THE YOUTH
engagement
S P E C T R U M

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Acknowledgements

HeartWood Centre for Community Youth Development would like to thank the following individuals – and their organizations – for contributing to the preparation of this resource document: Lorena Pilgrim and Karen Dahl of the Halifax Public Libraries and Norma MacLean of Recreation, Tourism, and Culture – all departments of the Halifax Regional Municipality. A number of HeartWood staff and associates participated in the writing and editing process, including Laena Garrison, Pam Lee, Josh Feuer, Brian Braganza, and Marc Langlois. As well, specific stories came from individuals at different times in various settings and they are identified as sources when they appear in the text.

The Youth Engagement Spectrum is a tool that we hope practitioners of Community Youth Development will find useful as they engage young people in their work. There is obviously a huge amount of research and on-the-ground innovation that is happening in this field. We have attempted to acknowledge our predecessors and colleagues for their contributions, however it has been a daunting task simply because so much information is out there. We apologize if we have made use of concepts and practices without proper recognition of original work.

Lastly, the development of this resource was made possible with financial and professional support from the Community Support Centre, a granting mechanism under the Canadian Volunteerism Initiative,[1] which is administered by Volunteer Canada and Imagine Canada, and funded by the Department of Canadian Heritage. It was written as a companion piece to a larger resource HeartWood prepared in this same project, Youth Volunteers at Your Library: a Handbook.

For all of this, we express our heartfelt thanks!

John Ure
HeartWood

The HeartWood Centre for Community Youth Development is a not-for-profit organization that engages with youth to develop their skills and confidence as community builders. We also work with adults, community organizations, and government agencies to help them develop the skills, tools, and strategies they require to support meaningful youth participation in building healthy communities.

For more information, see: www.heartwood.ns.ca

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1   For more information see: www.volunteer.ca/volcan/eng/content/canvol-init/canvol-intit.php

Outline of Contents

I.   What is Youth Engagement?

Youth engagement is a broad concept

There is no single definition that adequately and accurately describes the practice of youth engagement. There are numerous terms in use, all attached to the stem-word youth, such as: …inclusion, …involvement, …participation, …development, …volunteerism, …engagement, and so on. For your reference, we have included A Glossary of Terms at the end of this Section. HeartWood works within a framework of Community Youth Development. At the heart of all these terms is the idea of involving young people in meaningful ways in the essential tasks and processes of the community.

Some examples of engaged youth

> Town leaders wanted to hear what youth in their community had to say regarding youth issues, so they organized a town meeting and invited local youth to participate. That night, over 100 young people showed up to let their voices be heard. *(Lunenburg, Nova Scotia, 2002)*
>
> Several young people were charged with vandalism of a town cemetery. A local youth heard this story on the radio and didn't want all young people in his community to be stereotyped by this act. He organized his youth action team to rake leaves in the cemetery, giving the caretakers time to fix the damaged headstones. *(Bridgewater, Nova Scotia, 2001)*

When we are facilitating a professional development program, we often ask the participants, "What do *you* understand these terms to mean?" Because each organization and community is unique, a collective and diverse understanding of the basic idea is more helpful than a single definition that may not fit the local context.

For the purposes of this article, we will use the term *youth engagement* to encompass the above concepts.

A brief history of youth engagement

Youth engagement practices have evolved from "youth development" programs, which have their roots in "youth services." In the 1960's, these services were oriented to youth with serious problems (school dropouts, runaways, unwed parents, abused children and youth, and delinquents) to address their basic needs. Services became broader in scope in the 70's, meaning that they went beyond the "basics" to include other dimensions of a young person's life. It was during this period that practitioners began to recognize that youth could make their own decisions and help themselves. In the 80's youth services focused on prevention with an explosion of programs that were designed to decrease problem behaviour (like drinking, smoking, having unprotected sex, being truant, or violent). To

Community Youth Development describes the meaningful participation of youth in community building processes. This active involvement helps develop the skills, abilities, and gifts of the young people, while contributing to the community as a whole. For its part, the community must accept responsibility for the development of its young people, in much the same way – for example - as it is concerned for its economic development.

some extent, this growth of service resulted in duplication (i.e., multiple agencies serving the same young person). In response, practitioners attempted to integrate prevention initiatives to avoid redundancy. Generally speaking, these earlier programs and services can be characterized as problem-solving approaches, ones that were formulated by adults for the benefit of young people. A youth development approach began to emerge in the 90's, which saw the rise of non-problem-focused programming, training for youth workers, greater community investment in youth development, youth leadership, and other strengths-based approaches. In 1993 the National Network for Youth (a U.S. based organization) coined the phrase Community Youth Development.

(Adapted from Pittman, K. (2000). Balancing the Equation: Communities supporting youth, youth supporting communities. Retrieved from Community Youth Development Journal at: www.cydjournal.org/2000Winter/pittman/html)

The benefits of youth engagement

There is mounting evidence that youth engagement has a significant positive impact on young people – and their communities! It improves youth health, self-confidence, career outlook, the quality of the relationships they form with peers, older youth, adults, and elders, as well as their ability and inclination to participate in the civic life of the community. It reduces crime, violence, and vandalism. The communities, in turn, benefit from young people's capacity for innovative problem solving, their passion for social justice, their zeal to contribute and serve, their fresh perspective, their ability to rise above traditional boundaries in our society to make new and diverse connections, and their courage to pose the tough questions that need to be asked as communities struggle to renew themselves.[2]

How the Youth Engagement Spectrum was developed… and why!

HeartWood developed the Youth Engagement Spectrum (YES) through its work in youth development programming, and through ongoing research in the Community Youth Development field. The YES is related to similar concepts published by other youth serving individuals and organizations, including Roger Hart,[3] Karen Pitman's work (see Community Youth Development Journal at: www.cydjournal.org), the Youth Caucus, Canadian Environmental Network,[4] the Environmental Youth Alliance in Vancouver (see www.eya.ca), the Public Health Agency of Canada,[5] and Health Canada's Centre for Excellence in Youth Engagement

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2   Adapted from: Garrison, L (2005). Youth Participation in Goverance. Published by Halifax Regional Municipality.
3   Hart, R. (2002). Ladder of Participation. Retrieved from McCreary Centre Society at: www.mcs.bc.ca/ya_ladd.htm.
4   Specifically The Youth Guidebook to Policy Change for Intergenerational Partnerships, See www.cenrce.org/eng/publications/index.html
5   Specifically The Works: Assessing Youth Particiapation in Youth Health Organizations, September 1999. Prepared by Donalee Moulton and Barbara Cottrell and The Mainland South Teen Health Centre for Health Promotion and Programs Branch, Atlantic Region, Health Canada. See www.phacaspc.gc.ca/canada/regions/atlantic/Publications/The_works/index.html

(see www.engagementcentre.ca). We have attempted in this article to make note wherever a specific connection occurs between their work and HeartWood's own.[6]

The YES tool can be used by organizations, communities, and systems (e.g., health care, child welfare, education, etc.) to:
- Assess the extent of youth engagement in existing programs and services
- Explore new ways and means of engaging youth in organizations and in the community (or system)
- Identify the underlying values and activating principles that can help make youth engagement a commonplace practice
- Design youth engagement strategy to fit specific situations and local circumstances.

The tool is not meant to be prescriptive; that is, although we might talk about what has worked well for us in the past, we will try to avoid statements like, "These are the 10 things you must do!" Rather, the information in this resource is meant to stimulate the reader to reflect upon her own experience, talk to others, try some of the suggestions, learn from those actions, and come up with her[7] own new, fresh ideas. We encourage you to explore this resource and to adapt it to your local context (i.e., what matters most to those involved right here, right now). We expect this resource to change as we all continue to innovate and learn from our work in this exciting field.

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6   Some of the Youth Engagement Spectrum tool is based on an earlier HeartWood work, Making a Difference (2002), which was developed jointly as a youth inclusion resource package by HeartWood and the Nova Scotia Youth Secretariat, a division of the Nova Scotia Department of Education.
7   To avoid awkward phrasing, we are using the female gender in our choice of pronouns.

A glossary of terms

Leadership is about being our best self. We all have the qualities of being a positive leader - risk taking, being thoughtful, caring, decisive, inspiring, as well as following our dreams and passion. Being a leader is being able to access these qualities and put them into practice as often as we can, giving back to the community (family, friends, school, neighbourhood, the planet).

Youth is defined by HeartWood as adolescents, or teenagers, between the ages of 12-18. It is at this stage of development that young people are going through many changes and choices. During this time they can benefit from the support of positive peer groups, programming, and mentorship. This age is often overlooked in community processes; for example, young people are typically not valued for the contributions they make to the community in their daily lives.

Young adult is a term used by HeartWood when referring to young people over 18 and into their mid-20s. They are at a stage of life when they are legally defined as adults, yet may still be trying to understand what their role or place is in the community. We see these young people as potential mentors for teenagers and as important bridges, or connectors, to adults.

Community, for HeartWood, can mean a geographical area (e.g., North End Halifax), or a social group defined by culture or ethnic origin (e.g., the African-Canadian community), or some set of circumstances that is shared amongst specific individuals (e.g., youth in the care of the child welfare system, students in a school), or a community of interest (e.g., skateboarders). The term is meant to include individuals, as well as families, groups, and organizations. (Note: at HeartWood, one of the first steps we take when working with a group is to help them define their "community." This process increases the likelihood of success for any initiative the group decides to organize.)

Youth engagement is the meaningful and sustained involvement of a young person in an activity focusing outside the self.
Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement www.engagementcentre.ca

Youth development refers to programs, services, and practices that focus on a young person's gifts, talents, current skills and abilities, as well as her potential for further development in these areas. This is a positive, strengths-focused, asset-based approach to personal development, as opposed to one that is deficiency-based (i.e., primarily concerned with problems, needs, and so on).

Youth inclusion is the meaningful involvement of youth in core organizational processes such as planning, decision-making, and program delivery of governments, organizations and communities.[8] It goes beyond traditional youth services to identify opportunities for meaningfully including young people within different community structures.

Youth participation in governance is different than youth participating in a program, volunteering, or contributing service to an organization, or community.

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8   Siegbahn, C., Warner, A., Gilbert, R.(2002). Making a Difference. Published by Nova Scotia Department of Education.

While these activities are also important, youth in governance implies power sharing between adults and youth and requires that youth have equitable access to the decision-making processes that affect their lives, their communities, and matters of importance or interest to them.[9] Thus… youth participation in governance means youth have equitable access to and play an active role in making decisions, setting policies, and influencing outcomes on matters relevant to their lives at the municipal, organizational, and program level. Some familiar forms of youth governance include: municipal youth advisory councils, youth on Boards of Directors, community youth action teams, and youth-run programs or services.[10]

Community Youth Development assumes the involvement of young people in their own development and that of the community - in partnership with adults - to make use of their talents and increase their investment in community life.[11]

Civic youth engagement is one of the ways that Community Youth Development concepts and practices are being applied, especially in municipal settings. It embraces the current interest in civic engagement. Simply add "youth" to the following definition and you will see the obvious connections:

> One useful definition of civic engagement is the following: individual and collective actions designed to identify and address issues of public concern. Civic engagement can take many forms, from individual voluntarism to organizational involvement to electoral participation. It can include efforts to directly address an issue, work with others in a community to solve a problem or interact with the institutions of representative democracy. Civic engagement encompasses a range of specific activities such as working in a soup kitchen, serving on a neighborhood association, writing a letter to an elected official or voting. Indeed, an underlying principal of our approach is that an engaged citizen should have the ability, agency and opportunity to move comfortably among these various types of civic acts.
> (Carpini, M. The Pew Charitable Trusts. Retrieved from the American Psychological Association at: www.apa.org/ed/slce/civicengagement.html)

II. The Youth Engagement Spectrum

Forms of youth engagement

The YES identifies opportunities for youth engagement in organizations, communities, and systems. We call these "forms" of youth engagement (i.e., kinds, activities, practices, or ways in which it could happen). Although it is a spectrum,

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9   Youth Affairs Council of Victoria. (2004). Consulting Young People about their Ideas and Opinions: A Handbook for Organisations Working with Youth People. Retrieved from: www.yacsa. com.au/cgi-bin/wf.pl?pid=&mode=cd&file=../html/documents//Youth%20Participation.

10   Adapted from: Garrison, L.(2005). Youth Participation in Governance. Published by Halifax Regional Municipality.

11   Curran, S. and Hughes, D.(2000). Comunity Youth Development: A Framework for Action. Retrieved from Community Youth Development Journal web site, see: www.cydjournal. org/2000Winter/contents.html

being at one end is not necessarily considered better than being at the other; i.e., there is no right or wrong here. The various forms will, however, generate different degrees of individual, organizational, and community outcomes. It would be wise, therefore, to explore the full spectrum of possibilities in order to find the right fit for your organization and the young people that you serve.

An organization, community, or system can exhibit several forms of youth engagement simultaneously. An organization may, for example, have young people participating in programs that have been designed by adults and, at the same time, the organization may also have a youth committee engaged in the development of future programming. There is compelling evidence that organizations that incorporate diverse forms of youth engagement will strengthen their organizational resilience (see the Section III, as well as an article by Marc Langlois[12]).

The spectrum is more of a map on which to find your self. Then, you can ask, "How can we go deeper here so as to create a better quality of service?" Or, you might say, "We are doing fairly well in this area of our work, so what else can we be doing?" In the latter case, the organization may look farther along the spectrum to see what could happen in the next form. The map can be used to plan movement, either vertically (i.e., going deeper) so as to improve performance in that form, or horizontally (i.e., across the spectrum) so as to explore new ground.

Below are the forms of youth engagement that we are observing in the Community Youth Development field.

Participation in Programs/Services

Youth are participants in programs offered on their behalf by adult-led organizations. Young people may be accessing services to improve their life conditions, to upgrade their skills, to have fun, or to gain self-confidence.

Examples: Participants on a youth exchange program, students using services in a school-based health centre, youth who access an employment centre or a teen service at a library, participants in a community recreation program.

Program/Organizational Assistance

Young people are asked to take on specific tasks on behalf of the organization in areas such as research, programming, publicity, fundraising, and so on. They simply carry out the tasks without much input into *what* those tasks are or *how* they are done.

Examples: Fundraising for a charity, setting up furniture for an event, photocopying resources for information packages, being a program volunteer.

Informal Influence in Organizations and Program Development

Youth informally help plan and implement programs and are involved in a range of organizational activities. They have influence as advisors and advocates on various issues. They are not yet included in the core planning processes of the organization, but they may contribute their ideas via informal discussions, or even impromptu conversations.

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12   Langlois, M. (2003). In Service to Youth and Community. Major Paper for Masters in Management Program at McGill University. See: www.heartwood.ns.ca/resources_publications.shtml

Examples: youth involved in public education initiatives, young people working in front-line positions at a community centre.

They may also be consulted by adults in more structured ways (i.e., more formally) to give their input in identifying community problems and potential solutions. As well, they may be asked to participate in the development of policies, programs, and strategies.

Examples: youth being consulted: by participating in focus groups, surveys, forums, World Cafés[13] regarding their views and interests in youth employment programs, recreation services, the development of library programs for younger children, etc.

Note: all three of these forms of youth engagement are still adult-led, but the youth are exercising more influence.

Formal Roles in Policy-Making and Decision-Making

Youth participation in core planning processes is viewed not just as an opportunity for their own development, but also as a valued contribution to the whole organization. Their input, including their right to vote, is respected on formal decision-making bodies such as Boards and committees. As well, young people may hold staff positions with a high level of authority.

Examples: Youth as members of a Board of Directors, young people in senior-level staff positions, municipal youth councils, an advisory committee at a youth health centre.

Youth/Adult Partnerships

Youth are integrated into existing organizational structures and have equal status in its decision-making processes. As well, adults recognize youth members as full partners that share responsibility and accountability for the development and implementation of the organization's programs and services.

Examples: An organization in which half of the Board members are youth, a skateboard park that is organized and maintained by youth and adults together, an environmental education program for children that has been designed and implemented by older youth and adults working as partners, a community-based youth action team made up of youth and supportive adults.

Note: some of these programs/services may be entirely youth-led with adults playing support roles.

Youth-Led Initiatives

Young people control the governance and decision-making of their own organization, or initiative. All of the organizational responsibilities - program creation, financial management, program facilitation, and service provision - are carried out by youth.

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13   A Wold Café uses dialogue to engage large groups of people in meaningful conversations around questions that matter. For more information, see: www.the worldcafe.com

Examples: Youth-governed drop-in centre, university student union with full student governance, meals-on-wheels service prepared and delivered by youth, a First Nations youth media service.

Note: adults, if present at all, serve only as resource people or advisors.

Core values and activating principles underlie Community Youth Development practice

The Food for thought questions to the left are basically asking, "OK, we understand the different forms of youth engagement; now, how do we do it? What are the activities, tools, and strategies that we can use to make it happen?"

The answer to that question can be multitudinous because the possibilities are endless.

There are many articles, guides, and handbooks on youth engagement practice, some of which have been identified here. As well, a good number of these sources have been summarized in two publications that were developed by HeartWood in partnership with Recreation, Tourism, and Culture, Halifax Regional Municipality. They are: a literature review, entitled Youth Participation in Governance by Laena Garrison, and a "tool kit" for practitioners, Resources, Tools, and Strategies for Youth Engagement by John Ure. These resources are easily accessed so there is no need to repeat them here.

Rather, this article attempts to identify the core values and principles that underlie our actions, upon which best practices are based. That is, the activity of youth engagement will always vary depending upon the young person, the organization, and the local context. In addition, its practice will evolve as circumstances change, as individuals move on and new people arrive, as thinking shifts, as innovation occurs, as capacity increases, as breakthroughs are made, and so on. However, the underlying principles and core values tend to remain constant, and because of their constancy they can be used to develop best practices.

To clarify this terminology:
- A value is a belief that you hold to be true. It permeates everything you do and drives your decisions and actions. It causes you to react strongly when it is violated and it is the last thing that you will give up. Core values are the ones that have the strongest influence on your actions and behaviour. Example of a core value: I believe that being able to take action is a primary motivator for involving young people!
- An activating principle is simply how you put the value into action. Example: I will orient my programs and services towards action! I.e., we won't just sit around and talk about it – we will go make something happen!
- A practice is the pattern of actions that you do over and over again until you can say, "This is how we do it!" Best practices have evolved through our usage and are the ones that we really count on to get the results we desire the most! Example: We will provide opportunities for young people to get

involved, take action, and make a genuine difference in their communities! (Note: the "forms" of youth engagement presented above are simply practices writ large!)

It looks like this: core values → activating principles → best practices

Let's examine these one at a time.

Core values

How do core values create a foundation to practice? They do that in several ways.

Core values guide the practitioner. Values often operate outside our conscious awareness - until we identify and articulate them. Then, we become clearer and more able to choose activity and behaviour that is in line with our beliefs. For example, in the development of new programs or services, a practitioner gets to decide the potential role of young people. If the value she holds is a belief that the more involved they are, the more engaged they will be and the more capable they will become, then she will work with youth to create the program together, rather than do it all herself, even though that might be more "efficient." In other words, she allows herself to be guided by this belief, knowing that the payoff will be a good one, even if it may mean more work for her in the short term (e.g., coaching the youth in performing new tasks).

Core values invite the young person to participate. Core values are what attract young people to programs, activities, and events… and keep them involved. If a young person senses that an activity is a genuine opportunity to follow her passion – what matters to her most in life – then it is relatively easy for her to step forward. As well, as programmers and administrators, if we continue to activate these values, we will retain young people in our programs and their involvement will grow.

Core values provide a foundation. As mentioned above, core values guide – and shape – our actions and behaviour. However, they go farther than that. When we understand our values to the point that we can articulate them, they become bedrock on which we can stand. They elevate our day-to-day work to a higher level of purpose. They also energize us! People are inspired by ideals, not by programs.

How do we find out what our core values are?

This is a self-discovery process that every individual - and organization - must take. The more you look into it, think about it, talk about it with others, act upon it, the clearer and more affirmative your values/beliefs will become. They will be different for every individual, although some beliefs are almost universal (e.g., most of us desire safe communities).

At HeartWood we spent a fair amount of time in reflection, dialogue, and conducting research to identify our core values. Full engagement only occurs when individuals have the opportunity to act on their deepest values. Supportive adults need to recognize these values to help create opportunities for action. What did youth tell us they valued? They greatly value:
- Opportunities to follow their passions.
- Connecting with other people was vitally important.

- Making a positive difference was essential.
- Finally, young people said that they wanted to take concrete action - "actually do stuff."
- In the context of Youth Action Teams, these core values synergized to create a fun, adventurous, and service-oriented team culture.
  (Dumond, C., Warner, A., Langlois, M. (2003). p.5)[14]

We will be using these values to illustrate how they ground practice. We do not presume to say that these are everyone's values; they are simply ours and may serve to help you better understand yours.

Activating Principles

How do we identify the principles that allow us to put values into action?

This is a similar process of discovery and experimentation. As well, we can also observe the shifts in practice that have occurred in the Community Youth Development field – how it has evolved from "youth services." We believe the shifts in thinking and practice are being caused by changes in values, perceptions, and attitudes, as well as innovations and breakthroughs. If we look deeper into these emerging shifts, we ought to be able to identify their underlying principles.

The shifts that we have observed through our work in the field are:

A focus on youth problems/needs (in a sense, seeing youth as "problems")	→	Seeing youth in terms of their strengths and resiliency (i.e., as innovative problem-solvers)
Seeing youth as "future leaders"	→	As leaders today! (i.e., as active and energized participants in their lives and community)
An emphasis on building good programs for young people	→	An emphasis on building good relationships with young people
Creating programs that develop good leadership skills for some young people	→	Creating programs that develop good civic participation skills for all young people
Adults mentoring young people (usually implies a one-way teaching, or giving, of knowledge)	→	Youth/adult partnerships (means a reciprocal learning exchange)

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14   Dumond, C., Warner, A., Langlois, M. (2003). Voices from Youth Teams: How to Create Successful Partnerships for Community Action. HeartWood Centre for Community Youth Development.

Problem-solving approaches	→	An appreciative approach
Talking about change (including planning, consultation, and research)	→	Taking action to create change!
Going it alone as service providers	→	Collaborative learning/action with community partners
Developing programs and services for young people	→	Developing programs and services with young people

In observing these shifts, HeartWood has highlighted the following activating principles:
- Being action oriented
- Build relationships
- Use a positive, strengths-based focus

The following section discusses how the core values and activating principles play out in youth engagement initiatives.

III. Putting Values and Principles into Practice

Activating Principle: Be action oriented

The core values being activated are:
- • Taking action
- •Making a positive difference

Practices:
- • Increasing the capacity and confidence of young people to participate in the essential tasks and processes of the community.
- • Adventuresome learning; i.e., young people learn best by doing.
- • Meaningful contribution.

Practice: increasing the capacity and confidence of young people to participate in the essential tasks and processes of the community.

My experience at the teen health centre tells me that participation is the first step towards empowerment. From a professional development session with staff and volunteers.

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My community loves basketball and when we offered a
Night Hoops program, it was – and is – a huge success.
Either kids are participating by watching and keeping
score, or actually playing. Tyrone, who is a recreation
programmer and mentor to young people.
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Helping young people develop their participation skills is the foundation for the whole spectrum of youth engagement. Taking that first step to join in, to become part of something (peer group, community organization, an action, an event) that is bigger than you, to become involved is often a turning point in a young person's life.

> Focus on the promotion of participatory skills for all, not just leadership skills for the few. Leaders will always emerge, but all children and young people need the chance to learn the multiple skills of listening and collaborating in groups if they are to discover that they can play very different roles in building communities and achieving change.
> (United Nations Economic and Social Affairs, 2003, pp. 286-287.[15])

From the community's perspective, we need to involve young people. We need their input now and we would be wise to start supporting them in leadership roles. The earlier we do that the better. From these initial key experiences, young people often develop an interest in civic involvement that will last a lifetime; i.e., engaged youth will become engaged adults. The young people will also acquire a real sense of belonging to the community. This may not prevent out-migration (i.e., moving away to find a job, go to school, or to travel) but it dramatically increases the

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15   United Nations Economic and Social Affairs. (2004). Youth Participation in Decision Making. In World Youth Report 2003. Retrieved from Chapter 10 of: www.un.org/esa/socdev/unyin/wyr03.htm

probability of them returning "home" some day – bringing with them all the skills, knowledge, and life experience they picked up along the way.

Unfortunately, communities typically do not include young people in a deeply meaningful way, which can lead to dis-connection.

> Youth – the untapped resource in our communities…
> John McKnight and John Kretzmann of Northwestern University introduced the concept of Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD). One of its central ideas is that communities usually don't make very good use of their resources (i.e., assets), in particular, people! Individuals are often overlooked, or simply not invited to join a community task or process, because they do not appear to have anything they can contribute. This can lead to civic disconnection on an individual basis and marginalization of whole groups, typically lower-income families, persons with disabilities, visible minorities, the elderly, and youth. On the contrary, McKnight says, a leader is anyone who is willing to help and everyone has some unique gift to offer. An active and inclusive community makes best use of all its resources and, as a result, is more likely to be healthy, vibrant, and sustainable. (See www.northwestern.edu/ipr/abcd.html)

As well, young people need active involvement as a component in their healthy development as individuals.

> Adolescent Development
> Adolescence is a critical time when positive experiences and relationships may build a solid foundation for life-long personal learning and development, civic participation, and service to others (such as volunteerism, social justice, environmental activism, and so on).
>
> Ages 10-14 (early adolescence) are a stressful time due to biological and social changes. At these ages youth need increasing autonomy, as well as opportunities for meaningful input, which may mean a struggle as they attempt to give voice to these urges. They also need help in dealing with negative peer pressure and in communicating with parents on difficult subjects. It is important for the young person's development that something good happens here.
>
> Ages 15-18 are a time when family conflict decreases, as does susceptibility to peer pressure and, at the same time, personal and social concerns increase. This is a prime period for the youth to have opportunities for receiving mentoring (and giving, e.g., mentoring younger children), taking leadership roles in organizations, learning about multiple cultures and the skills to navigate those. It is also a time to link interests and passions to educational and career goals.[16]

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16   These notes were provided by Marc Langlois, a HeartWood Associate, and were adapted from the work of Eccles, J., Appleton, J. (Eds.). (2002). Community Programs to Promote Youth Development. National Research Council.

Practice: adventuresome learning; i.e., young people learn best by doing.
This is best known as "experiential learning" (HeartWood refers to it as
adventuresome learning), or learning that is action-oriented and that happens in a
fun, supportive, and challenging environment. When it is the basis for undertaking
tasks and initiatives, it always engages young people's interest and energy.

Practice: meaningful contribution
Meaningful contribution involves serving others, the community, or the planet.
Examples of service include painting the community centre, cleaning up the litter
in a public park, helping rural seniors stack their winter wood, organizing a "fun
day" for children, and so on. Meaningful contribution is a powerful learning tool for
the development of life skills, increasing leadership ability, and building contacts/
connections with people in the community.

> We have Junior Leader and LIT *(Leaders in Training)*
> programs for youth *(12-15 years)*. They help out with day
> camps, learning skills they can use in the future. They
> also get to do things that interest them, like hiking,
> swimming, mountain biking. Next thing you know, these
> kids are working as summer staff. *Nicholas, who is a*
> *recreation programmer and mentor to young people.*

When young people serve others to meet a genuine need, they are acting on the
core value of making a difference. When they take action – individually and as
Youth Action Teams - they benefit the whole community and contribute to its well-
being and vitality.

Youth are natural visionaries. They can imagine – i.e., see – how their community
can be better, healthier, stronger, more vibrant and inclusive. Adult partners provide
the support to help youth put their visions into action.

Activating Principle: Build relationships

The core value being activated is:
- Connecting with others

Practices:
- Making connections with others.
- Peer support.
- Youth/adult partnerships.

Practice: making connections with others

According to complexity theory (i.e., the study of living systems) a community's natural organizational structure is formed of inter-connecting networks – a vast web of relationships. As we found out from Asset-Based Community Development (above) young people are typically not included in the community's core tasks and processes and the community ends up losing a valuable resource. That's another way of saying that young people need to connect to what's going on and inter-connect with those existing networks. A young person does not usually have the extensive contacts of an involved adult. So, in a sense, they don't have the same access to local resources, decision-makers, available know-how, and potential opportunities. So, one of the primary goals of youth engagement initiatives is to increase connections and to build good relationships between young people and the community.

Practice: peer support

Peer support means feeling a sense of belonging, being part of a group, a team, or the community. An excellent way to foster peer support is through Youth Action Teams (YATs).

YATs provide a safe and fun container for young people to develop their personal skills and abilities in the areas of participation, relationship building, being of service, and taking action. Supportive adults become engaged in the activities of the YAT, recognizing its value for individuals and for the community. Through its service and actions, YAT members meet and connect with community groups and organizations, which typically respond with high appreciation for the contributions of the young people.

Practice: youth/adult partnerships

In addition to the more traditional roles of being a connector, bridge-builder, advocate, coach, mentor, and ally to youth, an adult can also be a partner. Good youth/adult partnerships evolve from good youth/adult relationships; that is, healthy youth/adult partnerships involve inspiration, support, and guidance through a non-hierarchical relationship of mutual caring and respect, as well as reciprocal learning (i.e., the adult is just as likely to learn from the young person, as the young person from the adult).

> As youth start out in their roles as partners with adults, they need more support, and adults can provide this. They can motivate youth, hold youth accountable, and provide opportunities for youth participation, ownership, and skills-building. They can orient youth to the workings of organizational or municipal systems, facilitate a healthy team dynamic, and connect youth to community resources (Camille Dumond, HeartWood Associate, 2003).

Youth/adult partnerships exemplify the primary shift that has happened in the evolution of Community Youth Development practice. That is, we have moved from the mentality of developing programs to meet their needs and to address their "problems," to one of working with youth – being in relationship with them - making best use of their skills and knowledge, to create benefits for the whole community, not only for the young person.

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It is a matter of staff "finding the time" to get to know
these kids, break the ice, and build a relationship
with them. This creates a good foundation to deal with
whatever comes up. It also increases staff tolerance
for teen behaviour, which can be trying. Some staff
only interacted with the young person when she did
something wrong. That's changing. Even if you are not
the designated Teen Services staff member, you can still
learn the names of the young people you see coming into
the library every day. That is huge. Library staff at a
professional development day on youth engagement.

Relationship building is a long process but it all
starts simply enough – just make a connection, say
hello, find out someone's name. Library staff at a
professional development day on youth engagement.

The Recreation Programmers who work for the Halifax
Regional Municipality are very good at their jobs.
However, some feel challenged as they begin to initiate
their citywide youth engagement strategy. Although they
are competent in developing and delivering programs
for young people, they are now being asked to engage
directly with the youth, to be in relationship with
them, and to spend time with them in non-programmed,
sometimes impromptu activities. This requires a
different skill set and a whole new attitude about how
they do their jobs every day. Already they are seeing
positive results as they meet these challenges with
creativity and determination.
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Activating Principle: Use a positive, strengths-based focus

The core values being activated are:
- •Following your passion
- •Having fun!

Practices:
- • Creating and contributing to an empowering culture.
- •Taking an appreciative approach.
- • Supporting young people to take on challenges that build their capacity.

Practice: creating and contributing to an empowering culture

One of the most effective youth engagement strategies that adults can undertake is to create and foster an empowering culture for young people. This means providing an atmosphere, circumstances, and opportunities where individuals feel empowered to initiate, commit, plan and choose paths to work together with peers and the community as active citizens. It could also mean that a facility (like a recreation centre, or a public library) or program feels welcoming to youth and appreciative of their presence.

Having fun is a great equalizer – amongst peers who are meeting for the first time and in mixed groups of youth and adults. It's a way of stepping out of roles and cliques to come together. As people loosen up and relax, they feel more comfortable – and confident – to try new experiences, to learn new things, and to take risks.

Practice: taking an appreciative approach

Another powerful strategy is to take an appreciative approach in your interactions with young people, in how you design and deliver programs for – or with – them, and in the provision of services that not only meet their needs, but also build their capacity to be autonomous.

An appreciative approach[17] is based on developmental processes (e.g., youth development, professional development, and so on) that are positive in nature; that is, it focuses attention/thinking on strengths, potential, and possibilities. It increases capacity in individuals, organizations, and communities by identifying/tapping into resources/gifts they already have - including their own knowledge and life experience - and building on that. In a community development context, it means using local skills and existing resources to find/create solutions, rather than relying on outside "expertise" to fix problems.

Acting appreciatively means finding out what is working well right now, what specifically are we doing to make that happen, how can we build on that, what resources already exist that can be leveraged, what resources are not being used that could be mobilized, and then imagining what else could be done to move even closer to our objectives.

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17   Based on the appreciative inquiry methodology of David Cooperrider of Case Western Reserve University. He has community members discovering what they care about, dreaming what is possible, designing ways and means to make it happen, and then delivering (i.e., taking action). See: ai.cwru.edu/

In the context of youth development, this approach means that we view young people not as dependents, service recipients, or problems, but as competent innovators who contribute to the community, and as energized participants/leaders in social change initiatives. This approach is consistent with the philosophy of McKnight's and Kretzmann's Asset-Based Community Development mentioned above.

Practice: supporting young people to take on challenges that build their capacity

Part of the dynamic in youth/adults relationships is to offer support when a young person steps out of her comfort zone to try something new, but to also challenge the individual to go one step farther and try for her personal best. There needs to be balance between support and challenge – too much of one without the other is not good.

In a leadership development context, as the young person steps up to take initiative, the adult steps back to give her room to move (thereby giving up a measure of adult "control"), but not so far back that the youth is left without support or connection to resources in the community. In short, the adult supports the young person's process of self-empowerment.

> *The following progression is a process that we have seen over and over…*
> One of the ways we engage young people at HeartWood is by offering wilderness adventure programs to different age groups of young people, preferably in their own community and with their own peers. In the first year, a youth simply participates in the canoe trip and has a great time. Next year, she – and some of her friends - helps organize a fundraiser so that they can once again participate in the same program. The following year she volunteers to co-lead the trip, which includes younger people from her community. Then, she organizes other events, sometimes with HeartWood's involvement, sometimes not.

In conclusion, the essence of what we are suggesting is that the more you use and explore these tools and strategies, the more results you will see, that is:
- Your youth engagement practice will become deeper
- Your quality of outcomes will be better
- Your experimentation and learning will yield more possibilities.

IV. Where to next?

How about organizational renewal!

Organizations (and communities, systems, etc.) that desire genuine youth inclusion and meaningful youth engagement have to understand that this is not a simple matter of developing a new program, or adding a young person to the Board of Directors, or having program staff participate in a cool training program that will give them a "bag of tricks." It's not that easy… and it's not that hard! It does involve fundamental change in the very bones of the organization, a shift in its thinking and behaviour, and a transformation of its culture. In essence, it is an opportunity for organizational renewal!

It doesn't so much mean attracting more youth into your programs, but serving the ones you already have in new or different ways. It does not even mean adding new programs or services to your workload, but being in relationship with the young people who show up every day. In fact, you are probably already doing things that are working well!

To accommodate genuine youth engagement in an organization, requires the organization to reflect deeply on its current practices, policies, organizational processes, core values and beliefs for the purpose of effecting changes and shifts that make the organization more youth inclusive.

And… the very changes that are being made to welcome and accommodate young people will also benefit the adults in the organization – and the organization itself! Shifting the focus to relationship building, re-affirming the core values of the organization, appreciating individuals' unique gifts, helping them find their passion and empowering them to make a difference, taking innovative action – these are profound forces for everyone, not just youth! In taking this journey, adults are likely to re-discover their vocation, to be energized and inspired, and to feel a stronger connection to their organization and the community it serves. The organization, in turn, becomes more responsive to its clients and staff, more willing to share leadership across the breadth of the organization, and is more able to recommit to its vision.

> Because an organization is itself a living system, any change that is introduced will follow the same path, more or less. That is, the innovators will try something new and start to get good results. Most people in the system won't pay much attention to this, and if they do, they will think that the innovation is strange, un-workable, and risky. However, the early adopters, the opinion leaders, will take note and start to adapt the change so that it is a better fit for their usage. Then, the early majority is able to accept the adapted innovation because it now "sits better" with them and their tolerance for risk. Then comes the late majority because the innovation now has soft rounded corners, i.e., it is not so prickly, or strange. Last are the laggards who will come along because everyone else already has.[18]

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18   Based on: Gladwell, M. (2000). The Tipping Point. Little, Brown and Company.

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Our staff is a mixed bag. Some people are very comfortable
with the youth, some are not. So we now meet every week to
"de-brief" what's going on: what has been working well, what
hasn't, we hear each other's stories. This all helps us
strategize and go back out there. One thing we've learned:
don't isolate the point person. That is, it's not just
the Teen Services staff who has to do this - we all have
responsibility to make the Branch a youth-friendly place. From
Library staff at a professional development workshop in youth
engagement.

It was realized… that in order to be successful in achieving
youth engagement, Recreation staff require support such as
gatherings for staff within and between areas (geographical
regions) to encourage sharing and working collaboratively,
rather than competitively. A regular check-in and sharing
of ideas to inspire staff with storytelling, coaching,
workshops, sharing successes, team building, inviting staff
to youth gatherings, etc. To ensure that the Community Youth
Development Model is supported and nurtured, organizational
changes need to be put in place… From staff who participated
in the Recreation, Tourism, and Culture Youth Engagement
Strategy of the Halifax Regional Municipality.
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Food for thought…

From all that you've read and thought about in this article, what now intrigues you most about youth engagement? What possibilities can you imagine for your organization? Your community? What would be the benefit to your organization or community of adopting youth engagement practices? What specific forms would fit best with your organizational culture at this time? In what ways would you and your colleagues be challenged? What would you have to do – or stop doing – in order for these practices to be successfully implemented? What small, first step can you take to get moving in that direction?

At HeartWood we are currently asking ourselves these questions:
- Are we truly practicing youth/adult partnerships as well – and as much – as we possibly can?
- What questions and challenges are nudging us to change our practice and understanding of youth engagement?
- Is our use of language – inclusion, community youth development, civic youth engagement – helping us to understand our practice more clearly, or are these terms acting as "boxes" that prevent us from seeing what lies ahead in the evolution of our practice?

What are your questions?