ◆ making a good support system available for their attendance (e.g., including parents, peers, family, schools).
- ▶ All projects must provide opportunities for youth to deal with their personal issues. The extent to which this is necessary depends on the type of youth involved.
- ▶ Group development must be a planned process, pushing advancement of each stage and introducing skill development and training faster than the group knows it needs it. Youth have little patience for the chaos which sometimes happens during the early stages of group growth in adult groups.

## **Code of Ethics in Group Development**

- ▶ Early in its development, the group should identify some agreed upon rules or norms upon which the group can operate. Common group rules for meetings may include the following:
  - ◆ always respect other people's opinions;
  - ◆ speak for yourself, not others;
  - ◆ speak to others directly;
  - ◆ be honest;
  - ◆ listen when others are speaking;
  - ◆ silence is alright;
  - ◆ no fighting; and
  - ◆ what is said or happens in here stays in here.

## **Developing Adult/Youth Partnerships**

- ▶ Youth tend to want to work with adults who are credible, trustworthy, and able to fulfill the group's need.
- ▶ Adults should make every effort to involve youth in fun ways.
- ▶ Focus early on getting genuine adult commitment to the group and its objectives. It is easier for adults to recruit youth than for youth to recruit adults.

- ▶ If the project goal is directed toward youth involvement in agency change, the sooner the partner agencies are invited into the process, the greater the chance of project success.
- ▶ Try to create project work and processes where the needs of youth and adults are valued, openly discussed and incorporated. Youth tend to value respect, caring, opportunities to participate, choice, responsibility and security. Adults tend to value security, identity, usefulness, competence and autonomy.
- ▶ At the beginning of the project, adults must play the role of starting and leading the project. As youth develop more skills and confidence, adults transfer some of this responsibility so that it is shared equally. This initial leadership role by adults should balance the needs of youth to participate and feel ownership for the process.
- ▶ Many of the adult service providers who want to help with the project will not have the skills necessary to undertake community development or the power needed to make policy changes in the system. They may have to be trained in the techniques needed to accomplish the project goals.
- ▶ If agency commitment to the project is desired, it should come in the form of a resolution of the board of directors and be communicated through the agency's executive director. Having an adult front-line worker involved with the group does not necessarily mean that the agency is committed to the project.
- ▶ Adult group members should be aware that they provide a certain organizational and emotional steadiness to the project. This is particularly true in projects where there is a high turnover of youth membership.
- ▶ Orientation and training sessions for the partner agencies should be built in as part of putting the project into action. This training should not assume that adults know how to work effectively with youth. Adults may have to be trained on how to work as true partners with youth.
- ▶ To keep the project healthy, efforts should be made to continually recruit adults and youth.
- ▶ The best partnerships are formed around common concerns and specific problems.
- ▶ Partnerships will develop much more smoothly when "youth-friendly" adults and agencies are asked to become involved.
- ▶ Success is achieved when youth and adults share both management and operational tasks.
- ▶ It may be helpful to begin youth/adult partnerships by giving adults "personal discovery exercises" which will ask them about:
  - ◆ their own reasons for becoming involved;
  - ◆ their willingness to share control, even in their own field of work;

- ◆ their perception of their effectiveness in dealing with youth compared with the perception of the youth they are working with; and
  - ◆ their ability to be a role model.
- ▶ Adult members of the group must understand that the transfer of power and skills from the adults to the youth is a planned process that must take place over time.
  - ▶ There must be a proper balance between adults and youth and between healthy and less healthy group members. Without this balance, the group may not develop properly.
  - ▶ Adults must remember that their actions speak louder than words regarding attitudes and respect for youth. Adult members who do not participate send a clear message about the priority of youth concerns.
  - ▶ Adults provide a valuable role in youth/adult partnerships. They serve to validate youth decisions and actions in the minds of the youth. Validation is especially important for youth who have low self-esteem.

## Communications

- ▶ Projects need to find a balance between the need for youth to work out their own communications before meeting with adults and the need to have these communications as an ongoing process between youth and adults. The project should create opportunities for youth to meet ahead of youth/adult meetings to work out what they want to say. Another option is to have an opportunity for youth to break out of meetings, have a discussion and return with their ideas better formed.
- ▶ Projects should take every opportunity to communicate to the general public the needs of the youth and other youth issues related to the project. If possible, the project should use methods and contacts developed by the sponsor and other agencies already involved rather than trying to develop its own.
- ▶ Projects should try to get public input into the project implementation process at all stages. Public input will clarify the project's intentions to the community, build support and help relieve any fears the public may have.
- ▶ The project should have a discussion near its beginning about how communication will happen between funders, sponsors, project coordinator and youth. All information should be given at an appropriate level of literacy.



## Getting Youth Involved in the Project, and Keeping Them There

- ▶ Youth should be encouraged to recruit new youth members at all times.
- ▶ Try to create circumstances where the youth will feel that they are involved in a larger movement of youth in the community, region, province/territory or country. Connection to the broader picture will increase the chances that the participants will feel that their work is important.
- ▶ Recruiting should be done by asking potential new members to help the project in very specific tasks. These tasks should also have a limited time frame and be feasible to do with little or no training.
- ▶ The best methods for recruiting new youth to the project include:
  - ◆ an invitation from another youth who is seen as a leader,
  - ◆ an invitation from a friend who is already involved, and/or
  - ◆ an invitation from a service provider or other significant adult in the life of the youth.
- ▶ Include a representative mix of youth, remembering that those who may find it difficult to participate (e.g., single mothers) may also have the best experiences to share with the group and the project.
- ▶ Youth may be more interested in staying involved with the project when:
  - ◆ training is provided;
  - ◆ they are helping others;
  - ◆ they are doing meaningful community work;
  - ◆ opportunities are provided to meet community leaders; and
  - ◆ certificates of merit, school credits or work experiences are provided.
- ▶ Payment of money to youth should be used when there is a job to be done that the project would otherwise hire someone to do (e.g., distributing flyers, doing surveys). Money should not be used as an incentive for youth to stay involved but as a fair and reasonable benefit for doing a job.
- ▶ When possible, recruiting efforts should be among youth who have previous community experience and where there are a couple of youth who have some relationship with each other. If they are already associated with an existing youth group or organization, the chances are better that the work will continue after the project is complete. This is particularly true for projects with many sites separated geographically.

- ▶ In projects that cover a large geographical area, having a group of youth from each location rather than single representatives from each site, strengthens the group, makes the potential for local team building better and increases the likelihood of the project continuing.
- ▶ Recruiting youth who have some experience doing community work, and some understanding of their role as leaders, appears to shorten the group's development process and its work toward its goals.
- ▶ Recruiting youth members who are more “mainstream” with those who used to be street-involved may move the project to a more health promotion/prevention approach and away from a treatment/rehabilitation approach.
- ▶ The power of youth involvement will increase as youth begin to learn new skills and become meaningful participants in decision making. Likewise, their sense of control and ownership for the project will also increase. This development will require deliberate efforts, time, patience and resources.
- ▶ Education and skill development are most effective in the context of a real situation, allowing youth to practise what they have learned.
- ▶ Youth may not stay involved in the project if:
  - ◆ it is too restrictive,
  - ◆ there are little or no opportunities for control or learning,
  - ◆ it is boring,
  - ◆ there are leadership problems,
  - ◆ their friends have left the project,
  - ◆ there is too much discipline, or
  - ◆ they develop other interests.
- ▶ Group development and growth appears to be an important social outlet for some of the group members. Team building, therefore, is an essential element in group development.
- ▶ Tasks assigned to group members, mentors and other volunteers should be closely related to the goals, have a deadline and be achievable.
- ▶ One of the most valuable skills that youth can learn through the project is conflict resolution.

## Developing Youth Skills through Group Process

- ▶ Assigning tasks to youth should be seen as a reward. They will receive respect by having accomplished the task and self-esteem from having learned the skill to do the task.
- ▶ Training should go along with the tasks assigned, and there should be ongoing coaching until the task is completed. Youth will receive satisfaction by completing the task successfully and develop skills necessary to do the task again.
- ▶ At the beginning of the group's development, discussion should take place about the role and authority of the group and what is expected of the members. If this discussion leads youth to identify skills they will need, training should be organized as soon as possible.
- ▶ Project coordinators should build in as much opportunity for the group to make choices as possible. Youth will become more comfortable over time with decision making and exercising real power in the group.
- ▶ Youth will eventually recognize that they need training to keep the group moving toward its goals. When this happens, arrangements for training should be made, and resources may be required. Flexibility in timing may have to be built into the project proposal so that training can be provided when it is required and not on a strict schedule.
- ▶ As the group matures, there should be an increase in the complexity of problems which need to be solved by the youth without adult supervision.
- ▶ When possible, people outside the project should be used to transfer skills to youth. This will get other adults involved in the group and ease the burden on the coordinator.
- ▶ Formal and informal training should happen early in group development in areas such as how to run a meeting, communication skills, conflict resolution, facilitation skills, public speaking, writing, motivational skills and group dynamics.
- ▶ Rather than waiting for youth to be "ready" for more complex tasks in the community, trial by fire under a properly coached or tutored situation is often the best approach to group skill building.
- ▶ Wherever possible, have youth train other youth.
- ▶ Encourage the process of "*learn it, do it, teach it.*"

## Developing Youth Leadership within the Group

- ▶ Adults must provide initial leadership for the group. As youth become more skilled and confident in the duties and responsibilities of leadership, responsibility can be given to the adult/youth partnership.
- ▶ Adult members must learn the importance of seeing youth leadership as a process where the means are as important as the ends.
- ▶ It is not realistic to expect all youth to take on leadership roles within the group.
- ▶ The coordinator should identify natural leaders among the youth, train them in leadership skills and gradually develop their leadership responsibility.
- ▶ Potential youth leaders should be encouraged to take on more responsibility for running meetings and developing group facilitation skills. This can be accomplished through mentoring, role modelling and training. Some of the leadership skills required include the following:
  - ◆ how to encourage participation,
  - ◆ conflict mediation,
  - ◆ how to relieve tension in the group,
  - ◆ how to help others communicate through feedback,
  - ◆ active listening and rewording what was said,
  - ◆ measuring the emotional climate of the group,
  - ◆ what to look for in group process and group growth, and
  - ◆ how to build trust.
- ▶ It may be helpful to have youth work in pairs, or have a youth paired with an adult when developing group leadership skills.

## The Role of the Project Coordinator

- ▶ Some of the qualities and skills needed in a project coordinator are:
  - ◆ leadership qualities based on firm personal principles,
  - ◆ ability to be a role model for the vision of the youth,
  - ◆ a belief in the capacity of youth,
  - ◆ ability to remove blockages to youth empowerment,
  - ◆ genuine,
  - ◆ flexible,
  - ◆ resourceful,

- ◆ ability to transfer power to the participants without being threatened,
  - ◆ ability to be a friend and adviser at the same time,
  - ◆ willing to work long and flexible hours,
  - ◆ sense of humour,
  - ◆ reliable,
  - ◆ ability to talk on a person-to-person basis rather than on an adult-to-child basis,
  - ◆ creative,
  - ◆ good listener,
  - ◆ open to criticism, and
  - ◆ ability to help the group find win-win solutions to problems.
- ▶ One of the most important roles of the project coordinator is to ensure that the needs of youth are attended to at each stage of the project. These needs include the following:
    - ◆ respect for culture and individual differences,
    - ◆ caring,
    - ◆ opportunities for participation,
    - ◆ choice, responsibility and
    - ◆ security.
  - ▶ The personal wellness of the coordinator is closely associated with the success of the project. The coordinators must be willing to participate in their own healing journeys and open themselves up to the important role they play as mentors and role models.
  - ▶ Respect and faith in the abilities of youth are the two most important ingredients to establishing a positive relationship with youth.
  - ▶ The project coordinator should try to connect the project to as many resources (e.g., mentors, volunteers, service providers, private-sector contributors) as possible.

## **The Role of Mentors**

### ***Mentor – an experienced and trusted friend and adviser***

- ▶ Mentors can be used in different ways with youth throughout the project. They can work as coaches with youth on short- or long-term jobs. They can provide technical expertise as well as support to youth. Mentors can complement the abilities of the project coordinator.
- ▶ Mentors should be chosen by the youth. Their responsibilities should be described in detail. The mentors should be available over an extended period of time to work developmentally with the youth.

- ▶ The project should look for mentors with the same personal qualities of character and integrity that are required of the project coordinator and other adults in the process.
- ▶ It may be necessary to pay mentors if they are expected to be with the project for a length of time. The group may ask them to volunteer if the commitment is only for a short time. When mentors are being paid, the job descriptions, contract and payments should be made by the youth as a learning activity.
- ▶ Mentors should be introduced to the training and coaching roles of the project before working with youth.
- ▶ Mentors should be brought into the project as early as possible to establish connections with the youth.

### **The Role of Outside Resource People and Consultants**

- ▶ Some of the same qualities that are needed in the project coordinator are also required in any outside resource people brought into the project. Outside resource people can perform many of the following functions for the project:
  - ◆ providing technical information,
  - ◆ planning and facilitating planning,
  - ◆ providing information and assistance in project management,
  - ◆ assisting with problem solving and providing support to the project staff,
  - ◆ identifying and bringing together other community resources,
  - ◆ comparing the work of the group with its original goals and objectives,
  - ◆ collecting data and evaluating the project, and
  - ◆ connecting the project to political contacts and economic supports.
- ▶ The outside resource people should work toward the development of project independence and not create a dependent relationship between themselves and the project.
- ▶ Project coordinators should know the difference between those skills and resources that should come from the group and those that should be provided by outside resource people. The coordinator should find the balance needed to run the project smoothly within the available resources.
- ▶ When an external evaluation is required, evaluators should be introduced into the project as soon as the goals and objectives have been set.

## The Role of Project Funders

- ▶ Building a good relationship between the funder and the actual or potential project groups is important in making the project a reality. Funders should make frequent contacts with the groups, connecting them to information, other groups and additional resources.
- ▶ Regular check points should be set to know that the group is developing as proposed.
- ▶ Where appropriate, funders should be involved at the beginning of a project in assisting the group in project design.
- ▶ Funders should recognize that community development projects involving youth are time consuming, labour intensive and require long-term commitment.
- ▶ Funders can assist projects and communities in the following ways:
  - ◆ setting in place the broader intervention in which each project is only a part,
  - ◆ maintaining the overall vision,
  - ◆ assisting with networking among projects,
  - ◆ providing the projects with technical assistance, and
  - ◆ advocating on behalf of the project with other stakeholders and funders.
- ▶ Funding should be flexible so that the project can take advantage of opportunities (like training) when they arise.

## The Role of the Sponsor Agency

- ▶ The sponsor agency should be a net contributor to the project rather than one looking for ways in which it can benefit. It should play an active role in achieving the project's overall goals without assuming control over the project and the youth members. It is usually expected that the sponsor agency will play the role of "champion" in the project. If not, the youth will look for leadership and advocacy from other sources; if they do not find it, they will often lose interest.
- ▶ It is hoped that the sponsor agency will be:
  - ◆ interested in youth issues and mandated to work with youth;
  - ◆ prepared to become involved as an agency in an official, board-approved way;
  - ◆ able to include some of the key principles of participation and involvement within its own operation;
  - ◆ able to provide meeting space at times suitable to the youth;
  - ◆ able to provide staff time, training and other resources to the group;
  - ◆ able to make connections with resources on behalf of the group;

- ◆ advocating for the project within the service system and the larger community; and
  - ◆ able to stimulate the group when it gets bogged down.
- ▶ The sponsor agency also plays a role similar to the funder and the project coordinator: It can provide the following:
- ◆ training of youth leaders;
  - ◆ help in managing the project;
  - ◆ assistance to the project in developing realistic objectives and workplans;
  - ◆ mediation when requested;
  - ◆ credibility for the project within the community;
  - ◆ ideas;
  - ◆ connections, resources and support in a timely and helpful way;
  - ◆ advocacy, when required; and
  - ◆ easily understood administrative procedures.
- ▶ Youth must see the sponsor as active and interested participants in the process of change.
- ▶ The sponsor must use the values of healthy change and youth empowerment in its own operation and with its own clients.

### **Sustainability through Partnerships: Keeping the Group Going**

- ▶ Long-term group life will depend on the recognition and support the group is given by the community. The group and the issue must be seen by the community as being important.
- ▶ The group must see itself as being important before it can actively promote its assets and importance to the wider community.
- ▶ High-profile and fun activities in the community increase public awareness of the group and its cause and attracts new youth.
- ▶ Long-term sustainability requires the development of partnerships in the community. Working on youth issues with community partners provides group members with opportunities to gain knowledge and skills in a real setting.
- ▶ Before the community development group can be seen as a full and equal partner in the community, it may have to focus away from its own individual needs only and make the connection between youth issues and larger community needs.
- ▶ Equality among partners is the strongest form of partnership. Equality is created when both parties agree that they need one another to solve a mutual problem.



- ▶ Community development groups should consider working with a broad range of partners, including media, private-sector partners, government and non-governmental organizations.
- ▶ One of the key factors that affects the group's legitimacy (and its long-term sustainability) is its ability to provide a link between other community stakeholders and youth. For instance, a community organization (e.g., a shopping mall) experiencing a problem related to youth (e.g., youth violence) may recognize that it needs to work with youth to solve the problem. Often, the community development group can make youth accessible.
- ▶ During meetings with community partners, the group may assist with problem solving, provide links with youth and relay important information on youth issues.
- ▶ The group should always be looking to identify individuals and groups who may have a need for its special skills in accessing at-risk youth.
- ▶ The group should be careful not to become a service provider or an ongoing spokesperson for the target population of youth-at-risk. It may lose valuable connections and legitimacy with youth. It serves a better role as a link between the at-risk population and the wider community in solving community problems.

# Notes