

# Youth-Adult Partnerships

Oklahoma 4-H Volunteer Development Series



## Making the Connection

The developmental needs of young people can be met through opportunities to work in meaningful roles together with adults on issues of importance to young people's lives. Studies have shown that youth, adults and

institutions benefit when young people are involved in the decision-making role in communities and organizations.

The key to this partnership is an adult viewing youth as a valuable resource who

have ideas, experiences, and assets that will contribute to the betterment of the organization. For a Youth-Adult Partnership to emerge adults cannot view youth as an object to be dealt with or as recipients of programs provided.

## In this Help Sheet

<i>Developing Contributory Skills</i>	2
<i>Helping Youth Practice their Contributory Skills</i>	2
<i>Tips and Tricks for Working with Youth as Partners</i>	3
<i>Application of Youth-Adult Partnerships to the 4-H Experience</i>	4

## Benefits of Partnership

Adults experience and appreciate the competence of youth first-hand, and begin to see young people as legitimate, crucial contributors to the organizational decision-making process.

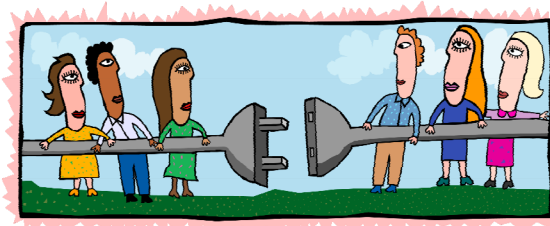
Adults feel more effective and confident in working with and relating to youth.

Adults come to understand the needs and concerns of youth.

Adults learn to appreciate the energy, ideas, and optimism of youth.

Youth feel more comfortable and effective in expressing themselves with adults.

Youth develop life skills such as planning/organization, decision-making, self-discipline, managing feelings, self-responsibility, teamwork, self-motivation, contribution to group efforts, leadership, accepting differences, cooperation, communications, etc.



## Developing Contributory Skills

**“Every volunteer system should strive to build upon the natural desires of people to contribute something back to their communities or life in general.”**

A Volunteer has many reasons for volunteering. Three major motivating forces are for achievement, for influence or power and for affiliation. But to stimulate these motivational forces there first has to be a reason to participate. For many people just helping others to grow is the reason.

The volunteer system that encourages a volunteer to grow from a perspective of leading to one of helping will build the personal power of its individuals.

Every volunteer system should strive to build upon the natural desires of people to contribute something

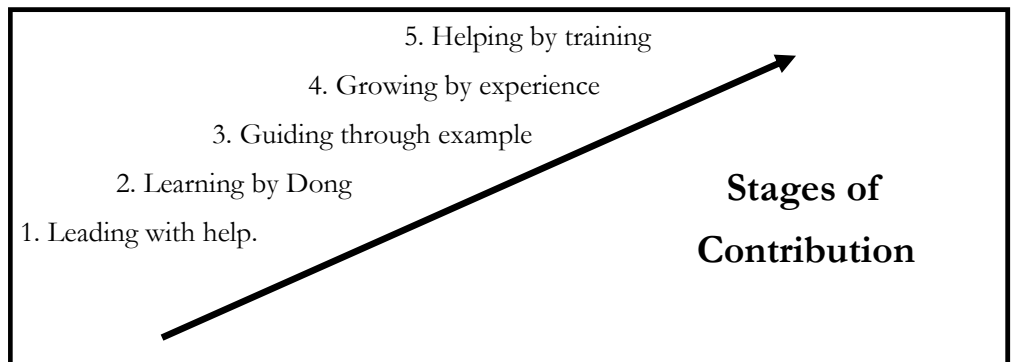
back to their communities or life in general. To enhance this need, managers should design opportunities for leadership development. Helping others learn to lead and teach others should be a primary focus for these opportunities

## Helping Youth Practice their Contributory Skills

People gain satisfaction and a sense of accomplishment when they feel like they have contributed to another person’s development. One of the ways they can do this

is by helping others move through the stages of contribution. For example, these steps suggest how this can be done.

1. I do – you watch.
2. I do – you help.
3. We do.
4. You do – I help.
5. You do – I watch.



## *Tips and Tricks for Working with Youth as Partners*

*(Taken from "Younger Voices, Stronger Choices," Kansas City, Promise Project, a Joint Effort of the Junior League of Kansas City, MO. Inc. and Kansas City Consensus, 1997)*

### **Don't expect more from the youths than you would from another adult.**

In much the same way that minorities feel they have to be better than their counterparts to get the same rewards, young people do too. When a young person shows up 15 minutes late for a meeting, an adult will think, "Ah ha, a slacker. Irresponsible kid." When a fellow adult shows up 15 minutes late, the same person will think, "That's understandable. They've got deadlines, pressures and schedules." So do young people.

**Make sure that you don't hold the young person to a stricter standard than the adults.** No, they may not hold down full-time jobs, but they have other commitments and pressures and schedules that cry for their attention. And they will agonize more over their performance than an adult. In dealing with any new relationship, there is a caution or apprehension. You both watch closely for signs that this might not work out. Don't exaggerate this tendency and expect the youth's performance to exceed that of adults.

**Conversely, don't excuse all indiscretions just because you are dealing with a youth.** Some of the

survey respondents commented that they couldn't find fault with youth. When asked to recount the dumbest thing a youth has ever said to you, one respondent claims, "I realize I am much more gracious with young people than adults. I can't think of something I would classify as dumb from a youth, but I can think of several from adults." Sometimes adults tend not to expect enough from young people.

**Treat youth as individuals; don't make one youth represent all youth.** Young people will put enough pressure on themselves. They understand that adults may carry negative images of young people and may generalize from the behavior of a few. Don't add to it by making them feel that they must speak for or represent all youth. You wouldn't do that for another adult. Assure the young people that you are interested in their individual opinions and don't expect them to embody an entire population.

**Be careful about interrupting.** Kids get discouraged easily. Let them finish their ideas. For the partnership to work, young people must feel that they are valued and respected by adults. In

many of their outside relationships, this respect is lacking and they are inherently wary of adults. When interrupted by an adult, they will tend to stop talking (sometimes permanently). To prevent this and create an environment that fosters equal participation, adults need to be hypersensitive about interrupting a young person, and young people need to be encouraged to persevere with their point despite adult interruptions. Both parties need to respect each other in their right to voice opinions without criticism or censure.

**Remember that your role in a partnership is not to parent.** While being a parent may be the most important role that any adult can play, the purpose of youth/adult partnerships is to give young people a different way to relate to adults.

**Don't move too fast.** Remember that this is all new for the young people. Don't move too fast without explaining the reasons for actions taken. Rushing through meetings can be a sign the adults are still trying to control the actions of the group.

**A 4-H volunteers role in a Youth-Adult Partnership is not to parent.**

## *Application of Youth-Adult Partnership to the 4-H Experience*

### **On TRAC** (Taking Revitalization to All Clubs)

On TRAC is a program designed to help each club plan a fun, organized and educational program for its local club each month. On TRAC involves a team of parents, volunteers, 4-H members and club officers from a club/unit.

The process encourages cooperation and teamwork between adults and youth as they plan and carry out the club year.

**Club Officers** – A Volunteer works with the Executive Committee (club officers) to plan the meeting agenda and discuss items prior to the meeting. The youth then have sole responsibility in conducting the business meeting with minimal assistance from the club leader.

**County Activities and Events Committees** – 4-H members and adults work side-by-side to plan, conduct and evaluate county activities and events. The

youth are given equal voice and meaningful leadership roles at the activity/event.

### **Service Learning Projects**

– Youth and adults work together to identify and analyze the problem, select and plan the project, receive training and orientation, take action to complete the project, provided time to reflect upon the activity, what was learned and how things might be handled differently and finally celebrating the experience.



### Resources:

- Red Taxi, A Management Volunteer's Guide for Involving Other Volunteers, National 4-H Youth Development Program, 1994
- (Taken from "Younger Voices, Stronger Choices," Kansas City, Promise Project, a Joint Effort of the junior League of Kansas city, MO. Inc. and Kansas City Consensus, 1997)

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