



## Benefits of Youth-Adult Partnerships

Joan Chong

Department of Family and Consumer Sciences

**Y**oung people aged 5–19 are about 25 percent of the U.S. population. They can be active participants in school and community activities, especially if they receive mentoring and encouragement from adults. As the future of our society, and a quarter of the population of our communities, youths are an enormous resource that is relatively untapped. They are tomorrow's leaders and policymakers, and if they become engaged in issues that affect our communities now, our future will benefit.

### What is a youth-adult partnership?

A youth-adult partnership is a joint effort—youth and adult working together to achieve common goals. In this intentional relationship, adults offer knowledge, experience, and access to resources, while youths impart fresh ideas, new perspectives, energy, enthusiasm, and talents.

#### **Youths gain . . .**

- life skills such as leadership, planning, and teamwork
- a sense of belonging and being accountable and committed to their community
- civic awareness, the capacity to care for others, and a desire to change and improve the lives of others
- a sense of pride and the feeling of being needed and valued
- new respect and acceptance from adults.

#### **Adults gain . . .**

- first-hand information about the needs, concerns, and issues that pertain to youths
- the satisfaction of seeing youths willingly accept the

services and messages of the relationship

- open and honest interactions and feedback about existing programs or services relating to youth
- access to new collaborators with fresh and innovative ideas, creativity, energy, and enthusiasm
- new perspectives on decision-making and community problem-solving, as responsibilities are shared with the partnering young person
- opportunities to foster active community members for the future.

#### **Communities gain . . .**

- resources and creativity to solve critical problems and provide needed community services
- mutual understanding and increased trust between youths and adults, leading to strong youth-adult partnerships
- new alliances among organizations as they work together to support youths
- fresh perspectives on policy making, as youths gain a voice in governance and philanthropy
- citizens who are more knowledgeable and invested in youths and the community.

### Tips about creating youth-adult partnerships

Getting youths and adults to work together can be challenging. Here are some helpful tips for working to create youth-adult partnerships.

#### **1. Establish clear goals and responsibilities**

Each youth and adult must have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities for achieving the goals of the partnership.

**2. Possess mutual respect**

Mutual respect leads to positive relationships between youths and adults and helps to create an environment in which the partners are able to establish and carry out a common mission and vision for their communities. The youths and adults each bring valuable ideas, talents, and skills to the partnership. Each must be open-minded and willing to learn from one another.

**3. Ensure open communication**

Communication is essential for youths and adults to work effectively together in achieving goals. When youths and adults communicate openly, conflicts in their approaches to situations are more easily resolved, and the capabilities of both are enhanced.

**4. Provide capacity-building and training**

Effective partnerships set up youths and adults for success by avoiding throwing them into situations for which they are not prepared. Leadership is a continuing learning process. Both the youth and the adult may need training in areas such as communication, leadership, teamwork, and evaluation.

**5. Share the leadership**

Share the work activities and the power to make decisions. Shared leadership is a vehicle to empower and increase youth participation in planning, decision-making,

and program implementation and evaluation. If youths have no power to make decisions, their participation is not one of partnership.

Youth-adult partnerships focus on collaboration and emphasize youths as fresh resources with unique gifts to share. There are many ways to involve youths in constructive activities that can strengthen communities. For example, youths can partner with adults to perform community needs assessments, write grant proposals, raise funds, design programs, implement ideas and projects, collect data, deliver services, or evaluate a program's effectiveness.

When youths contribute to the larger purpose of the community, they develop leadership, citizenship, and life skills. Adults and the community reap the benefits of what youths can accomplish when they are challenged, engaged, and valued as citizens. When youths and adults work in partnership, they create a formidable unit that can have a powerful effect in problem solving, solution implementation, and positive change in the community. Youths should have a voice in issues that affect them, and youth-adult partnerships can empower them to participate.

**Reference**

Innovation Center for Community and Youth Development, et al. 2003. Youth-Adult Partnerships: A Training Manual. Takoma Park, MD.