

# How to Develop Youth-Adult Partnerships

Both young people and adults have the power to help our communities become vibrant, enriching places to live. However, facilitating young people and adults working together can be challenging. The following tips can be helpful when you are working to create Youth-Adult Partnerships.

The following includes tips and information that can help YOU create lasting and sustainable Youth-Adult Partnerships.

## 1. Know Thyself

When youth and adults work together, they must face some key questions about themselves: Do I appreciate different perspectives? What stereotypes do I have about others? Do I judge people based on their clothes rather than their abilities? Why should I be open to working with youth/adults? Adults and young people must be willing to honestly address their stereotypes and preconceptions to work together effectively.

## 2. Speak By Listening

All people, regardless of age, have the potential to be both teachers and students. Unfortunately, we are often too pressed for time, overly task-oriented, or limited by traditional roles, so we neglect to really communicate with one another. Young people must take a stand for positive change and demand that their voices be heard. Adults should step back and listen – really listen – to the concerns of young people.

## 3. Make It Meaningful

All people - youth & adults - need to feel that they are contributing to their communities. Young people and adults can work together to create meaningful and challenging opportunities to change our communities. Respect both youth and adults, by thinking about schedules, transportation needs, and other commitments when planning meetings and gatherings. And don't forget to recognize everyone's efforts!

## 4. Spread the Wealth

Young people, when involved in the decision-making that will affect their lives, grow more capable, responsible, and trusting of adults. By working with young people, adults become more energized, creative, and insightful. Adults and youth who recognize the benefits of working together are great ambassadors to their own peer groups. Spread the work – youth and adults who work as allies develop a broader base of support and build stronger communities.

## 5. Check Yourself

Read through these questions and ask yourself if you're really ready to create partnerships with young people? Young people, are you really ready to work with adults?

- DO I respect and value the opinions of others no matter how old they are?

- DO I seek to involve a diverse group of people in my programs and projects?
- WHAT IS my motivation for working with youth/adults?
- DO I expect one person to represent the opinions of all youth or all adults?
- AM I willing to let go of some of my own control in order to share responsibility?
- WHY DO I want to work with adults/youth?

## What can adults do?

- Offer moral support, encouragement, and a little bit of wisdom- with restraint
- Help make connections with other supportive adults in the community
- Recruit young people to help recruit other young people
- Provide a telephone, copier, fax machine, computers, etc.
- Supervise events
- Share wisdom and experience
- Allow young people to find the answers and make mistakes
- Make sure that activities are safe and appropriate
- Provide training
- Help locate funding sources
- Provide transportation to projects, community organizations or other locations

## 6. Take Practical Steps.

- Build a team of young people and adults working together with a common purpose
- Respect is essential: without basic respect and trust, youth leadership cannot help
- Back up young leaders with care and support... young people lack the experience to know that a failure is not the end of the world: they need encouragement and support to learn

- from mistakes
- Structure opportunities for reflection through writing and discussion: a key factor in effective leadership is the ability to learn from experiences and to apply them
- Utilize program veterans or older peers in training roles
- Avoid tokenism: one or two students on a board may be intimidated or feel inadequate representing all their peers
- Establish and maintain accountability
- Set responsibilities at appropriate levels – too high: failure is guaranteed; too low: you insult their intelligence and risk boring them.
- Involve young people in the process of delegating responsibilities
- Model the behaviors you expect from youth leaders
- Listen to each other!
- Have fun!

## 7. Take a Look Inside

Ultimately, we all have to ask ourselves “What is the purpose of youth-adult partnerships?” If we answer that we honesty and integrity, we may find that there are great motivations for this action. We may also discover that we have ulterior motives that aren’t so great. Either way, the moral of the story is that we have to be sincere in our desire to engage in partnerships, or else they are bound to fail. Meet the task. Make change now.

*Adapted from the Freechild Project*

