PROFILES OF
Youth Engagement & Voice
In New York State
Current Strategies

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"If you had a problem in the Black community, and you brought in a group of White people to discuss how to solve it, almost nobody would take that panel seriously. In fact, there'd probably be a public outcry. It would be the same thing for women's issues or gay issues. But every day, in local arenas all the way to the White House, adults sit around and decide what problems youth have and what youth need, without ever consulting us."

Jason, 17 years old
Youth Force Member

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Profiles of Youth Engagement and Voice in New York State: Current Strategies

The findings presented in this report are intended to be a resource for those who want to engage youth better and turn up the volume on "youth voice." Organizations that intentionally involve youth do so in many different ways, but the dynamics are always the same: youth opinions are taken seriously, considered with respect, and used to move programs, organizations, and systems forward. Here is how 19 New York agencies from multiple fields have done it.

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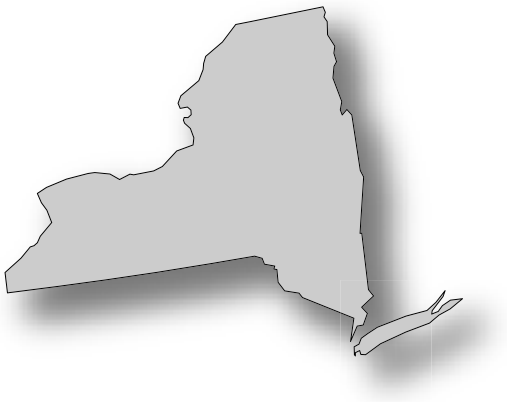
Executive Summary

This project was conducted as a collaborative effort among the Department of Human Development, Cornell Cooperative Extension, and the Family Life Development Center's ACT for Youth Upstate Center of Excellence at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York. In the Fall of 2001, 19 interviews were conducted with agencies in New York State who have made very deliberate attempts to empower young people, involve youth in the decision-making apparatus of their organizations or programs, and/or create community change.

The purpose of this report is to share the results of those interviews, including specific ideas about (a) roles for youth, (b) recruitment, (c) sustaining involvement, (d) preparation, (e) logistics of involving youth, (f) adult staffing, (g) outcomes/impacts, and (h) lessons learned.

The following "Lessons Learned" are an effort to capture a selected grouping of important issues to be considered when initiating or strengthening a "youth voice" emphasis or mechanism in a youth development program. The term youth voice means intentionally creating meaningful ways for young people to have input and decision-making authority in programs, events, initiatives, or public policy matters. The term assumes a commitment by adults to maintain a sense of equality in youth and adult interactions.

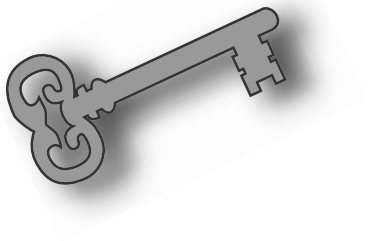


Project Partners

Department of Human Development, Cornell University
Cornell Cooperative Extension
Family Life Development Center, ACT for Youth Upstate Center of Excellence, Cornell University

Lessons Learned

1. Make one or more staff responsible for setting up a youth voice initiative. For organizations unaccustomed to the youth voice approach, creating a youth voice emphasis is like creating a new program.



One or more staff people will need to share leadership with youth to develop a youth voice emphasis. It needs to be someone's specific job responsibility, at least initially. It is well established that training and preparation are required if young people are to have meaningful roles on boards and committees. In addition to training and preparation, a mechanism for ongoing reflection on the part of youth will strengthen the youth voice emphasis in organizations and communities. Set aside time to meet with youth to talk about what they are observing and what they think about it.

2. Directly address adult attitudes through training, reflection, and discussion.

Many of the agencies in the study stressed the need to address adult attitudes such as the need to take youth seriously, be open-minded, and be willing to give up control. This is a constant challenge even for organizations that have considerable experience in working with young people. Planning for in-service training and ongoing reflection and discussion on the "How are we doing?" question will ensure that the critical issue of adult attitudes continues to be a priority.

3. Use the "50/50 Rule" with youth voice.

Education, policy making, planning, and the other serious benefits for involving youth in meaningful ways are important, but so are fun, entertainment, and casual relationships. Spend as much time on the latter as you do with the former.

4. Understand your program's current youth voice profile. Programs are at different places in the program development process with regard to involving youth in decision-making and meaningful involvement.

Some youth development programs are initiated with a youth voice philosophy or approach while others don't make the decision to involve youth until the program has been operating for years. Be aware of where you are starting. Are you strengthening an already established youth voice approach in your agency, and actually looking for creative ways to increase meaningful youth involvement? Are you basically starting from scratch and in need of laying organizational groundwork by promoting the concept through training and discussion with key decision-makers, and board and committee members? Starting from scratch means, ***first***, creating a climate which supports increasing young people's influence on the organization.

5. Recognize that logistics, location, environment, and time will always play a key role in establishing youth voice.

Do meeting times accommodate school schedules? Do young people feel comfortable expressing themselves?

6. Consider current and future funding.

Having programs fail or stop because funding and resource development weren't seriously considered initially is not only a mistake, but it's counter-productive for youth. Don't start something unless you're able to reasonably predict the duration. The longer the young person is in a program, engaged and challenged by an adult ally, the greater the developmental gains for that youth.

7. Consider the recruitment and targeting question up front.

The field of positive youth development is an inclusive field, it is meant to be for all youth. But this position creates a dilemma. Youth who have had discouraging school, family, or peer experiences may shy away from the image that an active youth voice presence conveys to organizations or communities. These, of course, are the young people who could benefit the most from involvement in program efforts that take them seriously. Spending time on planning strategies that ensure social, economic, and cultural diversity will give your organization and community efforts a real sense of integrity. ●

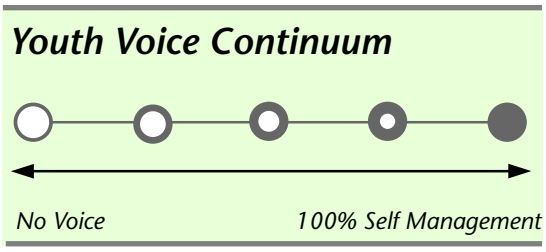
1 Introduction

In the minds of many professionals and youth advocates, youth voice is a key underpinning to positive youth development. When young people participate in decision-making (as equals) with adults, mobilize and create or change public policy, and take influential leadership roles in organizations and institutions, the benefits accrue to adults, organizations, and communities, as well as contribute to the positive development of young people themselves. Yet organizations often find it difficult to involve youth in truly meaningful ways beyond mere token youth representation. The lack of information on successful models of youth involvement led to the current study.

The purpose of this report is to share the results of interviews with 19 New York agencies who have made very deliberate attempts to empower young people, involve youth in the decision-making apparatus of their organizations or programs, and/or create community change. Based on both the study and current literature, a collateral purpose is to provide sets of specific ideas about (1) roles for youth, (2) recruitment, (3) sustaining involvement, (4) preparation, (5) logistics of involving youth, (6) adult staffing, (7) outcomes/impacts, and (8) lessons learned. If you want further information on a particular topic or strategy, contact the program director (See Appendix A: Respondents: NYS Youth Voice Survey).

Many strong supporters of youth voice believe that it is critical to involve youth immediately and throughout the entire program development process. Certainly some agencies in this study support this approach. There is, however, the reality that many agencies and organizations have been in operation for years or decades and are just now considering creating a youth voice emphasis.

Youth voice is typically not something you either have or don't have in your agency, organization, or community. It may be viewed on a continuum ranging from zero voice to 100% self-management. ***It can take many forms beyond the sharing of power, including finding one's voice and using one's voice.*** We hope that the findings summarized in this report will be of use to those who would like to initiate or strengthen youth voice efforts within their organizations. ●



2
Methods and Procedures

The goal of this study was to identify a set of specific strategies that are being used by organizations to involve youth in meaningful roles, such as decision-making, program planning, policy making, organizational direction setting, and in youth/adult partnerships.

Identifying the Sample

We sought to identify best practices of youth involvement and learn from practitioners who had a track record of engaging youth in New York State. We first identified potential systems and programs and then contacted key state agencies in order to identify possible sites. We sampled a variety of programs across New York State, which were identified as having visible youth voice components. We also relied upon "word of mouth" contacts gained during the course of the data-gathering process. We tried to get programs that were in diverse fields, across different service systems and populations of youth.

Initial screening enabled us to discern a program's viability for study participation. We sought programs that had an active youth voice component to their work, and that had demonstrated successful, sustained involvement of young people in their organization. Our final sample included 19 programs covering the child welfare, mental health, juvenile justice, health, cooperative extension, family planning, employment/training, and youth court fields. The sample includes a combination of not-for-profits, community-based organizations, and statewide agencies. As illustrated in Table 1 (page 11), our sample represents a mixture of region, i.e., 7 out of 19 programs were downstate, and geographic locale, i.e., rural, urban, and suburban.

Development of Survey Tool

We developed an open-ended questionnaire in order to gather our data. The final interview covered the components listed on page 10 (see Appendix B for a complete copy of the interview tool).

About half of the interviews were conducted in person, on-site at the program, while the others were phone interviews. In four cases, group interviews were conducted and involved the participation of several staff

from a particular program. In three sites, youth participated in the interview process. Most of the interviews were one-on-one, usually with the project director or coordinator.

Interview transcripts were typed and entered into electronic format. Once the interviews were compiled, qualitative thematic analyses were conducted to identify the major themes and generate the study findings. All respondents were given the opportunity to comment and provide additions and corrections to their agency's program description.

Survey Tool Components

1. *History, background, organization description*
2. *Roles for youth: What does youth voice look like?*
3. *Process for recruiting and involving youth*
4. *Sustaining youth involvement*
5. *Development and preparation strategies*
6. *Logistics for involving youth*
7. *Adult staffing: Who do you hire to do this work?*
8. *Benefits/impact: Youth, adults, program, community*
9. *Lessons learned*

3

Overview of Programs

The 19 programs surveyed for this report are located in communities across New York State, including five in New York City. The programs represent a variety of service systems (see Table 1). Generally speaking, each program acknowledged the importance of youth voice, and had specific mechanisms for ensuring meaningful youth input. ●

Table 1. Study Sample *(description of sample N=19)*

NAME OF PROGRAM	LOCATION	SERVICE SYSTEM
Youth Force	South Bronx	Community Based Organization
Youth Communications	Manhattan	Child Welfare
Westchester Youth Forum	White Plains	Child Welfare
Teen AIDS Taskforce	Syracuse	Health
At the Table	Binghamton	Cornell Cooperative Extension
Voices of Youth	Manhattan	Child Welfare
Youth Advisory Board Opportunities	Syracuse	Family Planning
Youth Empowerment Initiative: Reality Check	Syracuse	Health
Career Exploration Program	Geneseo	Employment/Training
Asset Building Coalition	Oswego	Youth Court
Oswego County Youth Court	Oswego	Youth Court
Learning Web	Ithaca	Apprenticeship/ Employment
Youth Voices Theatre Group	Watertown	Education
ACT for Youth Initiative	Watertown	Cornell Cooperative Extension
Kids First Alliance	Fredonia	Education
Nassau County Youth Board (Youth Adult Participation Project)	Hempstead	Youth Bureau
Community Counseling & Mediation	Brooklyn Services	Community Based Organization
IMPACT Coalition	Manhattan	Career Development
Youth Leadership and Service Council	Rensselaer	Office of Children and Family Services

4

Roles for Youth: How Are Youth Involved?

How are youth involved? What does their involvement look like? How does this vary across programs and communities? What do young people learn from the various roles they hold? In this section we describe the various forms and configurations of youth voice, highlighting examples from the programs sampled.

Governance

Governance is a fundamental aspect of youth voice. It refers to those situations where youth work, typically in partnership with adults, to set the overall policy direction of organizations, institutions, and community coalitions. These terms often refer to young people working on boards of directors, sanctioned committees, planning bodies, and advisory groups. Governance also involves youth participation in leadership and decision-making about how organizational rules are constructed, implemented, and enforced (*Zeldin et al., 2000*).

- Young people are involved in making budget decisions regarding the allocation of resources. *(North Crown Heights Partnership for Youth)*
- Eight youth sit on an Advisory Council (AC) that includes subcommittees for fund raising, events planning, and a newsletter. Overall direction is set by the AC based on listening to other young people and assessing their needs. *(Youth Forum)*
- Youth have extremely high levels of decision-making on every level of the statewide initiative. *(Reality Check)*
- Youth serve on the Nassau County Youth Board of Directors, only after being trained and participating in the program for one year. After completion of the program, young people are connected to other service opportunities, e.g., serve on local neighborhood boards or civic groups. *(Nassau County Youth Board, Youth Adult Partnership Project)*
- Youth are presented with a broad range of opportunities and they choose the ones they want to participate in. Some young people serve as board members to various community groups, such as the Tobacco Control Coalition or the Community Conscious Youth. The young people who participate in these projects are regarded as colleagues and their input is valued

Roles For Youth

Governance
Design, Development, Planning
Assessment/Evaluation Mapping
Communication/Public Relations
Education
Service
Advocacy
Consulting

and utilized for ongoing program improvements. *(Kids First Alliance)*

- Young people serve on the hiring committee for staff and are part of the decision-making body. *(Learning Web)*
- In addition to participating on the Board of Directors, which must be at least 51% youth at all times, a Youth Force Management Team coordinates the day-to-day infrastructure necessary to carry out action plans as set forth by the membership. The Management Team must also be made up of at least 51% youth. *(Youth Force)*

Design, Development, and Planning

In this role, youth are involved in the development of programs, services, and activities. Level of involvement varies considerably across programs. In some cases, young people manage overall projects, i.e., youth identify a particular community or youth problem and then develop solutions in the form of services and programs. More often youth work in partnership with adults, planning and making joint decisions regarding program design and implementation. Some programs obtain youth input on decisions that adults have already made regarding services.

- Through the Youth/Adult Partnership Project, youth and adults work together to determine program and community service learning priorities. This countywide process enables young people to have a permanent voice in the identification of needs and the development of programs, policies, and related activities. Carrying out the program is critical to active youth involvement and decision-making. This empowerment model actively involves youth in all aspects of program design, implementation, evaluation, and decision-making. While adults train youth, the young people design all workshops they present, do the presentations, troubleshoot, and facilitate follow-up with programs

and community development activities. *(Nassau County Youth Board, Youth Adult Partnership Project)*

- Young people are responsible for setting the direction of the organization. This includes: determining project goals, activities, and outcomes; identifying youth concerns and conducting needs assessments; developing action plans; creating outreach and educational materials; developing workshop curricula; and evaluating the organization's overall progress. *(Youth Force)*
- Youth and adults work in partnership to plan and implement a conference to increase youth voice, youth volunteerism, and community service. Youth are involved in all aspects of the planning, including choosing workshop topics. Additionally, youth recruit speakers, develop and co-facilitate workshops, and compile and disseminate youth voice recommendations. *(At the Table)*
- The primary roles for youth center around editorial direction of the magazine. Youth produce the writing and create graphic designs for each issue. Youth hold weekly editorial meetings to select content. Editorial decisions are based on youth's assessment of the needs, realities, and current issues and concerns of their peers. *(Youth Communications)*
- Each school-based chapter is run by youth in different ways. The youth at each site brainstorm, design, and plan how best to achieve their goals at their school. The students work with an adult advisor based at the school. *(Teens Aids Task Force)*
- Through the Kids First Minigrant Project, youth in Chautauqua County award minigrants of up to $1000 for community projects preferably designed and implemented by youth for youth. Youth try out leadership roles, write grants, and develop projects to address a need that they have identified. Youth review proposals and decide who receives the grants. This project "provides a sense of community pride and empowers youth to help make decisions affecting their lives." *(Kids First Alliance)*
- All programming starts with the individual young person and what s/he wants. Young people identify their interests and develop individual learning plans and experiences. This philosophy holds even in the Youth Outreach Program, which serves the most at-risk population of street and homeless teens. Many of these youth have previously worked with caring adults, but the adults defined what they thought the kids needed. *(Learning Web)*

> *"We start with the young person. This keeps us on track. We build in steps to help young people learn that they have a voice—from the initial intake process. Staff are trained to ask questions, to discover what the young person's interests are, and to help young people find their voice." (Learning Web)*

- The New York State Youth Leadership and Service Council meets several times a year to discuss ways young people can mobilize communities by building partnerships with adults, enhancing communication with youth development organizations, and participating in community service

activities. The Council serves as the voice of young New Yorkers to the State Commission on National and Community Service. *(NYS Youth Leadership and Service Council)*

Assessment/Evaluation Mapping

Youth are involved in research roles, either through identifying community needs by conducting a formal needs assessment and collecting data on community problems, or by evaluating the impact of programs and services.

- In the summer assessment project, young people identify a community problem to study, e.g., teen suicide, gangs, drug use; develop the survey; administer the survey; compile the collected data; analyze findings; make sense of the results; write reports; and present the findings. *(The North Crown Heights Partnership for Youth)*
- Young people played a critical role in helping the program evaluate a component that served homeless and street youth. Youth identified the sample (found study participants) and gathered the data by administering an interview to current and former participants. *(The Learning Web)*
- Youth voice workshop participants generate recommendations to help parents, schools, and communities prevent and address risk behaviors more effectively. *(At the Table)*
- Youth revised or "translated" the risk behavior surveys that the community was using to assess adolescent risk behaviors in order to obtain more accurate information. The young people asked the adults, "What do you want to know?" and then shaped the wording of the questions. *(Kids First Alliance)*

Communication/Public Relations

In this role, youth deliver the message to the community—they spread the word about programs, issues, and activities. This is a very effective method for reaching disaffected or disenfranchised youth. It can involve writing, speaking, distributing posters, or working with the media.

- The Street University (SU) of Youth Force is a resource and training center that provides information and referrals to connect youth involved in drug trafficking and sex work to education, employment, recreation, counseling, legal services, and other community supports. It also educates youth in community organizing and advocacy techniques. To reach all youth, including those homeless or disconnected from services, the Street Outreach Team mobilizes and provides services in non-traditional settings, including parks, public housing projects, prisons and detention centers, shelters, and on the streets. SU also provides training and outreach for the traditional school system and youth programs. Highly sought after for its expertise in youth-led community

organizing, SU has provided trainings to many organizations throughout the United States. *(Youth Force)*
- Youth produce a magazine for youth. They decide the content of the magazine based on their assessment of the needs, realities, and current issues and concerns of their peers. *(Youth Communications)*
- Through dramatization, youth raise awareness and provide education about issues affecting other teens. *(Youth Voices Theater Group)*
- Youth develop and deliver public service announcements and press releases, and write news articles. *(Kids First Alliance)*
- Youth work with adults to produce a newsletter, which is used as a recruiting tool. *(Nassau County Youth Board, Youth Adult Partnership Project)*
- Youth are involved with marketing and public relations so that local programs are supplied with brochures and literature to explain the initiative. A public relations firm makes its recommendations to the Youth Board for approval. Youth are responsible for the overall image and public "face" of the initiative. *(Reality Check)*
- Youth use peer pressure in a positive way, i.e., to exert peer influence, to recruit peers, to get a message out, to create fliers and develop outreach strategies. *(North Crown Heights Partnership for Youth)*
- Young people created and maintain a web site for the organization that serves communication and networking needs. *(IMPACT Coalition)*
- Youth conducted research on careers that they were interested in exploring. They then wrote letters to professionals involved in these careers or businesses (zoo, hair salon, glass museum, machine shop, sports teams, etc.) Many of these businesses sent replies or contacted the counselors and set up tours for the youth to come and explore careers first-hand. *(The Career Exploration Program)*

Education

In this role, youth serve as peer educators —or educate the larger community about youth issues and concerns. They are the ones delivering the training or workshop, providing the information, and presenting the material. *(The Career Exploration Program)*

- Youth provide accurate and up-to-date information on HIV and STD prevention through presentations, workshops, dramatizations, and educational skits. Education is carried out in classrooms and through community outreach, such as booths at fairs and community events. *(Teen AIDS Task Force)*
- Youth serve as peer educators on HIV/AIDS, diversity, youth/adult communication, relationships, sexuality, and other youth related topics. *(Nassau County Youth Board, Youth Adult Partnership Project)*
- Members engage in community education and public relations by presenting at training conferences and other speaking engagements. *(Youth Forum)*
- Youth provide theatrical presentations addressing youth issues in schools, confer-

ences, and agency-based workshops. *(Youth Voices Theatre Group)*
- Young people train other youth in debating skills. *(IMPACT Coalition)*
- At Street University a street outreach team takes information to the street, reaching youth who are homeless and/or disconnected from resources and support and who rely on street economies to survive. *(Youth Force)*

Service

Youth service, volunteerism, and service learning are common names for the utilization of youth as resources to the community. While service provision is most often conducted in a volunteer role, stipends, educational vouchers, and other forms of incentives are becoming more common. Service means addressing important needs or meaningful issues on an individual, family, or community basis. Examples of youth service include: painting a mural on an old building adjacent to a city park, supporting the elderly through lawn care or visitation, and cleaning up a community park.

- Youth identify an issue of importance, research the issue, and develop and implement a service learning project. *(Nassau County Youth Board, Youth Adult Partnership Project)*
- Peer support groups provide advocacy, mentoring, group discussion, and rap sessions. *(Westchester Youth Forum)*

Advocacy

In this role, youth act as agents of change, trying to influence policy and decision makers, mobilize their community to take action, and effect changes in systems that affect their lives.

- Youth Force members have initiated several campaigns aimed at strengthening resources and opportunities for young people in the South Bronx. These have included: organizing a community-led response to criminal justice that covered improving conditions and opportunities for detained and incarcerated youth, plus reducing the arrest and incarceration of youth in the South Bronx; mobilizing tenants and youth to protect, expand, and improve low-income housing; and mobilizing and politicizing youth to hold South Bronx government institutions and officials accountable. *(Youth Force)*
- Youth serve as change agents. They meet regularly to develop and implement strategies to achieve their goal of improving child welfare services for youth, and they meet with legal advisors and representatives from the child welfare system to help them explore, learn about, and facilitate change in policies that affect their lives. *(Voices of Youth)*
- Youth are trained in legislative advocacy on the state and local county levels. *(Nassau County Youth Board, Youth Adult Partnership Project)*
- Youth attend meetings with staff to speak

out on issues affecting their lives. They serve on the county youth employment board where they impact policy. Through this experience, youth develop public speaking and assertiveness skills, and learn how to use the system. *(Learning Web)*

- Through debate, youth develop public speaking skills and learn how to do research and think critically. They use knowledge to advocate for themselves and their community and become social activists. *(IMPACT Coalition)*
- Through youth-driven and adult-supported strategies addressing the tobacco industry, young people create ad campaigns, public relations events, and educational activities that expose big tobacco's intent to influence youth. *(Reality Check, Youth Empowerment Initiative)*

Consulting

Young people in the role of consultants advise and provide valuable feedback on meaningful community and organizational matters. For example, individuals, organizations, or communities may call upon young people to reflect on an issue or problem, review the way in which a program is or should be conducted, participate in the hiring process for a new staff person, or take part in the evaluation of a program.

- Young people are called upon by the community at different times to give input, feedback, and ideas. For example, some will seek advice on how an event should be organized so that teens will attend. This includes not only human service activities, but other community functions and events as well. In another example, youth were consulted on how to make an evaluation "kid friendly." *(Youth Advisory Board Opportunities)*
- Kidsultants serve as consultants in a unique field of expertise, being a "kid" in today's world. Kidsultants serve their individual communities in a variety of ways related to policy decision-making. Some focus on particular issues, such as the use of tobacco products. Kidsultants work with various levels of government, from the county level to regional and statewide efforts. *(Kids First Alliance)*

"Putting a concrete definition on the role of the Kidsultant has been very difficult for us to do because it's constantly changing. The issues in our schools and communities are constantly changing. What might be important for one Kidsultant, might not be for another. This is why our program is youth led and youth oriented. They are not told what to do, but rather asked for their opinions and input. They are treated as an equal in every aspect and in every situation. We feel that if the Kidsultants, and any other youth for that matter, have a voice in the things they do it gives them a sense of ownership and accomplishment. And that is where Youth Empowerment comes from!" (Kids First Alliance)

5

Recruiting and Involving Youth

Word of Mouth

By and large the most effective method for recruiting and involving young people is to have youth recruit other youth. This theme was voiced throughout the interviews. This is frequently carried out in "formal" ways, i.e., youth do presentations and workshops at agencies, programs, schools, or conferences and invite others to join. However, one of the most powerful methods for recruitment is "informal" word of mouth contact. In the words of one program, "The best tools are the kids, they are key." It was common for youth to bring their friends into their activity and program involvement.

- Recruitment occurs through outreach campaigns. This includes a team of youth doing street outreach to tell other youth about Youth Force, as well as workshops and organizing efforts in parks, public housing, prisons, detention centers, shelters, on the streets, in schools, and in more traditional youth programs. Recruiters may use skits or mock fights to capture the attention of youth in the community. *(Youth Force)*
- The Kids First Alliance held a big community event, a luau. In order to be admitted, each adult had to invite and bring a young person to this event. Additionally, Youth Empowerment Specialists were hired to travel throughout the county to schools and community-based organizations in an effort to invite a diverse cross-section of the young people to participate in programming. *(Kids First Alliance)*

> *"It's all about developing relationships and trust. We provide youth with opportunities—a dance, a project, or a place to hang out." (Kids First Alliance)*

- Nassau County Youth Board looks for young people who want to make a difference. Much of the recruiting is by word of mouth. *(Nassau County Youth Board, Youth Adult Partnership Project)*

> *"We do tons of presentations, we are always recruiting, always bring applications. We tell youth about our program—we are a community service learning program—and we are very interactive. We tell them that 'this could be yours,' and we describe the*

work we do. We ask them: 'Is your voice heard as a youth? This is what we have to offer. You can have a voice.' We are flexible. We allow them to create programs." (Nassau County Youth Board, Youth Adult Partnership Project)

Referrals

Referrals continue to be a traditional and popular method for recruitment. Referrals could come from agencies, networks, police, courts, and various youth service systems.

- Families whose children have previously participated send youth. *(Nassau County Youth Board, Youth Adult Partnership Project)*
- Schools are a big referral source for this project. *(Career Exploration Program)*

Publications/ Media

- Advertisements in the classified section of the newspaper, i.e., a job description in the want ads, are used to recruit youth. *(Kids First Alliance)*
- Young people create fliers and post them everywhere—on the street, stores, shops, schools. *(Crown Heights Partnership for Youth)*
- Fliers are posted in key community locations and sent to agencies. *(Youth Forum)*
- Four youth put together a recruitment video (five-minute piece) to encourage program participation. *(IMPACT Coalition)*

"Youth become involved first as readers in the New York City area who are intrigued by the idea of writing. It is a self-selection process that is enhanced by each issue inviting new youth to become involved." (Youth Communications)

Schools

- Staff work with classroom teachers to recruit youth participants. They contact classroom teachers who agree to offer students an option for a class project whereby participation in Youth Advisory Board Opportunities for five to six months counts for credit. *(Youth Advisory Board Opportunities)*
- The program staffs an office in several schools during the school year and staff are a visible presence. *(Learning Web)*

Minigrants

- Young people write a proposal and receive money to do various projects. Each project offers an opportunity to develop new relationships and connect with kids. *(Kids First Alliance)*
- The teen theater group administers an annual minigrant program which funds other youth groups that develop community assets. *(Youth Voices Theatre Group)*

Nominations

- Candidates to this project are sponsored by organizations or coalitions where an individuals have demonstrated their leadership ability and good character through community involvement and the promotion of youth development. At the time of application, candidates must be between the ages of 14-20. The sponsoring organization should have a network on the city, county, state, or national level. One goal of the New York State Youth Leadership and Service Council (YLSC) is to link existing networks together to increase the cooperation among organizations to mutually promote the cause of youth development. *(New York State Youth Leadership and Service Council)*

Other Useful Strategies

- Youth Advisory Board Opportunities (YABO) representatives went to already existing groups of teens and requested that two kids from each of the groups participate. They described what their program was about. *(YABO)*

> *"Limiting it to just two kids made it kind of exciting and people wanted to do it because it was so limited." (YABO)*

- Youth are introduced to the program as a peer support, peer-run program where youth with common experiences can come together, support each other, socialize, and educate themselves and others. *(Youth Forum)*

Strategies for Recruiting "Hard-to-Reach" Youth

Involving youth is a challenge, especially trying to reach disenfranchised sections of the youth population. The following strategies were identified as particularly useful for engaging hard-to-reach youth:

1. ***Recruit from alternative settings: go where the kids are, e.g., children's homes, inner city clubs, etc.***
2. ***Don't give up on trying to be diverse: keep going back, this is not a one time thing, be persistent.***
3. ***Model your diversity: don't bring the superstars when you give presentations or workshops.***
4. ***Identify key peer group leaders, establish relationships, and build trust.***

- Learning Web staff are trained and expected to spend time in the community where they will meet youth (on the streets and in other areas where young people congregate). They are expected to chat with the youth they know, which results in their acceptance among youth in general and can lead to non-program youth asking for services. Staff do frequent home visits and arrange recreational activities that are open to program youth, their partners, friends, and family. For example, they host a Dinner Club at program youth's homes where young people host, plan, and prepare a meal for program participants, their children, friends, and families. This provides another venue for the staff to meet young people in a relaxed social atmosphere on the "youth's turf." ●

6

Sustaining Youth Involvement

Incentives for Sustaining Youth Involvement

External

A number of concrete incentives were mentioned repeatedly as effective in sustaining youth involvement including the following:

1. Food is a big one—serve at all events
2. Stipend, money, or paid position
3. School or course credit
4. Scholarships
5. Trips, e.g., college awareness program offering overnight visits
6. Laptop computers
7. Social events
8. Awards ceremony: trophies given to participants

Internal

Although external factors might draw youth into participation, what sustains their involvement may have more to do with the following intrinsic factors:

1. Making a difference to your community
2. Hanging out in a safe, nurturing environment
3. Enjoying the opportunity to have fun
4. Having options and opportunities, and learning new skills
5. Getting support from peers and caring adults
6. Feeling connected: experiencing a sense of belonging, an extended family
7. Being valued by others: finding self-worth
8. Making decisions, running an event, feeling ownership
9. Experiencing success, accomplishment, recognition

Examples

- Incentives include school credit, scholarships, the satisfaction of seeing your words and thoughts in print, and the feeling for many youth that by telling their story they can help others. The informal setting at the office feels like a family for many youth who feel they have a place and a vehicle for safe expression. Although Youth Communications has experimented with other more traditional incentives like money and food, the true incentive continues to be the process of writing and the publication itself. *(Youth Communication)*
- Incentives include food, socialization, the opportunity to reconnect and network with youth who have shared similar experiences, and the fact that it is an extended family outside the home. *(Youth Forum)*

—"We don't have to use incentives because it is presented as an opportunity for them to impact what they have to offer. Young people want an opportunity to make a difference. They don't know what they have to offer until given the opportunity to do so."
—"We let young people know that we work for them; we are invested in them."
—"The fundamental thing is cohesiveness. It the sense of connectedness that keeps youth and adults engaged in process." (Nassau Youth Board)

—"Although the Kidsultants get paid $500 a year, the money is the least incentive. How you feel when you make magic happen—when adults let you make it happen—that's what keeps kids involved." (Kids First Alliance)
—"Most kids like 'chillin' here because they feel safe; they like what we're doing and it's like a family." (Youth Force)

- Youth remain involved because they are provided with a variety of opportunities and experiences that meet their needs. The program's inherent flexibility and capacity to grow with its youth members helps to sustain its youth involvement. *(Youth Communication)*
- Once youth become involved with Youth Forum the activities speak for themselves. Youth describe a sense of belonging that is enhanced through the use of a buddy system. Most youth stay involved for three to six years. Members provide outreach and follow-up with youth who have not returned. They try to learn why they did not return and if there is anything they can do either on an individual or programmatic basis. *(Youth Forum)*
- Youth remain involved in Voices of Youth because they feel cared about and respected. They feel a sense of control about their lives, and an opportunity to take action that can positively affect their lives. They feel that they can make a difference and change the system. Youth also describe feeling connected to other youth whom they share common experiences with. They feel they

are growing personally and building skills that will help them in the future. *(Voices of Youth Theatre Group)*

- Youth feel they are making a difference —things are actually happening and there is the opportunity to be visible and to be heard. *(Youth Advisory Board Opportunities)*

> *"It is their program, they say what is needed ('This is what I want to do.'), they put themselves into it, and they develop ownership over it." (Youth Advisory Board Opportunities)*

- We celebrate milestones along the way —all steps are celebrated. *(Nassau County Youth Board)*
- Young people need to organize opportunities to socialize in a positive way. For example, organizing a dance or party can have a huge pay-off. Young people can become so energized by the event that, that in itself is the incentive. For young people, the opportunity to socialize spills over into other things we do. They want to be involved in other aspects of the program. *(Crown Heights Partnership for Youth)*
- The "learning agreement" is a central component of our work. Staff are trained to prepare young people. There is an initial trial period of the apprenticeship, when both the young person and the adult can get a feel for it. Then there is a three-way meeting to plan out a blueprint for the learning experience, for the apprentice, the mentor, and the staff person. Once everybody gets their hands wet (initial trial period), we sit down as a group. The young person states his/her goals, the mentor states his/her goals; and the young person talks about what specific things s/he wants to get out of the experience. The mentor can also have input as to what s/he wants to gain. Expectations are shared. The young person states his/her expectations of the adult mentor (This is very unusual. Kids aren't used to stating their expectations for the adults in their lives, 'As a worker, I expect certain things from my mentor'). This is an important teaching experience/ tool. It teaches young people that it's OK to have expectations of adults and have a role in creating a learning experience. There is a labor exchange set up, that is negotiated, reviewed, and signed. *(Learning Web)*
- Self-worth regarding the role they play at the site, "I'm a part of this" regardless of the menial nature of job—having a role matters. For some young people, this is the only place where they can experience themselves positively, where other adults value them. Many continue to volunteer after the money ends. *(Learning Web)* ●

7

Developing and Preparing Youth and Adults

The organizations and agencies in this study had a number of things in common, but three central themes were identified that have clear implications for development and preparation.

1. Learning how to share power between adults and youth.

When considering youth engagement and voice, the most consistent theme in the literature and/or when reviewing current programs is the concept of "sharing power." This will mean different things to different people, but questions for adults include:

- To what extent are we as adults—really—aware of the opinions of youth in the matter we are considering?
- *To what extent have we—really—considered youth opinions in this decision?*
- Does this decision clearly reflect dialogue and discussion with youth?
- Can we identify mechanisms in our agency which assure meaningful youth involvement in decision-making and planning?

2. Providing critical information to young people so they can make informed decisions.

This point is about the issue of preparation. Involving youth in decision-making without proper preparation is counter-productive to the goals of youth engagement and voice. This is one example of how involving youth takes time. Questions for adults include:

- What information is necessary to prepare youth adequately for the discussion that will take place?
- What norms or unwritten policies are in place that youth should be aware of, i.e., how does business actually get done with this group?

3. Clarifying organizational boundaries.

All organizations, agencies, and formal systems have boundaries (it is not productive to pretend they don't exist), and if young

people are to be truly involved, the boundaries or "limits" must be explained and shared as a standard part of the development and preparation process.

Development and preparation of staff and youth were done in several ways, and involved a wide range of time commitments.

Means of Preparation and Development

Educational workshops, trainings, and orientation sessions were mentioned most often as the vehicle of preparation and development. These programs ranged from a three-hour orientation session, to a six-week training program, to ongoing, monthly skill development trainings. Training was conducted internally as well as by outside sources. Other methods for preparation and development included:

- *Team building activities*
- *Supervision from adult staff*
- *Presenting at/attending conferences*
- *Participating on county committees*
- *Serving on boards with adults*
- *Decision-making*
- *Informal reading about asset development*
- *Career exploration through apprenticeship/mentoring*

8

Logistics of Involving Youth

One of the frequently discussed barriers to youth involvement involves logistics, i.e., making arrangements so that youth can participate. Most adults hold their meetings during the work day, which excludes youth involvement given young people's school schedules and commitments. Here are a few strategies that have been found to be effective means of involving youth. ●

Strategies for Involving Youth

1. *Select a building in an accessible, convenient location.*
2. *Keep the building open in the afternoons and evenings until 8:00 p.m..*
3. *Schedule activities in the late afternoon, evenings, and/or weekends.*
4. *Provide a van for transporting youth.*
5. *Rent a limo for transporting kids to special events.*
6. *Give kids a "metro card" to enable them to use city transportation.*
7. *Ask adult volunteers to drive youth to meetings.*
8. *Conduct activities through the school, on parent nights, etc.*
9. *Operate the program in the summer only.*
10. *Allow youth to decide when and where meetings will take place.*
11. *Hold meetings during class time, if the classroom teacher has taken on the project as part of class work.*
12. *Keep meetings short and concise (youths' time is more limited than adults').*
13. *Fit meetings between school and sports/ extracurricular activities.*
14. *Have sufficient numbers involved to minimize the effects of absenteeism.*

9

Adult Staffing

We asked our respondents to tell us who they hired to encourage youth voice, and what kinds of characteristics and qualities they look for when hiring staff to do this kind of work. The table below summarizes these attributes and includes personal characteristics, skills, and interpersonal styles.

According to the Teen Aids Task Force, the following are qualities that make effective youth workers: adults who are flexible, open-minded, can work "off the cuff," are good at multi-tasking, like kids, and have a good sense of humor.

In a recent study, a sample of 8th and 9th graders who participated in youth development programs defined qualities of adults that make them effective youth workers. These 67 youth felt that adults who could "relate to youth" make the most effective youth workers. According to these young people, youth worker knowledge ("what they know") is much less important than how they treat and interact with youth.

These findings contrast with current models for training youth workers that focus on building youth worker knowledge, not on building interpersonal relationship competencies *(Bowen, 2002)*.

Table 2. Desirable Attributes of Adult Staff

CHARACTERISTICS	SKILLS	HOW THEY TREAT YOUTH
Open, nonjudgmental	Well organized	Relates well, connects with youth
Enthusiastic, passionate	Good at networking	Views youth as partners
Team player	Good at time management	Supports, facilitates
Secure: allows youth		Motivates youth to do/be their best
to take control		Believes in youth
Flexible		Is responsive, not prescriptive
Good judgment		Follows through on promises

Adult Staffing Models

In reviewing the nineteen projects, three key strategies or procedures for hiring adults emerged:

1. ***Youth play a key role in the hiring of adults in the project.*** Youth serve on a hiring committee with adults and have decision-making power in the hiring process. The youth look for adults who relate well to them, who will support them and back them up, and who have good organizational skills.

A majority of the projects used one or both of the two following strategies to hire their adult staff. In these strategies youth do not participate directly in the hiring, but they offer opinions about the qualities they would like in the adults they will be working with.

2. ***Adults who have explicit experience in empowering youth are hired.*** These projects specifically mentioned looking for adults who strive to empower youth, treat youth as partners, and/or motivate youth to do their best.

3. ***Adults who have experience working with youth and have certain desirable traits are hired.*** These projects stated that they hired adults who were educated about youth, had previous experience working with youth, and/or had certain desirable traits, such as flexibility and a good sense of humor, and liked kids. They also looked for adults who could "connect" with kids; who used E-mail, were young themselves, and were non-judgmental. ●

10

Benefits/Impact

Research has demonstrated that involving young people in decision-making has important positive outcomes for youth *(Roth et al, 1998)*. A recent study indicates that adults and organizations also benefit from youth involvement *(Zeldin et al, 2001)*. Benefits to communities have yet to be fully explored. Here are some of the perceived benefits gleaned from this study.

Who Benefits from Youth Voice?

Youth
Adults
Program/Organization
Community

Benefits for Youth

1. ***Increased knowledge and acquisition of new information about their communities and the world.***

> *—"Young people felt that they had become more aware of their own community….its laws, its people, its youth, and what they need. They feel that education works in both directions: they educate the community and are educated by it." (Youth Force)*

- Kids are educated and are less at risk of contracting the AIDS virus. They have greater ability to make informed decisions. Kids will listen more to teens than to adults. Kids can be positive role models for their peers. Also for themselves, they benefited from learning so much about so many important things. They felt good getting the message out. *(Teen AIDS Task Force)*

Benefits for Youth, cont.

2. ***Skill acquisition in public speaking, writing, reading, fundraising, decision-making, advocacy, and presentation delivery.***

—"Youth writers benefit as they are trained in journalism and related skills and have their work published." (Youth Communications)
—"The skills they learn here give them the power to see themselves and their community in a new way. They learn to be social activists and advocates, they learn to fight for their rights." (IMPACT Coalition)
—"Youth Forum has given my life purpose…what I want to accomplish. It has helped me to know myself and understand how to get what I want, how to approach people and get them to listen to me. I've learned how to make connections with professionals, governments, agencies, and corporations." (Youth Forum)
—"These youth have been clients, objects of the service system for many years. They learn how to access services, how to become their own advocates, and eventually learn that they don't need services." (Learning Web Youth Outreach)

- Young people learn valuable job and life skills which empower them through increased self-awareness and self-esteem to make a successful transition to the world of adult roles and responsibilities. *(Learning Web)*

3. ***Enhanced self-concept.***

—"It has given me increased self-esteem. It has made me see that I have many possibilities. Wherever I go, everybody knows my name. This feels good. I have a sense of accomplishment because I am having an impact on decision makers for children's mental health. I don't want other kids to go through what I went through."(Youth Forum)
—"Youth Forum has helped me with my own mental growth. It has opened my mind. It has made me less judgmental about people and given me a more positive attitude about facing adversity." (Youth Forum)

—"We have seen youth walk in shy and withdrawn. The more they learn, the more confident they get. Self-esteem grows, they become confident. Once they get comfortable talking, we see them become proud of our group." (Youth Advisory Board Opportunities)
—"We see a huge transformation in how youth express themselves and view themselves as making a difference. 'What I do matters.' This gets incorporated into who they are and their sense of self." (IMPACT Coalition)
—"Youth are more self-confident. Their experiences have given them a sense of direction." (Teen AIDS Task Force)

4. Mastery: self-efficacy, success, and a sense of accomplishment.

—"The young people feel that the primary benefit to them is that their voice is heard and taken seriously. They feel empowered by being able to take action in response to the concerns of their peers." (Westchester Youth Forum)
—"They know they can make a difference. When they see some change, they believe they can do anything. They begin to believe in themselves." (Nassau County Youth Board)
—"If you have a shy young person who doesn't want to participate, but by end of year is giving speeches in front of 150 people—that is POWER. What they put in, they get out 10-fold." (Nassau County Youth Board)
—"Youth enjoy learning—and they get what they want—feeling successful, feeling effective, not just marking time." (Learning Web)

Benefits for Adults

1. Perception of youth as leaders and contributors.

- The program helps change the way many adults view young people. Where in the past youth may have been perceived as incompetent and troubled, those involved with Youth Force are seen in a positive light, as leaders, contributing to and improving their community. *(Youth Force)*

Benefits for Adults, cont.

- Youth felt that their involvement helps to change and improve peoples' images of teens. *(Teen AIDS Task Force)*
- Adults view young people as an important resource, and value and recognize their contributions. *(NYS Youth Leadership and Service Council)*

2. Enhanced communication between adults and kids.

> *—"Both writers and readers benefit through the exchange of ideas and reflections in an environment where youth voice is often marginalized. The publications encourage teens and adults who work with youth to use the magazines to communicate on topics that might not readily emerge." (Youth Communications)*

3. Parents know their kids are safe.

- Participants feel that their families benefit by knowing that their teens are in a safe environment that will encourage healthy behavior and provide parents with some peace of mind and respite. *(Westchester Youth Forum)*

4. Parents report that young people are easier to live with.

> *—"When an apprenticeship goes well, the family sees growth in young people, who often demonstrate increased self-esteem, responsibility, and mood improvement. Young people bring home a new sense of their self-worth, are easier to live with, and can feel proud." (Learning Web)*

5. Adults have reassessed their roles in working with youth.

- Adults need to be more patient and work behind the scenes while the young person takes the lead. *(At the Table)*

Benefits for Program / Organization

1. ***More effective, relevant programs: fund programs that work.***

> *—"It's a matter of cost effectiveness. If you are going to fund a new activity or implement a new curriculum, chances are if you make decisions at an adult level, you will do something that doesn't work. Logically, it makes sense if you want to do something new for kids, get kids involved." (Kids First Alliance)*
> *—"Always have a relevant program, always changing with the times and with what kids need." (Learning Web)*
> *—"For the community, you can't beat having teen involvement. I've seen so many times where people have said, we should do this that and the other thing—but that is our agenda, not what the kids wanted. By asking the teens, you are getting exactly what you should be doing." (Youth Advisory Board Opportunities)*

2. ***Engage more of target population and community at large.***

> *—"You have more effective programs and engage more of the target population and community at large." (Crown Heights Partnership for Youth)*

3. ***Changed attitudes of staff and decision-makers.***

- Youth serve to enlighten educators, parents, professionals, and decision-makers regarding realities of life for youth in New York City. *(Youth Communication)*
- There is a change in attitudes of staff and decision-makers in the child welfare system. Child welfare staff are better informed regarding the real needs and realities of youth in the system. Youth are humanized and staff are better able to develop relationships with other youth in care. *(Voices of Youth)*

Benefits for Program / Organization cont.

4. ***Energizes staff.***

—"There are many benefits for our staff. We have new young people each year—which makes it exciting. Energy continues to flow. There are always new things going on. It also keeps us in check, Are we doing a good job? How can you have a youth program without youth? It makes what we do at Youth Board real." (Nassau County Youth Board)
—"Staff feel good they have been part of helping young people experience something not routine—individualized—that they can respond to each kid. Sometimes kids have interests beyond what parents can provide, e.g., a kid who wanted to build stereo speakers got hooked up with an electrical engineer at Cornell University who shared that passion." (Learning Web)

5. ***Prevents future placements.***

—"The youth feel that the agency benefits because they are providing a unique service that may prevent future placement. It shows that the agency believes in the philosophy of ensuring that services are appropriate and effective; that they are concerned with understanding how their services affect young people. The youth feel that their needs and ideas are valued by the agency." (Youth Forum)

Benefits for Community

1. ***Safety.***

—"As a result of Youth Force there are fewer young people on the streets doing nothing or getting into trouble." (Youth Force)
—"Youth have a safe place to do healthy things." (Westchester Youth Forum)

Benefits for Community

2. ***Increased knowledge of young people.***

   —"Youth become ambassadors—touching the system of services, creating policy and affecting decision-making." (Nassau County Youth Board)

3. ***Enhanced understanding of community needs.***

   —"As a result of this, we have improved curricula and services offered to youth and families in our community."

4. ***Community development.***

   —"Bonds are created when youth and adults form partnerships and work together to plan programs, activities, and events that strengthen their communities." ●

11

Lessons Learned

The following "Lessons Learned" section is an effort to capture a selected grouping of important issues to be considered when initiating or strengthening a youth voice emphasis or mechanism in a youth development program. The term youth voice means intentionally creating meaningful ways for young people to have input and decision-making authority in programs, events, initiatives, or public policy matters. The term assumes a commitment by adults to maintain a sense of equality in youth and adult interactions.

The purposes for creating youth voice mechanisms can be varied, ranging for example, from the specific purpose of "gains in cognitive development through analysis and rationale decision-making" to "strengthening the community by creating policies which support positive youth development." Many of the organizations in the study clearly operate with both purposes. There has been some initial research that suggests gains for both the adults and the organization as well (*Zeldin*, *McDaniel*, *Topitzes*, *Calvert*, *2000*). It is important to spend time thinking about the purpose for creating youth voice because establishing a youth voice emphasis will require different strategies depending on the intended outcome.

Three Important Questions

Whether your organization has a long history of commitment and action to youth voice, or is only now looking at ways to encourage the establishment of influential roles and responsibilities for young people, three important questions to ask are:

1. *Where are we currently on the continuum, what does youth voice look like now?*
2. *Where do we want to be? What would it look like if we successfully strengthened youth voice in the future?*
3. *What do we need to do to get there? What are the barriers and resources?*

Lessons Learned

1. ***Make one or more staff responsible for setting up a youth voice initiative. For organizations unaccustomed to the youth voice approach, creating a youth voice emphasis is like creating a new program.***

   One or more staff people will need to share leadership with youth to develop this emphasis. It needs to be someone's specific job responsibility, at least initially. It is well established that training and preparation are required if young people are to have meaningful roles on boards and committees. In addition to training and preparation, a mechanism for ongoing reflection on the part of youth will strengthen the youth voice emphasis in organizations and communities. Set aside time to meet with youth to talk about what they are observing and what they think about it.

2. ***Directly address adult attitudes through training, reflection, and discussion.***

   Many of the agencies in the study stressed the need to address adult attitudes such as the need to take youth seriously, be open-minded, and be willing to give up control. This is a constant challenge even for organizations that have considerable experience in working with young people. Planning for in-service training and ongoing reflection and discussion of "how are we doing?" will ensure that the critical issue of adult attitudes continues to be a priority.

3. ***Use the "50/50 Rule" with youth voice.***

   Education, policy making, planning, and the other serious benefits for involving youth in meaningful ways are important, but so are fun, entertainment, and casual relationships. Spend as much time on the latter as you do with the former.

4. ***Understand your program's current youth voice profile. Programs are at different places in the program development process with regard to involving youth in decision-making and meaningful involvement.***

   Some youth development programs are initiated with a youth voice

philosophy or approach while others don't make the decision to involve youth until the program has been operating for years. Be aware of where you are starting from. Are you strengthening an already established youth voice approach in your agency, and actually looking for creative ways to increase meaningful youth involvement? Are you basically starting from scratch and in need of laying organizational groundwork by promoting the concept through training and discussion with key decision-makers, board and committee members? Starting from scratch means ***first,*** creating a climate which supports increasing young people's influence on the organization.

5. ***Recognize that logistics, location, environment, and time will always play a key role in establishing youth voice.***

   Do meeting times accommodate school schedules? Do young people feel comfortable expressing themselves?

6. ***Consider current and future funding.***

   Having programs fail or stop because funding and resource development wasn't seriously considered initially is not only a mistake, but it's counter-productive for youth. Don't start something unless you're able to reasonably predict the duration. The longer the young person is in a program, engaged and challenged by an adult ally, the greater the developmental gains for that youth.

7. ***Consider the recruitment and targeting question up front.***

   The field of positive youth development is an inclusive field, it is meant to be for all youth. But this position creates a dilemma. Youth who have had discouraging school, family, or peer experiences may shy away from the image that an active youth voice presence conveys to organizations or communities. These, of course, are the young people who could benefit the most from involvement in program efforts that take them seriously. Spending time on planning strategies that ensure social, economic, and cultural diversity will give your organization and community efforts a real sense of integrity. ●

12

Appendix A: Respondents

APPENDIX A: Respondents To Youth Voice Survey [New York State]

Agency Name:	**ACT for Youth, Cornell Cooperative Extension of Jefferson County**
Address:	15 Empsall Plaza, Watertown, NY 13601
Phone:	315-788-8450
Date of interview:	9/20/01
Contact Person:	Kristy Crombie, ACT Coordinator
E-mail:	kac66@cornell.edu
Program Description:	ACT for Youth of Jefferson County organizes community councils across the county. The councils consist of youth and adults working together with the goal of increasing youth involvement in their communities and promoting positive youth development by increasing developmental assets for youth. Youth receive training and then run the council meetings, including making agendas, setting meeting times and dates, and suggesting activities they want for their community.

Agency Name:	**AIDS Community Resources; Teen AIDS Task Force**
Address:	627 West Genesee Street, Syracuse, NY 13204
Phone:	315-475-2430
Date of Interview:	8/3/01
Contact Person:	Donna Valerino
E-Mail:	www.aidscommunityresources.com
Project Description:	An adult sex educator who realized that sending adults to talk to youth about sex and AIDS did not work started the Teen AIDS Task Force 10 years ago. The Teen AIDS Task Force is part of AIDS Community Resources, a community based organization that produces information and provides education and direct services, referrals, and advocacy. The Teen AIDS Task Force focuses on youth educating and working

with their peers to reach those affected by HIV/AIDS. The program trains peer educators within high schools on HIV/AIDS. The peer educators then plan with other youth in their school about how to meet their goals. They work with an adult advisor and focus on educating and working with their peers to reach students affected by HIV/AIDS. The program started in one county and is now in 45 schools across central NY.

Agency Name:	**Asset Building Coalition**
Address:	70 Bunner Street, Oswego, NY 13126
Phone:	315-349-3451
Date of interview:	9/27/01
Contact Person:	Dawn Metott, County Youth Court Coordinator
E-mail:	dawn@oswegocounty.com
Program Description:	This Asset Building Coalition (ABC) program was developed by a group of seven young people who went to the Search Institute Conference in November, 2000 and decided to come back and implement the 40 Developmental Assets in their communities. Currently they have about 15 youth and 5 adults who sit on the team and they develop community service projects within the county of Oswego that focus on one or more of the assets.

Agency Name:	**At the Table, sponsored by Broome County 4-H, Cornell Cooperative Extension**
Address:	840 Upper Front Street, Binghamton, NY 13905
Phone:	607-772-8955, Fax: 607-723-5951
Date of Interview:	8/29/01
Contact Person:	Kay Telfer
E-Mail:	kct1@cornell.edu
Project Description:	At The Table grew out of an analysis of Broome County Teen Assessment Project (TAP) data. TAP surveyed youth in grades 7, 9, and 11, in 1993, 1996, and 1999, exploring both risk and protective factors. The 1999 results showed 25% of the 2700 participants as alienated from school and community. Alienation is linked to a variety of risk behaviors. Because community service and meaningful roles for youth are effective strategies to build attachment and reduce risk, At The Table was designed. A Leadership Team of 12 or more youth work with 6 or more adults in each of 2 school districts to plan

and implement a student conference with youth voice opportunities on issues of concern, and a community service project.

Agency Name:	**Community Counseling and Mediation Services**
Address	185 Montague Street, 9th floor, Brooklyn, NY 11201
Phone:	718-801-0666
Date of interview:	
Contact Person:	Marie Louis, Education and After School Services Director
E-mail:	mfl1272@hotmail.com
Program Description:	The North Crown Heights Partnership for Youth promotes the development of youth in general and adolescents in particular into empowered productive members of society. Dynamic peer-centered and service learning leadership projects engage and drive youth participation and development. Youth steward the implementation of project activities while project staff serve as advisors and facilitators to youth in this process.

Agency Name:	**IMPACT Coalition**
Address:	330 West 42nd Street, Suite 1510, NY, NY 10036
Phone:	(212) 702-0944 FAX (212) 471-8664
Date of Interview:	7/20/01
Contact Persons:	Will Baker, Executive Director
E-Mail:	impactcoalition@cs.c http://www.impactcoalition.org
Project Description:	Founded in 1991, IMPACT (Improving Mentor Practices and Communication Techniques) is a nonprofit, career-development organization dedicated to the empowerment of urban students through training in debate and workplace dynamics. The objectives of IMPACT are to encourage 1) Debating: trains urban students in competitive speech and debate; 2) Networking: volunteer professionals share their insights on career opportunities; and 3) Mentoring: Peer mentors with IMPACT training create an environment for success in business and academia. IMPACT targets young people who have traditionally failed in the system, especially, women, new immigrants, people of color and the poor. The program is in 40 schools and involves over 1200 students in the NYC area.

Agency Name:	**Kids First Alliance of Chautauqua**
Address:	50 Brigham Road-Suite A, Fredonia, NY 14063
Phone:	716672-4371
Date of interview:	8/24/01
Contact Person:	Lynn Delevan, Peggy, Ken
E-mail:	ldelevan@e2ccboces.wnyric.org
Program Description:	The Chautauqua County's Kid's First Alliance grew out of a three-year partnership between the Center for Social and Emotional Learning and the Chautauqua County Health Department. The vision of Kids First Alliance is to "grow" healthier neighborhoods through two components of community development: 1) human development focused on empowering youth and 2) community asset building. Public and private partnerships work together, exploring innovative ways to integrate policy setting, service delivery, and investment organized around outcomes that will strengthen individual resiliency and promote communal connectivity. This local initiative seeks to: prepare youth to assume roles as colleagues and allies with adults; change the culture surrounding youth to include them in policy and other decision-making processes; establish innovative approaches to youth development initiatives; advocate for policies and programs to reflect input from young people; strengthen relationships between adults and youth, youth and youth, and youth and their communities; create inter and intra-community level networks to enhance development through shared experiences; and refocus allocation of resources to support asset development

Agency Name:	**Learning Web**
Address:	515 West Seneca St., Ithaca, NY 14850
Phone:	607-275-0122
Date of interview:	9/19/01
Contact Person:	Mary Ann Lapinski, Executive Director and Sally Schwartzbach, Associate Director
E-mail:	maryann@learning-web.org, sally@learning-web.org
Program Description:	The Learning Web makes connections among schools, agencies, and businesses to provide young people with meaningful experiential opportunities. The core of the program is apprenticeship: helping young people explore career and vocational interests. The Learning Web provides a wide spectrum of programs to address the special

needs of populations, e.g. homeless youth, at risk, rural and urban youth. The Learning Web provides tours, job shadowing, apprenticeships, employment, and volunteer community service opportunities to over 700 young people annually.

Agency Name:	**Livingston County Office of Workforce Development**
Address:	6 Court St., Room 105, Geneseo, NY 14454
Phone:	585-243-7047
Date of Interview:	9/28/01
Contact Person:	Jennifer Duby, Career Counselor
E-Mail:	jduby@co.livingston.ny.us
Project Description:	The Career Exploration Program is an offshoot of the Summer Youth Employment Program, a subsidized summer work opportunity for income-eligible county youth. Through Career Exploration, the youth participants are able to experience the opportunities that are available once they enter the world of work. One exploration team was made up of 12 youth from 3 different communities in the county. Youth brainstormed different careers they were interested in, researched the careers, and composed business letters to area businesses in those fields requesting more information and asking about making a field trip to the business. Youth also participated in team building activities.

Agency Name:	**Nassau County Youth Board**
Address:	40 Main Street, Hempstead, NY 11550
Phone:	516-572-1396
Date of interview:	8/26/01
Contact Person:	Angela Zimmerman, administrator, office of program development; also participating: Florence, Kenneth, and Kimatha
E-mail:	azimmerman@mail.co.nassau.ny.us
Program Description:	The Youth Adult Participation Project (YAPP) was created in 1979 as a direct service of the Nassau County Youth Board. Through this community service learning initiative, a diverse group of 40 youth is convened, core competency training is provided, and a process is facilitated that empowers young people to identify issues and develop and implement a related project. Through the years, these Community Service Learning projects have included: youth speakouts, legislative advocacy, conferences, and recycling programs.

Agency Name:	**New York State Youth Leadership and Service Council**
Address:	52 Washington Street, Room 309 South, Rensselaer, NY 12144-2796
Phone:	518-473-8882
Date of interview:	
Contact Person:	John Clinton
E-mail:	john.clinton@dfa.state.ny.us
Program Description:	The New York State Youth Leadership and Service Council (YLSC) meets several times a year to discuss ways young people can mobilize communities by building partnerships with adults, enhancing communication with youth development organizations, and participating in community service activities. The Council serves as the voice of young New Yorkers to the State Commission on National and Community Service. Members of the YLSC are teens and young adults who have demonstrated their commitment to youth leadership development and are willing to work with others to influence policies that will have a positive impact on young people in New York.

Agency Name:	**Oswego County Youth Court Program**
Address:	70 Bunner Street, Oswego, NY 13126
Phone:	315-349-3451
Date of interview:	9/27/01
Contact Person:	Dawn Metott, County Youth Court Coordinator
E-mail:	dawn@oswegocounty.com
Program Description:	The Youth Court program is a Family Court diversion program. We train high school students to be members of the youth court. They must go through 20 hours of training; which includes lectures, activities, mock hearings, job shadowing, and an exam. After they complete their training they become permanent members of the court and serve as judges, attorneys, and court clerks. Our youth court model is a tribunal model where we have three youth judges, two youth district attorney's, two youth defense attorneys and one youth court clerk. The offenders who are referred to the youth court are between 7-15 years old, are first time offenders, and must plead guilty to the offense they are charged with. Our Youth Court is a sentencing court (we do not decide on guilt or innocence) and the offenders can receive a variety of sentences. Such sentences

can include community service hours (up to 70 hours), restitution, essays, letters of apology, projects, educational classes, and any other sentences deemed appropriate. The Oswego County Youth Court program accepts students from all of the county school districts to be members and an offender can be referred from anywhere in the county.

Agency Name:	**Voices of Youth**
Address:	224 West 29th Street, NY, NY 10001
Phone:	212-279-0708, Fax: 212-279-8856
Date of Interview:	7/12/01
Contact Person:	Jennifer Nelson
E-Mail:	voicesofyouth@aol.com
Project Description:	Voices of Youth is housed in Youth Communications. It was developed in response to the outrage many youth experienced while in the foster care system. Youth wanted to reform the system and provide a mechanism for youth voice. The mission of Voices of Youth is to make foster care a more supportive experience for teens so they are better prepared for the transition out of care. The strategy used is to integrate youth and their stories in training, curriculum planning, and agency operations. Training presentations can occur on a small level such as through agency-based workshops, or on a broader scale through presentations to larger audiences at conferences. Youth meet with legal advisors to help them explore, learn about, and facilitate change in policies that affect their lives. They also meet directly with representatives of New York City's Administration for Children's Services to work out improvements to the system.

Agency Name:	**Westchester Youth Forum**
Address:	1 Summit Ave., White Plains, NY
Phone:	914-948-8151, ext. 287
Date of Interview:	7/16/01
Contact Persons:	Claire Mackay
E-Mail:	vicndally@yahoo.com
Project Description:	Westchester Youth Forum grew out of an idea from a Families First conference where a group of youth presented their experiences as the recipients of services. Adult staff came back from that conference and organized a group of local youth who had received services. They were

asked to discuss the question of what works for youth transitioning from various out of home care settings. The Westchester Youth Forum serves as a peer run support program for youth ages 16-24. Peers at the Westchester Youth Forum strive to help each other and others by connecting youth to other youth through recreation, discussion groups and rap sessions with youth and adults, and providing feedback and making recommendations to adults on how to improve the systems that provide youth with services.

Agency Name:	**Youth Advisory Board Opportunities (YABO), Central New York Council on Adolescent Pregnancy (CNYCAP)**
Address:	Central Field Office, 217 S. Salina Street, Syracuse, NY 13202
Phone:	315-426-7761
Date of Interview:	9/18/01
Contact Person:	Bruce Hathaway, Regional Reality Checks Director
E-Mail:	beh03@health.state.ny.us
Project Description:	Youth Advisory Board Opportunities (YABO) was created in 2000, and was set up to provide interested agencies with youth opinions on a variety of topics. It originated from a program at Planned Parenthood that focused on issues related to sexuality. Currently there are 13 youth aged 13-18 involved. The goal is for youth to learn as much as they can about a variety of teen issues so that they can offer informed youth input to peers, adults, legislators, etc. They would like to expand to 20 youth, and increase the diversity of the youth on the board

Agency Name:	**Youth Communications**
Address:	224 West 29th Street, NY, NY 10001
Phone:	212-279-0708, Fax: 212-279-8856
Date of Interview:	7/12/01
Contact Person:	Keith Hefner
E-Mail:	www.youthcomm.org
Project Description:	Adults who recognized the therapeutic power of having youth write for one another founded Youth Communications in 1980. It provides a medium for youth to express what they are really thinking about issues that affect their lives such as condoms in the schools, homosexuality, and violence. The approach had the added benefit of developing the writing and self-expression skills of the youth

involved. Youth are trained in journalism and related skills and are provided with ongoing support and encouragement from the staff both individually and through writing workshops. Youth Communications helps teens develop their skills in reading, writing, thinking, and reflection so they can acquire the information they need to make thoughtful choices about their lives. Currently there are two magazines and eight books all written by youth for youth. *New Youth Communications* is a magazine for youth in the New York City area with a readership of over 200,000. *Foster Care Youth United* was founded in 1993 as a direct outgrowth of the success of New *Youth Communications*. The eight books contain many of the best articles from the two award-winning magazines.

Agency Name:	**Youth Empowerment Initiative, Department of Health**
Address:	Central Field Office, 217 S. Salina Street, Syracuse, NY 13202
Phone:	315-426-7761
Date of Interview:	9/18/01
Contact Person:	Bruce Hathaway, Regional Reality Checks Director
E-Mail:	beh03@health.state.ny.us
Project Description:	Youth Empowerment Reality Check began in 2000. There are programs in each NY county with an adult coordinator. The program is modeled after the Florida program. Youth have been involved from the beginning in planning, and each county has youth that serve with adults on the Statewide Board. Youth are involved in planning meetings and work in teams with adults. The focus is to educate peers about media literacy with regard to tobacco advertising. Social events are planned as a way to get youth together. Currently, the smallest county group has 25 members.

Agency Name:	**Youth Force**
Address:	320 Jackson Ave., South Bronx, NY, NY 10454
Phone:	718-665-4269, Fax: 718-665-4279
Date of Interview:	7/20/01
Contact Persons:	Kim Barber
E-Mail:	the person you wanna reach@youthforcenyc.org
Project Description:	Youth Force was started in 1994 as a center to support youth-led organizing and advocacy in the South Bronx. Youth Force was founded by youth traditionally excluded from leadership opportunities who felt that at the time there was nothing available for them.

The mission of Youth Force, in the words of its youth and adult founders, "is to school young people to the fact that we are not powerless, we should be seen and heard, and we have the ability and right to act for change. We are committed to giving ourselves and other youth the skills and opportunities we need and deserve to participate in the running of our schools, neighborhoods, and city." Currently, a staff of 15-20 youth and 4 adults supports Youth Force efforts and activities. There is a membership of approximately 2000 youth.

Agency Name:	**Youth Voices Theatre Group, Cornell Cooperative Extension of Jefferson County**
Address:	15 Empsall Plaza, Watertown, NY 13601
Phone:	315-788-8450
Date of interview:	9/20/01
Contact Person:	Angela Newman, Extension Educator
E-mail:	an42@cornell.edu
Program Description:	The Youth Voices Theatre Group is a diverse, countywide ensemble dedicated to youth risk education and prevention. Actors range in age from 14-17, and are from all over Jefferson County. The actors write, produce, and perform their own original material dealing with contemporary teen issues like tobacco cessation, sexuality, and abstinence and sexual harassment. The Youth Voices Theatre Group presents its program to schools, youth groups, and organizations that wish to learn more about teen issues today ●

Appendix B: Interview Tool

Youth Voice Survey: New York State
Department of Human Development, Cornell Cooperative Extension, Family Life Development Center, ACT Center of Excellence
Cornell University, Ithaca, New York

Interviewer_____
Name of Agency Contacted _____
Address _____
Phone _____ Date of Contact _____
Person Contacted (Name And Position Title) _____
Phone And E-mail
_____

I. Describe the Program

1. Tell me about your program; describe the work you do.
2. Describe the community setting (geographic area, neighborhood, school district).

II. Roles for Youth: How Are Youth Involved?

1. What does youth voice look like in your agency? (Use the following as probes, but determine which most accurately describe the nature of youth voice/youth involvement in the agency:
   - Governance (boards, policy committees, etc.)
   - Design, Development, Planning (programs, services, activities)
   - Assessment/Evaluation/Mapping (finding out needs of community, evaluating programs, mapping of services)
   - Communication/ Public Relations (getting word out to larger community about efforts or programs)
   - Education (peer education or education for larger community about youth involvement)
   - Service (e.g., peer counseling, youth involvement in provision of services)
   - Other (describe)
2. On a scale of 0-10 (0=no youth voice involvement; 10=complete decision-making authority by youth) please rate the level of influence (meaningfulness) of youth voice on your agency or program. Rating_____
   What would you like it to be in the future? Rating_____
   What would need to happen to get from the first rating to the second?

III. History of Youth Involvement

1. How has youth involvement changed over time?
2. Has it always been a part of your program or did you make a shift, and initiate a youth voice effort?
3. If so, how did you do this?

IV. Process for Recruiting and Involving Youth

1. Who are the youth that get involved in this youth voice focus? (demographics: are they clients, members, community youth)
2. How do you recruit youth?
3. Do you intentionally make an effort to involve hard to reach, special needs or higher risk youth?
4. What do you tell youth about what you are asking them to do? How do you introduce it?
5. Do you use any types of incentives which you find to be effective?

V. Sustaining Youth Involvement

1. What methods/strategies do you use to sustain, maintain, keep youth involved once they have been recruited?
   Probes:
   - How long do kids typically stay involved?
   - Estimate the percent of kids that stay involved
   - What are the reasons kids drop out?
   - What are the reasons kids stay?
   - Do you ever have kids who leave and come back? what propels them to do that?

VI. Development and Preparation

1. Is there a formal process you go through to prepare youth? e.g., training?
2. What does it look like? Who is involved?
3. Is there ongoing development/support to help young people through increased levels of involvement and responsibility? Do you do anything to help them move to increasingly more complex, demanding, and visible levels of participation and involvement? (e.g., moving from local to statewide to national involvement)

VII. Logistics of Involving Youth

- Location/place
- Time: When are meetings held?
- General accessibility for both youth and adults

VIII. Adult Staffing

1. Who do you hire to do this work?
2. Do you intentionally hire staff to work with youth around encouraging youth voice?
3. If so, how do you recruit staff? What characteristics do you look for? What are effective qualities of someone who does this work well?
4. How do you train and develop staff?
5. How much more staff/program/funding or other resources does it take to do this work well?

IX. Benefits/Impact

1. Does it make a difference? What do you see as major benefits of incorporating a youth voice focus in your agency?
   Probe benefits for:
   - Youth
   - Families
   - Staff
   - Agencies
   - Organization
   - Community
2. Any evaluation of this effort?
3. Have there been any drawbacks to youth involvement?
4. What have been the barriers to involving youth in your organization? How have you overcome them?

X. Lessons Learned

1. What do you consider to be the key lessons learned in establishing a youth voice component in your agency? ●

Appendix C: Resources

References

Bowen, K. (2002) Preliminary Concept Mapping Conclusions: Advancing Youth Development Training Evaluation 4th Quarter Report Bowen's Evaluation and Consulting Services, Inc.

Roth, J., Brooks-Gunn, J, Murray, L., and Foster, W. (1998) Promoting Healthy Adolescents: Synthesis of Youth Development Program Evaluations. Journal of Research on Adolescence, 8(4), 423-459.

Zeldin, S., Kusgen McDaniel, A., Topitzes, D., and Calvert, M. (2000) Youth in Decision-Making: A Study on the Impacts of Youth on Adults and Organizations, University of Wisconsin-Madison. Available on the web at http://www.theinnovationcenter.org

Key Web Sites for Youth Engagement and Voice

Activism 2000 Project
www.youthactivism.com

Center for Youth as Resources
http://www.yar.org/

Innovation Center for Community and Youth Development
www.theinnovationcenter.org

National Service Resource Center
http://www.etr.org/nsrc/

Search Institute
http://www.search-institute.org/

Youth Leadership Institute
http://www.yli.org/home.htm

Youth on Board
www.youthonboard.org