

# Authentic Youth Engagement

Connecting the “Why” with the “How”

# Welcome!

- Please share...
  - Your name
  - Your job
  - Why you chose this workshop
  - If you were a kitchen utensil, what would you be and why?

# The Bigger Picture

- Youth Engagement is part of a bigger concept – Positive Youth Development
  - Positive Youth Development is an *approach*, not a program, that guides communities and organizations in the way they organize services, construct opportunities, and offer support so that youth are engaged and reach their full potential.
- Colorado Youth Development Team and the statewide assessment
  - [www.healthyyouthcolorado.org](http://www.healthyyouthcolorado.org)

# 7 Principles of Positive Youth Development

- These are the principles that all communities, organizations, and individuals should think about when working with and engaging young people.
  - Strengths-Based Approach
  - Youth Engagement
  - Youth-Adult Partnerships
  - Inclusive of ALL Youth
  - Culturally Responsive
  - Collaboration
  - Sustainability

## 1. Strengths – Based Approach

- Definition - A positive focus on physical and mental health, education, social, vocational, creative, spiritual, and civic connections
- What This Looks Like – Including strengths in your assessment of youth, rather than focusing primarily on risky behavior

## 2. Youth Engagement

- Definition - Youth have a positive sense of self and are connected to themselves and positive peers, adults and communities
- What This Looks Like – Inviting and engaging youth to participate in the development of a project or program that affects them.

### 3. Youth-Adult Partnerships

- Definition - Youth work with adults to make decisions for program and policy planning, implementation, and evaluation
- What This Looks Like – Using one of Colorado’s 84 youth advisory boards when making decisions that affect youth  
[www.healthyyouthcolorado.org](http://www.healthyyouthcolorado.org)

### 4. Culturally Responsive

- Definition - Adults recognize and respond proactively to variations in backgrounds and cultures, including but not limited to ethnic, racial, linguistic, learning and physical abilities, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, and geographic location to ensure inclusivity and equity.
- What This Looks Like – Hosting events where youth of various backgrounds must work together for a common purpose.

## 5. Includes ALL Youth

- Definition - Do not just target “at-risk” youth or youth who have exhibited risky behaviors in order to encourage dialogue and increase understanding across cultures and demographics
- What This Looks Like – Taking the term “at-risk youth” out of your vocabulary and challenging yourself to connect with a young person you don’t naturally connect with.

## 6. Collaboration

- Definition - Work with families and parents, private and public agencies and communities to develop and implement youth programs
- What This Looks Like – Taking an inventory of your program/project/effort to see who is included and who isn’t. Then, working to engage those partners that are not at the table, but would be of benefit to the effort.

## 7. Sustainability

- Definition - Long-term planning through funding, training, capacity building, professional development and evaluation in order to ensure ongoing support and engagement of youth
- What This Looks Like – Creating long-term strategic plans that incorporate positive youth development principles and strategies with accompanying budget line items

## For More Info

On positive youth development principles and strategies, go to [www.healthyouthcolorado.org](http://www.healthyouthcolorado.org)  
To download the full report and accompanying documents.

How do you define  
youth engagement?

# Perspectives on Youth Engagement

- “We must shift our thinking and start acting from the perspective that all young people and their families are resources to engage as problem solvers and not problems to be ‘fixed.’” – *Youth Advocate from Denver*
- “If I was going to talk with someone about something, I would want it to be someone I know and have a relationship with...If you go to the auditorium and ask us all what we want, no one will speak up. Go to the teacher that has all the of the kids hanging out...Go where the kids are. Ask us in small groups.” – *Young person from Yuma*
- “Youth advisory boards are worth a young person’s time when they have incentives to participate and allow youth input to be meaningful.” – *Student*

# What is Youth Engagement?

- Youth Engagement is the meaningful participation and sustained involvement of a young person in an activity with a focus outside of him or herself; specifically on the growth and well being of other youth.

(Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement, 2004)

- Youth Engagement – Creating an environment which coaches and mentors youth **while also training adults** on how to work with youth so they feel motivated and valued through building skills, exercising leadership, forming relationships with caring adults and helping their communities.

(Combination of Oregon's Youth Sexual Health Plan and Family & Youth Involvement)

# What the Research Shows – It Works!

- Youth who were engaged in structured activities were less likely to use cigarettes, marijuana, hard drugs and alcohol, less likely to engage in risky behavior and less likely to engage in violent behavior or be arrested than youth who were not engaged in these kinds of activities. (Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement, 2003)
- Engaging the voice of youth is an essential element in effective organizational development among community and youth serving organizations. (Zeldin, 2004)
- Ideas and input from youth are vital to the success of any program targeting youth. When programs targeting youth do not involve them in the development and decision-making process, they risk developing strategies that don't work and waste valuable resources. (Olson, et al. 2004)

# Adult Benefits of Youth Engagement

- Adults believe youth to be more competent and critical to program success.
- Adults feel stronger and more competent relating to youth



- Adults feel a stronger connection to their communities
- Adults can view young people as legitimate, crucial contributors to organizational decision-making processes

(Zeldin, et al, 2000)

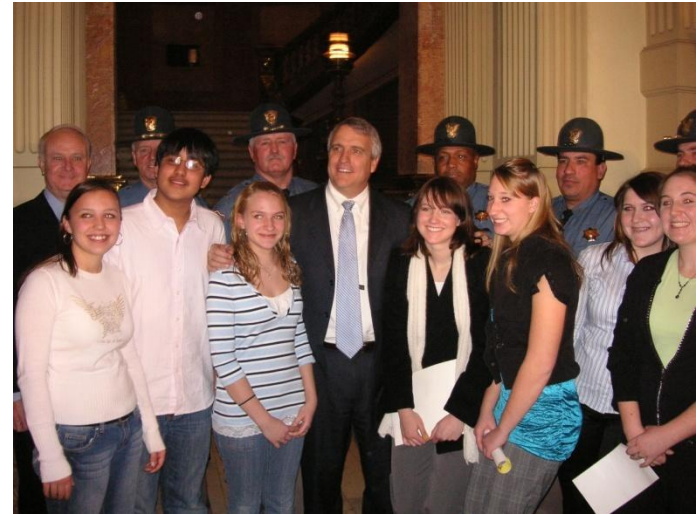
# Organizational Benefits of Youth Engagement

- Developing more effective youth-serving programs, initiatives and/or organizations;
- Strengthening the organization's focus on its youth-serving mission;
- Becoming more connected and responsive to youth in the organization's community;
- Placing greater value on inclusiveness and diverse representation;
- Organizations that have utilized youth adult partnerships realized greater mission clarity, increased connection and responsiveness to youth and the general community, along with greater appeal to funders

(Zeldin, McDaniel, Topitzes & Calvert, 2000)

# Youth Benefits

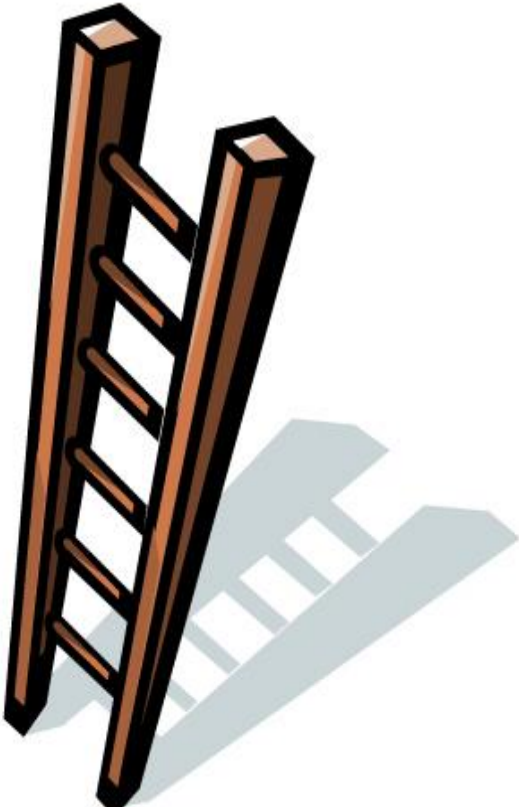
- Increasing self-esteem, sense of personal control and enhanced identity development:
- Increasing academic achievement;
- Enhancing development of life skills including leadership, public speaking and job responsibility;
- Strengthening communication skills with adults, peers and family;
- Decreasing loneliness, shyness and hopelessness;
- Decreasing involvement in risky behaviors, such as drug use, leading to an increase in overall safety



(Scales & Leffert, 1997)

# Ladder of Youth Engagement

## Hart's Ladder of Young People's Participation\*

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- ★ 9. Youth and Adult Initiated and Directed
  8. Youth Initiated, Shared Decisions with Adults
  7. Youth Initiated and Directed
  6. Adult Initiated, Shared decisions
  5. Consulted and Informed
  4. Assigned and Informed
  3. Tokenism
  2. Decoration
  1. Manipulation

\*Note: *Step 9: Youth and Adult Initiated and Directed*, while not part of Hart's original model, is an increasingly recognized addition to the model.

# Examples of Maximum Youth Engagement

- Youth Partnership for Health
  - An advisory board comprised of youth from all over Colorado
  - Non-profit organizations and public service providers bring ideas, literature, and campaign materials to the group sincerely looking for feedback, advice, and evaluation.
- Montbello Project
  - Youth pastor at local church reached out to all youth in the community.
  - Integrates gang members and non-gang members to come together for fun activities and talk about differences, goals, and struggles in the community.
  - Youth and pastor are partners. There is a great deal of trust and pastor is positive mentor and role model, not an unapproachable authority figure.



# Examples of Limited Youth Engagement

- STRYVE
  - Striving to Reduce Youth Violence Everywhere is an initiative led by the CDC to prevent youth violence
  - Result of the rise in school violence in the 1990s
  - Targets communities, families, and youth
  - Input is from CDC and experts on youth behavior and violence, youth do not have input
- Asking a youth to join an advisory board, but not allowing him/her to vote on decision items.

# How to engage youth

- Most important elements of engaging youth
  - Get youth involved from the beginning.
  - Ensure that their role meaningful and be real about what you need from them.
  - Respect their thoughts, ideas, and insights. They are the experts on modern culture.
  - Recognize the difference between authority figure and mentor.
  - Ask youth what they want and need. Don't make assumptions based on what "experts" say
- Handout
  - Lists ways to sincerely engage youth on all levels

# Small Group Breakout

- Groups of 3-4
- Discuss your program's relationship and engagement with youth and where it falls on the ladder.
- What action can you take to help your organization move up the ladder?

# Large Group Discussion and Closing

- What did you learn and/or hear in your discussions?
- What are some action steps that will help your programs move up the youth engagement ladder?
- Questions?

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