YOUTH INVOLVEMENT
in Evaluation & Research

The Harvard Family Research Project's (HFRP) Issues and Opportunities in Out-of-School Time Evaluation *briefs are short, user-friendly documents that highlight current research and evaluation work in the out-of-school time field. These documents draw on HFRP's research work in out-of-school time in order to provide practitioners, funders, evaluators, and policymakers with information to help inform their work. This first brief,* Youth Involvement in Evaluation and Research, *is the culmination of information collected in the year 2000 with representatives of 15 programs[1] that are involving youth in their evaluation and research efforts.*

Why Involve Youth in Evaluation and Research?

How can after school programs attract older youth and keep them interested enough to come back? Program models and activities that work well with younger kids may flop with older youth who are becoming accustomed to making their own decisions, determining their own direction and priorities, and looking to affect change in their own lives and communities. Competing with the benefits that even the most tedious teen jobs can offer—the money and the opportunity to take on new responsibilities and meet new people—is a major challenge for after school programs that are interested in providing services for older youth. To address these challenges, a growing number of after school and other youth development programs are trying a new strategy to engage older youth: they are involving them in research and evaluation projects related to the design and implementation of youth programming.

Youth participation in evaluation is a process of involving young people in assessing community programs that affect their lives. It is not "token" involvement, but active engagement where youth have real influence in decisions. Increasingly, after school programs, youth development initiatives, and community organizations are taking this new approach to research and evaluation. Programs are realizing that involving youth in evaluation and research about the programs in which they participate serves multiple purposes. These purposes include:

- Enhancing the individual development of youth and encouraging their active involvement in the decisions that affect their lives.
- Contributing to organizational development and capacity building.
- Providing youth with the opportunity to create real community change.[2]

HFRP's *Understanding Youth as Researchers* Project

Given the increased interest in and importance of involving youth as researchers, HFRP staff conducted a set of focus groups with representatives from 14 youth serving organizations nationwide in order to learn more about what it means to involve youth in evaluation and research work. The HFRP team conducted four adult telephone focus groups with 3–5 participants each (a total of 15 adult participants), several individual interviews, and three youth telephone focus groups, with 3–4 participants each (for a total of 10 youth participants).

This brief brings together information from these participants to answer three questions:

1. Who is involved in youth as researcher projects?
2. How do youth as researcher projects involve youth?
3. What are the key elements of successful youth-involved research and evaluation projects?

The brief concludes with a discussion of the influence of organizational cultures on youth-involved research projects.

> I think every teen should be involved in some sort of thing. Something outside of school that helps their community. 'Cause not only does it make you feel good about yourself, but it helps you a lot down the line, and it makes people give you a lot of respect.
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> —*Youth focus group participant*

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[1] One of the organizations has gone through major changes since the time of the focus groups and has asked that their organization's description not be used.

[2] After School Evaluation Symposium. (June 2001). Barry Checkoway, Director of the Edward Ginsberg Center for Community Service and Learning at the University of Michigan, presenter at Symposium.

1 Who Is Involved in Youth as Researcher Projects?

The Programs. While not comprehensive or even necessarily representative, the 14 programs and organizations represented by the participants in our focus group discussions demonstrate some of the many varieties of youth-involved research and evaluation projects underway in rural, urban, and suburban areas of the U.S. and Canada. The organizations represented include: schools; nonprofit institutions, including youth development agencies and research organizations; and universities in rural, urban, and suburban areas of the U.S. They involve youth in a range of activities, including community mapping, evaluation of programs and services, community-based strategic planning, education and advocacy, and social change projects in areas such as the environment, health, and safety. Each of these programs and organizations is profiled at the end of this brief.

> The 21st Century Project we are working with now [is] a grant that goes for after school programs ... one of the main problems that contributed to crime and teenage pregnancies and things like that was that there's nothing to do here ... So, what this grant does is it gives kids something to do from the time they get out of school till about 6:00, and it goes later for high school and junior high kids. So it's something; it gives something constructive to do.
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> *—Youth focus group participant*

The Youth. Youth involved in these projects came from diverse educational, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds, ranged in age from elementary school students to college students, and included students placed at risk, high school dropouts, and high achieving students. Some projects targeted special populations of youth, such as girls, minority and immigrant youth, youth from under-resourced areas, and street youth.

The Adults. Adults who work with youth in these research and evaluation efforts include volunteers and paid staff, community members, community-based and university researchers and evaluators, local graduate and undergraduate students, and experts in different areas of inquiry.

2 How Do Youth as Researchers Projects Involve Youth?

Among the youth who participated in our focus groups, several participated in the evaluation of after school programs and organizations, community service projects, and drop-in centers for street youth. Some led participatory action research projects on issues of concern to youth and their communities, such as youth health behaviors, immigration, youth violence, school drop-outs, and the environment. The projects represented in our focus group discussions involved youth at a variety of points in the research and evaluation process—developing research projects, designing research questions, creating data collection instruments, collecting information, analyzing data, presenting findings, and making recommendations for change.

The projects involve youth in a range of activities, usually taking place after the school day ended, on weekends, and during school holidays and vacations, and included community mapping, evaluation of programs and services directed at youth, community-based strategic planning processes, education, advocacy, and social change projects.

Some specific activities of these projects included:

- Managing an adult-youth coffee house and "rap sessions."
- Creating a video project for teens about violence and substance abuse.
- Producing a booklet on high-school dropouts.
- Bringing valuable jobs and positive activities for youth to the community by establishing an after school program.

3 What Are the Elements of Successful Youth as Researcher Projects?

Our analyses reveal five key elements that are essential to successful youth-involved research and evaluation projects:

1. Organizational and community readiness
2. Adequate training and support for involved youth
3. Adequate training and support for adult staff
4. Selecting the right team
5. Sustaining youth involvement

1. Organizational and community readiness

Ready organizations. An organization must be ready to handle the responsibilities and demands of the new "way of doing business" implied by youth-involved research and evaluation work. A participatory organizational structure is more conducive to this type of work than a strongly hierarchical one. Additionally, a key component to any youth-involved research and evaluation project is educating the adults involved in how to work with, listen to, and respect youth.

Ready communities. Communities must also be ready to work with youth and respect youths' work, especially in projects that include youth presentation to the community. In a context where their work is not respected, it is difficult to sustain youth commitment to research and

evaluation and change. Sustainability needs to be cultivated through youth demonstrating the value of what they do.

Readiness is not an all-or-nothing proposition. One of the most effective approaches to youth-involved research and evaluation is a gradual one. Youth in Focus (formerly Community LORE), a technical assistance organization in Oakland, California, builds the capacity of community-based organizations to involve and sustain youth participation in community and organizational development through youth-led research, evaluation, and planning. Youth in Focus utilizes a comprehensive training/coaching model, "Stepping Stones." Trainers from the organization work with both young people and adults in the organization through the full process of an evaluation or research project. They coach adults to plan and facilitate youth-run evaluation processes. Youth in Focus also trains young people directly through workshops at critical stages of the evaluation. This example illustrates that while youth involvement does require a commitment to a new way of doing evaluation and research, not everyone needs to begin by doing it comprehensively.

2. Training and support for involved youth

Providing the right training and support to youth is essential to the success of youth involvement in research and evaluation activities—but it is also a critical challenge. The key issues related to training are: when to begin the training, what type of training to provide, and how frequently.

Youth need to understand what it takes. It is important that youth understand the project and have the skills necessary to do the work. It is critical to break down the process of evaluation and research into concrete, but manageable steps and to stay away from technical jargon. One way to support and train youth is to pair them with "expert" partners or coaches. This enables youth to learn evaluation methods and also gives a greater level of credibility to evaluation and research work.

Some evaluation methods are more conducive to youth-involved projects. Some evaluation methods more easily lend themselves to youth involvement. Examples include: focus groups with other youth, ethnography, and other field methods that help youth to learn and develop new skills. Once youth become skilled in these methods, they can begin to handle more complex research methodologies.

Youth involved roles must match youth skills. Youth need to be given evaluation and research roles that are appropriate to their level of development and expertise. For some, the gradual approach described above is successful; youth are given initial, well-defined tasks and gradually take on more, depending on their motivation, their time, and their ability to take on tasks by themselves.

In other cases, youth involvement can take place in all of the tasks, but adults needs to provide more intensive involvement early on, and then, over time, pull back to let youth take the lead. While age level can be an important consideration in determining how much direction students need, their level of independence and maturity is also a factor.

3. Training and support for adult staff

Caring adults are a key element to any project involving youth in research and evaluation; however, it is important to recognize that adults working with youth on research and evaluation projects also need training and support. Often this involves changing the way adults typically work with and look at youth. Adults can be resistant to viewing youth in new ways, letting them play new roles, giving them the space to have a voice in decision-making, and treating them as true "partners." Meaningfully involving youth in the research and evaluation process challenges adults to take on new roles themselves and to adapt the process to the needs and skills of the youth.

Combat "adultism." Fighting adult perceptions of youth—what can be referred to as "adultism"—is one of the major challenges cited by both adults and youth. Youth often feel they do not have representation in programs that affect them; adults who work with youth can inadvertently reinforce this by making decisions for youth and overlooking their input.

For many youth, the opportunity to change adults' images of youth is an important motivating factor for participation in youth-involved research projects. In some cases, changing adultism comes about through youths' actions and the results. For example, youth members of a research project had difficulty getting adult participants to cooperate with a school-wide survey. They faced both skepticism and unwarranted criticism. However, after a successful presentation of their findings, youth received greater adult acceptance and support from school staff. In addition, the adult response rate to a similar survey rose sharply the following year.

Some programs have done a series of educational sessions with adults to improve their perceptions of youth credibility. The audiences for these educational sessions include the evaluation audience, or partners in the evaluation process (adults the youth are working with).

> **I think a lot of what makes teens want to be involved is giving them an opportunity to do it themselves. At first it's a little weird when you realize, "Hey, I'm making real major decisions!" At first, our projects were little, and doing tiny stuff. And now they're getting like big, and we're going out and doing more 'cause we're realizing it. A lot of my friends have come up to me, and said "Oh, I want to do that kind of stuff, too. How do I get involved?"**
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> *—Youth focus group participant*

4. Selecting the right team

It can be difficult, but essential, to bring together youth with diverse opinions and experiences. Key features of a good team include:

- *Diversity.* While obviously which youth should be involved depends on the interest of youth and the nature of the evaluation or research project, diversity is essential to creating a youth-involved evaluation/research team—ethnic, gender, income, and educational diversity are all important.
- *Multiple roles.* Projects need youth who will play different roles—up front youth leadership and youth who play supporting roles are both necessary to conduct youth-involved research projects.

5. Sustaining youth involvement

Sustaining youth involvement is a key challenge. Youth are typically not masters of their own lives or their own time—they may have to meet other school, extracurricular, or home commitments. Adults involved in these projects must be prepared for this, and recognize that youth will participate at different levels of intensity, at different times. Youth-involved research teams must be prepared for the "ebb and flow" of youth involvement.

Several factors help sustain youth involvement.

- *Use research for change.* The most common motivator for involvement in research and evaluation is the ability to use research and evaluation as a vehicle for change. Some youth are not satisfied with a report to a funder that sits on a shelf; they need to see the results of their work in tangible, immediate, and important ways. This can be either through program changes or the fact that others were willing to listen and consider what youth have to say.
- *Develop lasting relationships.* The experience of youth involved in research projects should go beyond just the "work" of research and evaluation. Youth members stressed that there is a real and long-lasting value in developing close relationships with peers and adults. These relationships can extend far beyond the bounds of the research or evaluation endeavor, to include attending youths' sports games and recitals and getting to know parents.

> **At the organizational level, they've bought into it … just the fact that the young people are coming up with these little tangible suggestions gives it credibility. But the place we run into challenges is funders and more policy-level people who are coming in with [an] academic bias … it's like being admitted to a club, in a way, and to believe that other people [like youth] can do that, when you've gone through ten years of various training might be hard, I think.**
>
> *—Adult focus group participant*

- *Compensate with visible rewards.* Providing youth with rewards and validation for their work helps to keep youth involved. This validation can take the form of: monetary compensation, a concrete product, utilization of results, presentation of findings to various audiences, travel to present or collect data and work with others, and making an impact in the community. The opportunity to gain skills, both practical and personal, is also a form of compensation.
- *Serve as mentors and role models.* Experienced youth who have worked on research/evaluation projects can be encouraged to be involved as mentors to newer members of these projects. Alumni of a project can play a strong role in recruitment, training, and maintaining connections and role models.
- *Provide logistical support.* Topping the list of requirements for a successful program for both adults and youth is food and transportation. Very simply, if youth are hungry, they will not be able to concentrate; if youth can't get there, they can't participate. Sharing meals also creates a congenial atmosphere conducive to work and relationship building.

Organizational Culture of Youth Serving Organizations

Any project that involves youth in evaluation and research activities is by necessity multifaceted, drawing on the rich histories and lessons from youth development, community and grassroots activism, action research, and evaluation. As the data presented herein suggest, while there are commonalities for successful youth involved research and evaluation projects, the projects themselves differ from organization to organization. We conclude that this is, in part, due to the culture of the organization sponsoring the youth involved project. Key elements of youth-involved research—who participates, what approach is used, to what degree youth are involved, and the type of project initiated—stem from the focus of the organization that initiates the project.

Two examples from our research underscore this point. Projects that had a strong evaluation or research focus—most often nonprofits research organizations and universities—described wrestling with issues such as the quality of the evaluation/research design, data collection protocols, timelines and deadlines, and the structure of reports. They recognized that at times this meant providing more adult structure to the work of the young people, even bringing in professional evaluators to give studies greater "credibility," to meet funder requirements for third party evaluators, to train youth in evaluation and research, or to ensure instruments and data collection and analysis procedures met certain standards.

By contrast, the more youth development-focused organizations in our sample prioritized the development of

youth leadership and skills. For these organizations, youth took the lead in projects and the adults played a consulting role. Research timelines and methodological rigor, though always important, were secondary to creating positive experiences for youth to gain leadership skills.

To set goals for a youth-involved research project, organizations must answer questions about their organizational mission and culture:

- Is the organizational priority to promote youth leadership and empowerment?
- Is it to produce a high-quality final product that meets rigorous research and evaluation standards?
- Is it to take action and make community change?

We conclude by emphasizing that one approach to youth as researchers is not preferable over another. Further, multiple priorities can be met in the same youth-involved research and evaluation project. However, youth involved research and evaluation priorities must be reviewed, assessed, and communicated to adult and youth members in order for a project to be successful. Negotiating the possibly conflicting goals for the project is a necessary starting point to determine the focus of the project and the expected outcomes achieved for the youth and the organization.

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Harvard Family Research Project

Acknowledgements

ORGANIZATIONS REPRESENTED IN THE STUDY

CENTER FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT AND POLICY RESEARCH

Community Youth Mapping
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Community Youth Mapping is a youth development strategy instituted by the Center for Youth Development and Policy Research at the Academy for Educational Development. Community Youth Mapping is a process in which young people canvass their neighborhoods to identify opportunities—places to go and things to do—for other young people, children, and families. The goals of this process are: to develop a more comprehensive list of resources for the community, to involve youth as major stakeholders in the collection of positive data, to shift the focus of youth issues in communities to include development of opportunities rather than only on delinquency prevention and treatment, to identify gaps in available resources, and to involve young people in developmentally appropriate youth activity.

Youth Mapping involves young people ages 14–18, from all races and socioeconomic backgrounds. In the process, young people partner with adults in a mutually empowering and respectful relationship. Young people are involved in all phases of the mapping process including data entry, data analysis, and dissemination. The young people attend a two-day training to prepare them for the situations they may face during the mapping process. Training is also provided to field supervisors and all adults working on the project to make clear what needs to be in place to support this effort.

CITY YEAR

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City Year is a full-time community service, leadership development, and civic engagement program for young people of all backgrounds aged 17–24, in 13 cities nationally. It is part of the AmeriCorps program network and corps members work in diverse teams on a variety of year-long (and some short-term) projects, many involving children. Through City Year projects, young people are involved in a variety of activities to help document their service, reflect on areas for improvement, and assess outcomes of their work. Youth are involved in all phases of the research. Their involvement in evaluation activities is a way of increasing their use of evaluation to improve their work, their understanding of service, their reflective ability, and other skills. City Year representatives from each of the sites/cities develop guidelines for the research. In addition, each site is encouraged to hire a local area evaluation coach (usually an advanced graduate student) to help them with their team or site level projects.

ENVIRONMENTORS

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The EnvironMentors Project matches urban high school students with environmental and science professionals. The pairs work together for eight months on environmentally-oriented

research or community service projects. Founded in 1992, the Project opens students' eyes to the contributions they can make to the environment and gives them the skills, knowledge, and discipline for greater success in life.

Students and mentors usually meet once per week for two hours for the duration of the program (varies by location, but generally from October to April/May). Together at the meetings, the student and mentor choose a topic and design a research, experimental, or community service project. Over the course of the program, the student and mentor work together to research their topic in the library, on the computer, in the field, and with expert interviews. With support from the mentor, the student develops and presents the finished project in a presentation to an elementary school class in the spring and at the culminating EnvironMentors Fair at the end of the year.

DOUGLAS 21ST CENTURY COMMUNITY LEARNING CENTERS

1235 7th Street
Douglas, AZ 85607
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The 21st Century Community Learning Center in Douglas, AZ provides youth programs designed to build resiliency and social factors for all youth—prevention, leadership, mentoring, and other factors. The 21st CCLC Program is a key component of President Bush's No Child Left Behind Act. It is an opportunity for students and their families to continue to learn new skills and discover new abilities after the school day has ended. The focus of this program, reauthorized under Title IV, Part B, of the No Child Left Behind Act, is to provide expanded academic enrichment opportunities for children attending low performing schools. Tutorial services and academic enrichment activities are designed to help students meet local and state academic standards in subjects such as reading and math. In addition 21st CCLC programs provide youth development activities, drug and violence prevention programs, technology education programs, art, music, and recreation programs, counseling, and character education to enhance the academic component of the program.

Youth aged 11–18 were involved in a research project at Companeros and the 21st CCLC in Douglas to determine the beliefs, experiences, and ideas of youth living on the US/Mexico border in order to implement change for betterment. These youth were involved in all aspects of the project, from identifying questions to presenting results. A university research team provided training in phases as the youth progressed with the research.

ENTER

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The Florida Prevention Center Tobacco Network (FPRC-TN), housed in the College of Public Health (COPH), University of South Florida (USF) provides a forum and network for university-based educators and researchers and key tobacco control persons within the state to collaborate in developing and implementing applied research. It also provides an opportunity to enhance university and state capacity to put research into practice. The primary goals of this project are to develop a university-based, multifaceted workgroup with expertise in diverse areas, develop collaborative relationships with key tobacco control persons in the state, and to collaborate in a network of prevention research centers and community partners to promote applied tobacco research.

Youth were involved in a research project of the Prevention Research Center in which youth collected data about tobacco and alcohol initiation and use among middle-school-aged youth. Twelve high school students were trained to collect focus group and in-depth interview data from other youth. The students were involved in instrument development, data collection, data analysis, and presentation of findings. They received intensive two-day training as well as follow-up training. Their efforts were compensated.

HEALTH EVALUATION RESEARCH SERVICES

Circle of Hope Initiative
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The Circle of Hope was a violence prevention initiative in three neighborhoods in the District of Columbia. The strategy focused on three areas: youth leadership and development, community policing, and collaboration for systems change. These intervention strategies were chosen in response to findings which suggested that: 1) violence among youth can be attributed to youth feeling disconnected, detached from, and not valued by their communities, 2) poor relations between community residents and police present barriers to effective public safety, and 3) inconsistent quality and poorly coordinated levels of community activism leave communities vulnerable to crime.

An evaluation was conducted of the initiative and focused on examining whether changes could be made in each of these areas. Youth between the ages of 16 and 19 and other community members were involved as researchers in the evaluation to: increase the cultural appropriateness of data collection methodology and enhance the internal validity of research, improving data interpretation; to provide youth and residents with knowledge and skills that would be useful to support later community building efforts; and to foster a sense of ownership by the community at large. Youth were involved in all aspects of the evaluation: instrument development, data collection as participant/observers (ethnographers), and the interpretation of data. An initial orientation, followed by a series of weekly trainings was provided to the youth involved. They received a small stipend for their time.

MYTOWN

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MYTOWN, established in Boston, Massachusetts in 1996, runs a youth-led 1.5-mile walking tour of Boston's South End. The tour chronicles the historic and contemporary events that have shaped the experience of the people struggling to cement their communities in the area, and covers one hundred years of history, from 1895 to the present. By blending oral and written accounts, the tour offers an innovative historical interpretation fueled by the lived experiences of past and present residents.

Youth involvement is the centerpiece of the organization's philosophy. Youth can hold any position in the organization, from researching and leading tours, to running payroll. Staff have developed a rubric of accomplishments and experiences that an individual must complete, which determines the level of responsibility they can hold within the organization.

NATIONAL TEEN ACTION RESEARCH CENTER

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The National Teen Action Research Center (NTARC) is a youth center of the Institute for Community Research in Hartford, Connecticut that works with diverse groups of youth in a variety of settings. The NTARC uses a participatory action research model to empower youth by developing skills in group problem solving, communication, social negotiation, critical thinking, and research, among others. This model has been developed into a curriculum over several years of work with youth in this area by past and present NTARC staff and has been adapted to work with many different types of youth in many different settings. The NTARC provides college and career exposure through visits, trips, career workshops, training, etc. Youth are also exposed to many cultural activities such as plays, dances, art exhibits, speakers, etc. Full-time NTARC adult staff support youth in all aspects of their research projects.

Youth primarily conduct action research projects around health and education issues of importance to them and begin looking at their communities critically, becoming engaged in ways that enable them to make positive changes in their communities and build support networks of young people and adults. They are involved in all points of the research process. The youth begin with identifying an issue of concern, creating a research model, and exploring all of the domains involved through a modeling process. They are then introduced to several research methods and trained in those they choose to use in their research project to develop research instruments and to collect and analyze the data. They synthesize their results and present them to peers and community leaders. Finally, the youth use their results for action, attempting to affect change to address the issue of concern. In addition, teens educate other youth and adults by developing dissemination strategies and facilitating action research training projects. NTARC youth are generally between the ages of 14 and 20 years. They are primarily African-American, West Indian-American, and Latino and come from a broad range of educational levels. The majority of youth are paid employees (although some have volunteered in the past).

PORTOLA NEW DIRECTIONS
(a 21st Century Community Learning Centers Program)

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New Directions offers after school activities and homework assistance to middle and high school students in Portola, a rural community of about 2,000 people in northeastern California. School year programs include dance, outdoor recreation, book making, and video production, while summer programs include hiking and camping, swimming, and pottery.

In the second year of funding for the program, youth were hired to do a needs assessment for future youth programming and evaluate program components in place so far. Youth were involved throughout the project. One youth was initially hired and was then involved in recruiting, interviewing, and hiring other youth. The six-person (in grades 8 and 10) evaluation team identified some research questions consistent with the research goal of providing information useful to the 21st Century program and their own desire to gauge student interest in starting a teen center in the community. The team designed and implemented focus groups with middle and high school students and used the information to develop a survey that they administered to about 425 students. Youth entered the data, analyzed results, developed findings and recommendations, and wrote a booklet about the project. The students were paid minimum wage as employees of the school district. Copies of the booklet are available to those interested by contacting the email address above.

TOWN YOUTH PARTICIPATION STRATEGIES

c/o TriCounty Addiction Services
88 Cornelia Street W, Unit A3
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Canada K7A 5K9
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www.typs.com

Contact: Les Voakes, Project Coordinator
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Town Youth Participation Services (TYPS) coordinates a variety of workshops, conferences, and information dissemination activities, using participatory action research methodologies, with a goal of youth involvement and empowerment within their respective communities. TYPS has a primary focus to work in small communities, but can include youths in large cities, to develop youth centers, groups in which the youths have either equal or majority voice in the operations and administration of their organization. Youth are provided with workshops and a series of training sessions. TYPS provides support by disseminating information and programs generated by youth groups and youth centers that have been participants in the TYPS workshops. New workshops are organized and facilitated each year, and new groups regularly request the start-up workshops. An annual conference is hosted, funded by Health Canada, and a webpage has recently been established to provide a means for youth to communicate among themselves about common issues relevant to their youth groups/centers.

Youth are involved in evaluating their own youth centers and

programs, other youth center programs, and new program models offered from a variety of government agency and voluntary groups. As well, youth are asked to comment on current social issues that affect them and their community (both macro and micro concerns). Through these evaluations, programs, models, and mainstream research about youth are examined and commented upon. The final purpose of the research is to produce useful information for each of the youth groups involved and for the information to be shared with other youths. Youth participants range from 12 to 20 years old, with a concentration on 14 to 18 year olds. They are involved in all parts of the research, in varying degrees. The youth participants have been particularly successful in conducting focus groups, identifying research questions, and presenting data to interested audiences.

YOUTH IN FOCUS
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Youth in Focus is a nonprofit training and consulting group dedicated to institutional, community, and social change. The organization's innovative Youth REP initiative builds the capacity of organizations to involve and sustain youth participation in community and organizational development through youth-led research, evaluation, and planning. Youth in Focus has designed and uses a comprehensive training/coaching model, "Stepping Stones." Trainers from the organization work with both young people and adults in the organization through the full process of an evaluation or research project. They coach adults to plan and facilitate youth-run evaluation processes. Youth in Focus also train young people directly through workshops at critical stages of the evaluation. They provide intensive support around research design, instrument development, analysis, report and presentation development, and next steps planning.

Since its inception, Youth in Focus has worked with numerous community-based organizations, schools, public institutions, and community initiatives to develop youth-led research and evaluation projects. These projects have addressed a variety of issues including: school reform, juvenile justice reform, youth services development, public land use and land stewardship, and urban development. Youth in Focus works with youth between the ages of 10 and 23, primarily with youth of low income and communities of color in urban and rural communities in northern California. Young people are involved in every step of the evaluation process, from developing the evaluation design, identifying research questions, creating evaluation instruments, conducting the study, analyzing data, creating a

report and presentation, presenting data to the community and key stakeholders, and participating in follow-up activities. Youth in Focus also involves youth evaluators from past projects in training and coaching new youth evaluators.

OTHER RESEARCH PROJECTS

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Frank Barry has been involved in a project to help two communities develop stronger environments for raising children. This work has involved co-facilitating four Search Conferences to help communities develop strategic plans toward this end. The Ford Foundation funded two of these conferences. The Search Conference methodology requires involvement of all major sectors of a community, including youth. Youth have been between the ages of 12 and 18.

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Youth involvement in evaluation was a focus of Dr. Reed's dissertation research in 1997. Urban high school youth were taught how to conduct focus groups, analyze data, present data, and develop new questions. Data collected through the focus groups conducted with other students at the high school were included in the school improvement process.

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Dr. Whitmore was involved in a youth-led participatory evaluation at the Besserer St. Drop In Centre, a service offered for street-involved youth by the Youth Services Bureau of Ottawa-Canada. Six youth, between the ages of 18 and 21 and users of the drop-in services, were involved. Youth were involved from the very beginning (starting with design, and including data collection, analysis, reporting, and follow-up action). The best description is "the Kit" which the youth designed themselves, for other youth wanting to evaluate their own services. The kit can be found on the Internet at: www.ysb.on.ca. Support was provided by two Centre staff who were on the research team and provided skills and crisis management.