

Boston Leadership Learning Community
Youth Leadership Development
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Convenors

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Framing the Discussion – Daryl Wright – YouthBuild USA

YouthBuild USA's definition of good leadership: Good leadership is taking the responsibility to make things go right for self, family, program, and community.

Carrying out leadership development requires work in three areas:

- Systematic training
- Personal development
- Creating meaningful leadership opportunities

A participant suggested adding a fourth area: building organizational capacity to effectively engage youth leaders.

Daryl commented that YouthBuild has found a lot of enthusiasm for its vision of leadership development among the organizations it works with, but these organizations often have a difficult time implementing this vision in their day-to-day work with young people. Often adults who lead these organizations do not know how to partner with young people in meaningful ways. As a result, the fullest potential of youth leadership is not realized.

Identifying Youth Leadership Outcomes

We asked participants to share the youth leadership outcomes they are seeking in their programs. These outcomes seem to cluster in four areas: personal outcomes, relational outcomes, community outcomes and results.

Personal

- Identity awareness
- Authors of their life story
- Create narrative of hope and possibility
- Self-advocacy
- Giving life meaning
- Finding a career path
- Clarify and practice values
- Develop capacity to manage projects
- Quest for heroism (heroes in their own narratives)
- Increase resilience

Relational

- Social awareness
- Perspective taking
- Help youth build trusting relationships that cross boundaries
- Communication skills
- Resolve conflict successfully

Community

- Civic engagement
- Become accountable and engage with the system – impact policy

Results

- Lower incidents of drug and alcohol abuse
- Rebuilt communities
- Academic retention
- Global community

We developed clusters for small group discussions on creating leadership opportunities in communities, personal and relational development, and organizational capacity to foster youth as change agents.

Preparing for Small Group Discussions

Before breaking out into small groups we asked each person to reflect personally and write answers to the following questions. Below is a summary of the responses we received.

What youth leadership outcome is your program (or a program you know) seeking?

Personal and relationship focused

- Youth clarify their values and link these values with their behaviors
- Youth have the capacity to fulfill their vision
- Youth live their values through their behavior
- Youth create a personal narrative of hope and possibility and a roadmap for achieving their goals
- Self awareness
- Youth engage in career-building
- Youth respond to the call to duty
- Youth develop skills for success (communication, perseverance and determination, critical thinking, stress management, cultural sensitivity, goal setting, recognizing and utilizing unique talents and abilities)
- Youth forge connections across boundaries

Community focused

- Youth are fully integrated into all levels of the coalition
- Youth identify their link to, and impact on, the community. By recognizing their impact and influence whether positive or negative, they realize they help

contribute to their current environment and therefore have some control over their lives and future

- Youth are included as full civic partners
- Youth take responsibility for the neighborhood/space/environment
- Youth develop advocacy/organizing skills
- Youth learn how to identify problems and find and implement solutions to problems
- Youth develop scientific skills, such as designing research questions/projects
- Youth are agents of change and progress in community development

Results

- Numerically reduce AOD (alcohol and other drugs) based on collected data
- Empowerment for women
- Conflict does not get escalated

What have you learned about how to support youth to achieve this outcome?

Process supports

- The importance of working together with families, schools, policymakers and other organizations
- Collaborate
- Learning across generations is powerful
- Allowing youth to set their own goals
- Venues for honest dialogue
- Repetition
- Learn, practice, apply results for better internalization

Training and skill-building supports

- Didactic stuff
- Develop their own spark of leadership and the skills to realize it
- Teaching specific skills needed to organize effectively

Attitudes

- Take care of myself
- Small steps; they learn and engage differently than adults
- Nurture a positive hope of the future
- To have high expectations
- To pay attention to the person more than the person's problems
- Meeting youth where they are at

What would indicate to you that this outcome has or is being achieved?

Changes in youth attitudes and behavior

- Unprompted behavior and unprompted reporting
- Outbursts decrease
- Youth are taking steps to realize their most hopeful dreams
- Reflection and expression of expectations
- Engagement without solicitation

- Confidence
- Stepping up and coming up with own projects
- Increased enthusiasm

Changes in adult attitudes and behavior

- Youth speak and are heard, not tokenism
- Enrollment in a young person's life

Indicator changes

- Improved indicators on youth risk behavior surveys and arrest data

What is the greatest challenge you face in moving youth towards this outcome?

Resources

- Enough time for planning
- Very part-time staff, decentralized program
- Finding appropriate partners, building an infrastructure that can support our project and help it expand, grow and be sustainable
- Time and consistency

Leadership opportunities

- Setting up some youth as leaders within the crew
- Engaging youth at different levels

Youth-adult partnerships

- Adults not bought in
- Genuine adult partnerships
- Engaging youth in a very adult-centric way and bland world of community development
- Integrating youth into adult-youth groups
- Adult non-believers that youth are worthy of our investment
- Lack trust and willingness to take the risk of having a real relationship

Youth

- To live values coherently
- To develop core capacities such as thinking globally in the present and the future
- Youth are transient; lack of ongoing commitment

Policy

- Lack of public policy follow through

How are you addressing this challenge?

- On-going education and groups working together
- Support youth with stipends
- Attending the Boston LLC gathering
- Stay the course
- More one-on-one time
- Training opportunities
- Organizational support
- Leadership opportunity
- Slowly

Small Group Breakouts

We broke down into four small groups: two groups focused on skill development and personal development, one group on leadership opportunities, and one group on organizational capacity. Each group explored the following four questions:

- What youth leadership outcome is your program (or a program you know) seeking?
- What have you learned about how to support youth to achieve this outcome?
- What would indicate to you that this outcome has or is being achieved?
- What is the greatest challenge you face in moving youth towards this outcome? How are you addressing that challenge?

Large Group Debrief

After small group discussions, the groups reconvened to share key insights and major challenges that surfaced in their discussions.

Key Insights

- Our language has to change.
- We have so much in common with what we are trying to do.
- We need to engage youth more in developing opportunities.
- We need real engagement and involvement.
- There are like-minded people doing this work; we are not alone.
- We need to view young people as change agents.

Major Challenges

- Adults who want to help but not touch.
- There is discontinuity between our values and how these are linked to the larger community.
- Time is a huge issue.
- We are not consistent with values.
- Setting boundaries and finding balance
- How to move beyond adultism
- Adults not knowing how to have fun

Suggestions for next steps

- Convene another meeting to follow-up on some of the ideas that were generated at this meeting, e.g., picking a challenge and having an in-depth discussion about how to address that challenge
- Need to involve more non-youth workers, funders, corporations, city hall in this discussion
- More cross-silo communication
- Have more fun

Resources

- Leadership Development: A Handbook from YouthBuild USA and Youth Action Program and Homes, Inc. by Dorothy Stoneman with contributions by John Bell
Can order through YouthBuild USA at www.Youthbuild.org
<<http://www.youthbuild.org/>>
- Learning and Leading: A Tool Kit for Youth Development and Civic Activism published by the Innovation Center for community and youth development
Available to order at www.theinnovationcenter.org
<<http://www.theinnovationcenter.org/>>
- Emerging Organizational Theory and the Youth Development Organization by Wendy Wheeler, an article from Applied Developmental Science 2000, Vol. 4, Suppl.1,47-54,2000 by Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.
- The Center for Teen Empowerment, “Moving Beyond Icebreakers” can be ordered at www.teenempowerment.org
- BCCJ 5:30-7:00 – third Thursday of the month – discussing challenges – first one is “Picking Your Battles”