

Literature review of youth/adult partnership models

1. 4-H Youth Development program¹

University of California

Ages: 9 – 19

The 4-H Youth Development Program is in every county in California. Today, 4-H is 130,000 young people learning, achieving, and giving back to their communities, supported by 20,000 caring and enthusiastic adult volunteers. 4-H is a place where young people are given many opportunities to build confidence, learn responsibility, and develop skills that will last them a lifetime. It's a place where youth make friends and share interests, ranging from building robots to raising rabbits, from designing web pages to landscape design. It's a place where youth work together to make a positive difference in their community, and adult volunteers make a powerful difference in the lives of young people.

Youth-adult partnerships occur when both youth and adults plan, learn, and work together. As a result, both are contributing equally to the decision making process. This is very different than many typical relationships in which adults take the leadership roles and the youth are assigned inferior roles, or programs where youth make all the decisions while the adults sit back and watch. Instead, youth-adult partnerships build on the strengths of each group and the final program or activity is stronger than a program or activity devised and delivered individually by either group.

This is what is done at the YTF. At the YTF, both youth and adults contribute their opinions, insights, and ideas. They respect what each other has to say even though they might not always agree. They learn from each other, build friendships with each other, work hard together, and as a result, their final projects are always something to be proud of.

To help visualize this concept, think about pairs figure skating. One partner brings strength to the event, lifting and rotating the other. The other partner twists, flips and lands jumps. They learn, practice and are judged together. Neither could perform the routine without the other partner. The partnership enables the skaters to perform a routine that is much more difficult than the routines performed by individual skaters.

¹ <http://www.ca4h.org/4hinfo/proginfo/yapartnership.asp> Originally authored by Shelley Murdock, Contra Costa 4-H Youth Development Advisor

Research studies indicate that successful youth-adult partnerships require a variety of elements to be in place including:

- Youth and adults share equally in the decision making process. Together youth and adults achieve better results than either would if working alone. (This is the YTF's process for picking their project for the year.)
- Roles for youth and adults are authentic and meaningful.
- Youth and adults learn together and serve as resources for one another. (Youth offer insights on the lives of youth regarding nutrition and physical activity while adults offer their experience from working in this public health field.)
- Each group is treated with respect and dignity by the other group

The same research studies cited a wide range of strategies that can be used to support the basic elements. Some of these include:

- Adults and youth work together to determine roles, plan activities, set deadlines, create guidelines, and divide tasks.
- If voting is used for decision making, youth and adults' votes count equally.
- Everyone feels comfortable enough to ask questions and express their ideas.
- Meetings are held when youth are out of school and meetings start and end on time.
- Adults offer transportation to youth to meetings.
- Both youth and adults are encouraged to contribute their unique strengths to the partnership.

2. Building Partnerships for Youth²

There are three components to a successful youth-adult partnership.

- Challenge the typical adult or teen role by avoiding hierarchical relationships where the adult is in charge. In youth-adult partnerships, the boundary between youth and adults does not exist because both will have valuable contributions (Suggestion: have youth-led meetings. Have members of the YTF take turns coming in 15-30 minutes earlier to help organize the agenda for the meeting.)
- Master the techniques of communication, teamwork, and coaching. Learn from each other.
- Develop a common goal for community action.

Suggestions for Youth-adult partnership development

- Have equal numbers of youth and adults on advisory boards, councils and committees.
- Select youth and adults who are willing and/or able to engage in the mutuality of the process that youth-adult partnerships require.
- Give opportunities for youth and adults to explore what each brings to the table. Encourage open communication concerning mutual expectations.
- Emphasize the mutuality of these relationships. Youth and adult should be seen as having unique and valuable contributions to the partnership. (The YTF encourages everyone to share their thoughts and ideas to the group. Every contribution has the potential to improve the work that YTF, and even the HPRC, is doing.)
- Allow young people to make significant program or community decisions. (The YTF contributes to planning the project for the year and has a big role in doing the research, organizing the data, creating a presentation, and presenting the project.)
- Allocate resources to youth. (The HPRC always tries to provide the resources that the YTF needs to do their project, whether it's transportation, food, props, computers, stipends, etc.)
- Offer young people the opportunity to regularly reflect on their work.

² <http://cals-cf.calsnet.arizona.edu/fcs/bpy/content.cfm?content=YAPartners> Stephen T. Russell, Ph.D., University of California, Davis Nicole Polen, M.S., University of California, Davis Karen Hoffman Tepper, Ph.D., University of Arizona

3. Youth – Adult Partnership Training³

Youth – Adult Partnership is one that:

- Integrates youth's realistic perspectives and skills with professional adults' experience and wisdom (The input of the YTF is combined with the YTF coordinators' experience and knowledge of community work)
- Offers each party the opportunity to make suggestions and decisions (The YTF is consulted on external PRC projects as well as providing input on YTF research projects.)
- Recognizes and values the contribution of each
- Allows youth and adults to work in a full partnership envisioning, developing, implementing, and evaluating programs

Youth – adult partnerships are NOT:

- Simply a checklist that either youth or adults follow
- Ways to hide the fact that programs are designed, developed, and run by adults

Tokenism is not partnership. Examples of Tokenism:

- Having youth present but with no clear role
- Assigning to youth tasks that adults do not want to do
- Having youth make appearances without training
- Having only one youth on a board or council

Effective Elements of youth – adult partnership:

- Establish clear goals
- Share decision-making power
- Get commitment from the highest level (The YTF works with PRC leadership and the Community Committee. At the end of the YTF year, the YTF presents their project to the Community Committee. The work of the YTF is an integral part of the PRC mission.)
- Be clear on roles and responsibilities
- Be selective in recruitment (Students have to fill out an application, which includes writing an essay, providing a resume, and getting a recommendation or providing references. Afterwards, they go through an interview process conducted by staff at the HPRC.)
- Provide training
- Be aware of different communication styles
- Value participation
- Include room for growth
- Remember youth have other interests

Adults should:

- Be open and nonjudgmental
- Take advantage of expertise

³ www.infoforhealth.org/youthwg/PDFs/...English/YPGslides.pdf

- Make sure youth participate in meaningful ways
- Be honest about expectations
- Accommodate youth schedules
- Treat youth as individuals
- Make work fun
- Avoid intimidating youth
- Avoid assumptions about all youth
- Know that youth have the right to say “no.”

Youth should:

- Remember that most adults have good intentions
- Remember that criticism is not condescension
- Realize that adults may not be aware of the capabilities of youth
- Realize that adults often feel responsible for the success or failure of a project
- Realize that adults may be just as uncertain as youth and hide it better
- Call adults out on using condescending language
- Not be afraid to ask for clarifications
- Not be afraid to say “No” because of other commitment

4. Across Ages⁴

Temple University
Ages: 11 - 13

Across Ages is a multi-faceted and multigenerational intervention aimed primarily at helping children in adverse circumstances avoid drugs and grow as individuals. The centerpiece of this program is the involvement of older adult volunteers acting as mentors for young people. (The YTF always has at least two adult coordinators who guide the youth in their work, offer suggestions, and answer any questions the youth might have. If the youth need any resources, the adult coordinators try their best to provide them.) The program facilitates the involvement of mentors and youth who are paired together in community service activities. The program was created by Temple University's Center for Intergenerational Learning and was originally implemented in Philadelphia. The program includes theoretical formulations that involve the human need for older persons to be "generative" and for younger persons to have a "future orientation".

The following are the elements of youth development that are contained within Across Ages:

- Decision-making / reasoning skills - The program encourages youth to make informed decisions after carefully weighing the potential consequences.
- Creativity - The program encourages youth to explore ideas through different mediums in different settings. The program promotes an appreciation of creative expression. (Members of the YTF are encouraged to share any new thoughts, opinions, and ideas. The fresh ideas of individuals help to make an interesting and strong final project.)
- Facing challenges / taking initiative - The program provides youth with the opportunity to take on new and diverse types of activities. The program helps youth to develop the internal motivation to direct their efforts towards challenging goals.
- Communication skills - The program provides youth with training to help them establish developmentally appropriate interpersonal skills and rehearsal strategies for practicing those skills.
- Close relationship with caring adults - The program cultivates caring adults within the community, who may or may not be professional youth workers.
- Peer relationships and friendship - The program allows for both formal and informal interactions with peers. The program provides the opportunity for youth to develop caring relationships with peers that include friendship.

⁴ <http://www.temple.edu/cil/Acrossageshome.htm>

- Respect for Diversity - The program helps youth to develop respectful attitudes and non-discriminatory behavior toward those who are different from themselves. The program encourages movement beyond tolerance and toward the development of an appreciation for different people and cultures. (The YTF is a diverse group, with students from different schools, from different areas of Boston, with different cultural backgrounds, of different races, and with different experiences. Yet they are all able to embrace each other's differences and bond over something they all have in common: an interest in healthy lifestyles.)
- Community connection - The program encourages a sense of connection to others in their community, school, or neighborhood. (The YTF hopes to do this more with partnerships with groups with similar goals and with community committees.)
- Family relationships - The program encourages youth to develop better family relationships.
- Citizenship and contribution - The program helps youth to understand the history and values of their country and their community. The program encourages a desire to contribute to the nation and community.
- Taking an active role with adults - Youth are highly involved in the program planning, implementation and evaluation. Youth are recognized as partners in this process.
- Understanding and valuing yourself - The program helps youth to develop the perception that they are good people who can make meaningful contributions. The program helps youth to make decisions about the type of person they are and the type of person they would like to be.
- Vision for the future - The program helps youth to have positive ideas about what the future holds. The program helps youth to have the knowledge and confidence to plan and then act on those plans to reach their future goals. The program fosters positive future orientation.