

# CREATING CREDIBILITY, ADDRESSING SUSTAINABILITY, AND BUILDING CAPACITY

## CREDIBILITY: UNDERSTANDING YOUR COMMUNITY'S YOUTH ENVIRONMENT

Creating credibility is one of the principal tasks of community entry. This includes showing members of the community that you have integrity, communication skills, language, cultural knowledge, and skills and abilities they value. Even if your Project Plan includes a youth component and provides you with an organizational base, creating credibility is a highly personal act of relationship building. If your work with young people is a new component of your primary project, or you are doing it in addition to your primary project, there are numerous ways to begin building relationships with youth. Get to know the young people in a family you live with or near, or the children of friends or co-workers. Play sports. Sing. Do art. Ask someone to teach you a local game. Volunteer to tutor some students at the local school. Do the things you like to do and notice the young men and women who are interested. Who is running alongside you? Who is curious about your music? Who wants to read your books and magazines? Remember that it is sometimes the small gestures, repeated consistently, that have the biggest impact.<sup>17</sup>

As you get to know individual young people and local adults, you can gather information about the youth environment in your culture. Be sure to consult the “Assessment Tools” in “Part Three: Tools, Techniques, and Games” of this handbook for suggestions about how to gather information. “The Community Map,” “Observation,” and “Informal Interviews” (p. 89, 85, and 87) may be particularly useful to you.

Keep a record of your observations, the information you gather, as well as your reflections and questions. You can use a bound journal or a simple notebook. This can help you inform and manage your actions and planning. It also can assist you in completing reports you routinely submit to your APCD.

*“Start out by getting to know young people, really understanding the culture they come from and the future they look towards... become their friend... smile lots and be patient...get to know their parents.”*

— A Volunteer in Honduras

## **Learning About the Youth Environment**

Every culture has mechanisms or processes for helping young people develop values, skills, and competencies as they move from the status of “youth” to “adult.” These range from formal structures such as schools to informal processes such as folk wisdom and peer group interactions. Consider the questions below as you begin to learn about the youth environment in your community:<sup>18</sup>

### **Family/Cultural Traditions**

In gathering information about family and cultural traditions, be sure to consider:

- Traditional coming of age and rites of passage ceremonies that signal the change in status from child to youth and youth to adulthood and that send the message “now you are a man/woman.”
- Folk wisdom, stories, and legends in which folk heroes and heroines represent values held by the community; family legends that address community values and skill areas.
- Roles and responsibilities of youth within the family structure and the skills their position develops; parents or guardians and other adults serving as role models to help transmit values and teach social skills.
- Religious institutions and traditions that help transmit cultural values and may include rites of passage signaling a change in status.

### **Education/Employment**

Look for formal and non-formal educational processes that contribute to positive youth development:

- Formal education/apprenticeships where youth learn academic and vocational skills, the rules of work and society, and what is expected of them as adults. These might include mentoring or internships.
- Life skills education camps, clubs, or classes in which youth learn the practical skills (budgeting, homemaking, problem solving, communication, and farming) for successfully managing independent living as an adult.
- Youth employment/entrepreneurship activities in which young men and women learn about the economic culture, expectations, roles, responsibilities, and rules by participating in the local economy through income generation activities.

### **Peer Group/Social Activities**

Look for social activities that can contribute to youth development:

- Recreation activities including sports, arts, crafts, games, and hobbies and other leisure time activities with some learning component and skills enhancement. These can help adolescents learn teamwork and build self-confidence and self-concept.
- Service learning, community volunteerism, and leadership activities that provide opportunities for young people to take on meaningful roles in family and community. These also help youth develop skills, learn community values, and prepare for the responsibilities of adult life.
- Peer group and peer influences: clubs, friends, and role models teach values and social skills.

## Journaling

Journaling, or the act of writing and collecting details of one's life and work, can be a helpful way to bring focus and reflection into your work with youth as well as your daily life. Journals can be large, medium, or small sheets of lined or unlined paper. They can be bound, looseleaf, in a single volume, or subdivided into sections. When writing, be sure to leave some white space for notes and commentary when you reread the page later.

Some journal sections can be creative right-brain jottings, ideas, and sketches. Other pages will contain narrative from left-brain "mind flows." You can use your journal to record the details of your observations and interactions and review them periodically for reference and planning.

Some things to record:

- Full names of people
- Observations and information about key meetings or exchanges from life and work
- Individual and family profiles
- Descriptions
- Formal and informal relationships
- Associations
- Activity settings
- Recipes
- Rituals
- Events
- Numbers
- Lists of ideas
- Quotations
- Folk stories and tales
- Rules of local games
- Feelings and emotions
- Descriptions of physical health and wellness
- Mementos
- Jokes
- Sketches
- Maps
- Reflections and internal dialogues
- Plans
- Predictions
- Evaluations
- Brochures
- Photos
- Community meeting programs
- News clippings

Or consider filling your journal pages with responses to prompts, a short list of standard questions or topics you think are important to ask regularly of yourself such as:

- Today's date
- Day of the week
- Season/weather
- Physical, mental/emotional state
- Where I spent most of the day
- Other places I went
- Reading, listening to, watching, wearing
- Eating/drinking
- Wishing, remembering
- Talked to, accomplished, learned
- Idea brainstorm on youth activities
- Planning
- Questions I still have
- Opportunities I can help create

Whatever system you use, be sure to reread what you have written periodically to refresh your memory and reflect on the information you have gathered.

*Volunteers and staff in Samoa assisted the Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture to formulate the official youth policy for the country by helping to plan and coordinate meetings. Volunteers also played an important role in presenting the draft policy to the public and to youth in particular.*

## SUSTAINABILITY: CHALLENGES AND RESPONSES

Development work is said to be “sustainable” when the community is able to continue on its own without outside support. The Peace Corps sees sustainable development as a process whereby people learn to build on their own strengths, take charge of their lives, and address their expressed needs. Planning for sustainability requires considering all of the following:

- ▶ **Culturally sustainable:** Does the project design fit within and build on local beliefs and traditions, or will it be seen as an “outsider’s idea” and not be acceptable or continued when you (i.e., the Volunteer) leave?
- ▶ **Politically sustainable:** When there is no longer an outsider in the project, will it be sustainable within the sociopolitical context?
- ▶ **Economically sustainable:** Will there be sufficient local resources, or the capacity to generate them when you or other supportive outsiders leave?
- ▶ **Managerially sustainable:** Will there be the local management capacity to carry on the work when you leave?
- ▶ **Environmentally sustainable:** As the project grows, will the environment be able to support the continued use of resources?

*“A Jamaica Volunteer assisted in developing a management plan for a community life skills education project. After the activity was fully assumed by the Counterpart, it became a registered non-governmental organization.”*

By addressing these questions at the outset of the planning process, you and the community will be more likely to create a meaningful project that has the impact you both desire. When you are working closely with Counterparts and supervisors and are receiving guidance from program managers, there is greater likelihood that the activities will be appropriate and sustainable.

In the long term, it has been said that development is not sustainable unless it involves youth, as they are the investment in the future. Nevertheless, when dealing with youth activities and small projects, special challenges emerge.

Some challenges and ideas for responses:

- ▶ Adults often undervalue youth’s contributions and abilities.  
*Response:* Do some projects that are public. Focus attention on achievement and celebrate success.



- ▶ Adults dominate discussion, meetings, and planning with youth.

**Response:** Coach and prepare both youth and adults to work with each other through raising awareness and building communication and understanding among them.

- ▶ Youth's access to financial resources is limited.

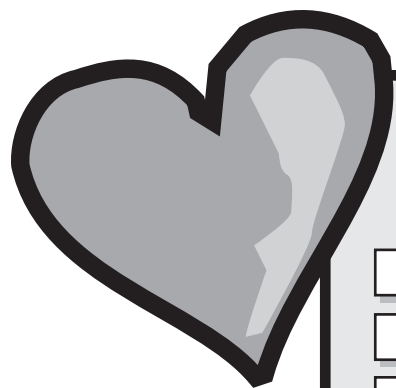
**Response:** Treat almost every activity as a demonstration project to adults with resources or access to resources. These include people who work in government agencies, religious organizations, non-governmental organizations, or community organizations. Teach youth how to write proposals and conduct fundraising events.

- ▶ Many youth prefer to experiment with their participation and move from activity to activity more frequently than adults.

**Response:** Duties should be well defined and for short duration with options to continue involvement in other areas as long as the interest and participation levels remain high. Assign two young people per position and have co-planners, co-secretaries, co-treasurers.

- ▶ The activity the youth wish to do is probably not replicable because of cost or the existence of unique talents or people.

**Response:** Enhanced relationships or exceptional learning opportunities are often good outcomes from activities. Where appropriate, celebrate these outcomes.



### **Ways to Show Kids You Care...<sup>19</sup>**

- Read aloud together
- Tell them their feelings are okay
- Set boundaries that keep them safe
- Be honest
- Notice when they are absent

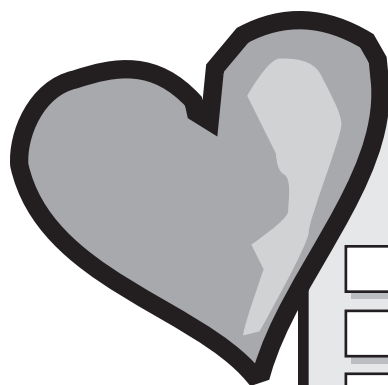
## BUILDING CAPACITY

Keep in mind the Peace Corps capacity building approach to community development as you think about the roles you take on with young people. This approach focuses on helping people develop the capacity to improve their own lives. Building in young people the confidence and skills to make a difference in their communities is an important investment in the future of these communities. This can be done at various levels:

- ▶ **Individual members of the community, project participants:** Much of your work will be at the individual level. The activities in this manual describe many different ways in which Volunteers have helped build capacity in the young men and women they engage in these endeavors.
- ▶ **Professionals, service providers:** Involving Counterparts and other local adults in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of activities with youth or helping them to involve youth in activities that have not previously included young people helps develop capacity among professionals, service providers, and those who will continue the work when you leave your post.
- ▶ **Organizations:** You may also find that you can strengthen organizations' management techniques by helping both youth serving and other organizations develop systems that encourage youth participation in their projects and programs.
- ▶ **Communities:** Any time you involve youth in an activity that benefits the community, you are broadening the base of participation and building capacity for youth development in the wider community.

*“Keep a comfortable balance between being a leader and being a friend. If authority is lost, the children will lose respect or interest. We are in a unique role. We can be their friends, their teachers, and their role models.”*

— Peace Corps Volunteer,  
Morocco



### Ways to Show Kids You Care...<sup>20</sup>

- Give them space when they need it
- Discuss their dreams and nightmares
- Answer their questions
- Apologize when you've done something wrong
- Keep the promises you make

## VOLUNTEER ROLES

As a Volunteer, you will take on various capacity building roles in your work. You will be a **learner, trainer, co-facilitator, change agent, project co-planner, or mentor**. For more specific information on the knowledge, skills, and attitudes required for each of these roles, consult **The Roles of the Volunteer in Development**.<sup>21</sup> The pages that follow will provide you with some specific information to consider about your roles in relation to youth, beginning with guidance on communicating with youth, parents, and guardians. Three roles are described: the **Volunteer as Mentor**, as **Youth Promoter**, and as **Community Youth Developer**.

## COMMUNICATING WITH YOUTH<sup>22</sup>

Improving your interpersonal communication skills will help you build relationships with the young people in your community and with adults too! Good skills in this area allow you to show young people you respect them even when you disagree. The skills described below can be useful when gathering information about youth activities in your community, helpful when coaching young people as they take on leadership roles in their schools and communities, and a source of guidance as you support a young man or woman who comes to you for advice.

When working with young people, it can be tempting to give advice and solve problems for them. Unless there is great urgency or you have specific information that they could not find independently, it is more helpful and empowering to coach them as they meet challenges themselves. Keep these guidelines in mind when communicating with youth:

► **Be genuine.**

Be relaxed and respectful and share your interests with them. Be careful not to adopt the styles and language of youth just to try to relate to them. Young people will sense your lack of sincerity and most won't appreciate it.

► **Remember that little things matter.**

Greet young people. Get to know them. Learn their names. Invite a young person you know to join you for an outing. Consult the tips sprinkled throughout this book to show them you care.

► **Watch your non-verbal messages.**

Young people may be reluctant to speak with an adult. They may be shy or unsure that you want to listen and that they have the right to speak. Put them at ease using culturally appropriate eye contact and body language. Encourage them to speak by remaining silent for a few seconds when you would otherwise respond, and by making short encouraging sounds or remarks such as "Hmmm," "I see," or "Interesting."

*Even if it doesn't seem like you are doing much, your presence is important. Being consistent allows you to build a stronger relationship...especially important if you want to discuss sensitive topics.*

— Volunteers in Ghana

► **Turn off distractions and listen.**

Listening involves “turning off” your own background conversation. Develop your awareness of the voice inside that is agreeing, disagreeing, judging, or problem solving. This will allow you to hear what young people are saying more fully whether they are telling you about a football game or expressing concerns they have. If a young person approaches you to discuss a sensitive topic, try to determine whether you should stop what you are doing and focus completely on him or her. This can send the important message that he or she deserves your full attention. On the other hand, it might make you both more comfortable to do something together while you talk.

► **Ask questions with care.**

When you do ask questions, try to use open-ended ones that require more than a short answer. They will encourage the young man or woman to speak. To avoid sounding like you are interrogating, be careful not to ask more than two questions in a row, particularly when you are discussing sensitive issues. (See “Asking Questions” on p. 86 for more on this topic.)

► **Paraphrase cautiously.**

Sometimes paraphrasing, or repeating back what another person has said using your own words, can help communication. It can convey that you are listening carefully and may allow the other person to correct any misunderstandings. You can use phrases such as “What I am hearing is...,” or “How I understand what you meant is...is this what you mean?” Be sure to use this technique with care when communicating in cross-cultural settings. Misinterpretations can occur, especially when you are a non-native speaker of the language and new to the culture. Remember also that it is inappropriate for young people to “correct” adults in many cultures and that it may be impolite to tell a visitor that he or she has made a mistake.



► **Avoid giving advice, but do share information.**

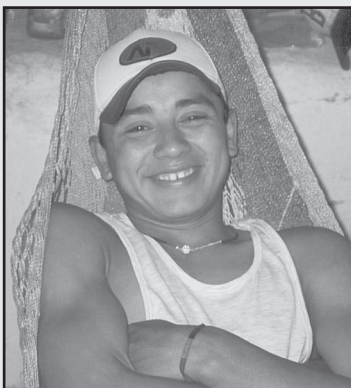
Sharing information is different from giving advice. Sharing information means presenting material in such a way that a young man or woman can decide whether or not to use it. Giving advice, on the other hand, means presenting information as something that *should* be used. Remember that many interactions provide opportunities to help youth develop their analytical and problem-solving skills, leading them to find their own answers. It is fine to share your ideas and experiences as options and point to how they connect to ideas and experiences the young person has already shared with you.

“Tell youth things  
about yourself.  
They really like that!”

— A Volunteer in Nicaragua



## What to Do About Crushes<sup>23</sup>



A “crush” is a romantic feeling a youth can have for another youth or adult. Because of the difference in age and the position of power your role as a Volunteer represents, it is never appropriate for you to have an intimate relationship with a young person. Even if you act appropriately, by working with youth, you are susceptible to admiration that goes deeper than it should. Here is how to handle being “crushed”:

- 1** Don't blow the crush out of proportion. It's a normal part of adolescence and is simply a sign of your importance in young people's lives.
- 2** Affirm the teenager. Kids need affirmation, and a crush is one way of asking for it. Be careful, however, not to encourage romantic ideas.
- 3** Use the crush as an opportunity to build friendship with the young person. Prove that you'll still be important in his or her life even when the romantic feelings are gone.
- 4** Don't put yourself in compromising situations. Tell a local adult and the parent or guardian about the suspected crush to protect yourself.

## COMMUNICATING WITH PARENTS OR GUARDIANS

Regardless of the nature of your relationship with a young person, it is critical to work closely with parents or guardians and other local adults as you build relationships with, and create activities for, young people. Doing so will increase the likelihood that your work with youth will be appropriate to the needs, interests, and culture of the community and that it will be sustainable. Friendship with adults from another culture can provide young people with an alternative lens on their world at an important time in their lives. Their relationship with you should never be at the expense of good relationships with their parents, guardians, or other local adults. If you have concerns about a relationship between a child and his or her parents or guardians, share your concerns with a local adult you trust to help you decide what to do. Community support mechanisms

*“Give specific supportive feedback to young people about their strengths and point out ways in which their behavior makes a difference. Be positive, but in a specific way. It's better to say ‘I like the way you colored that flower,’ or ‘You used a lot of colors in the flowers,’ than ‘That's pretty.’ If you must criticize, criticize the action, not the person. Say something like ‘Don't go through the trash. It can make you sick,’ instead of ‘Little Piggy!’”*

— A Volunteer in Nicaragua

should be developed to, whenever possible, help parents or guardians help their children.<sup>24</sup> Young people typically report a desire for guidance, resources, and role modeling from their parents or guardians as they develop their own leadership skills.<sup>25</sup> Healthy relationships with other adults in the community can enhance young people’s relationships with their own parents.<sup>26</sup> As a Peace Corps staff member notes:

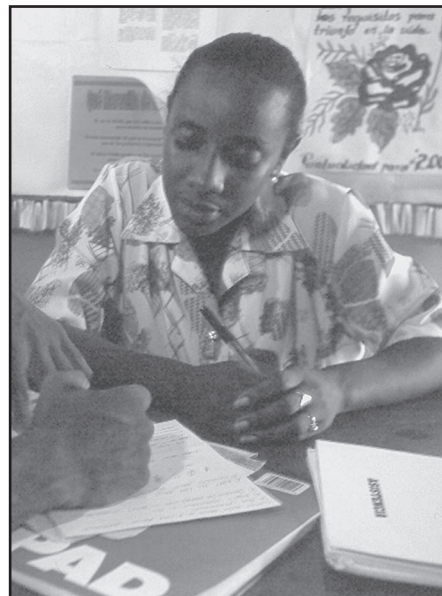
*Youth are very fragile and open to “change material”.... Volunteers should [help them] build new values based on those that exist, not destroy the old ones, and instill new ones that will not be supported by parents and other adults.... Youth should be taught to communicate assertively with as many adults from their community as possible. They should be taught to state ...their concerns, problems, and challenges, as well as their ideas, plans, and victories. Volunteers should...interact with the community adult population...When the Volunteer leaves he or she should leave parents and children willing to learn about each other and willing to support each other.*

— Peace Corps Program Manager, Moldova

Be sure to use the community observations, interactions, and interviews you have conducted to understand the relationships between youth and adults in your host community and look for ways to strengthen them.

The communication skills that work with youth (see “Communicating With Youth,” p. 25) will also work with their parents or guardians. Here are a few additional tips:

- ★ Describe to parents or guardians the strengths you have observed in their children and invite them to do the same.
- ★ Invite them to tell you about their hopes and aspirations for their children.
- ★ Listen to parents and be respectful of their culture, language, home, and personal space.
- ★ Be clear about your role, what you can and can’t do with and for them and their children.



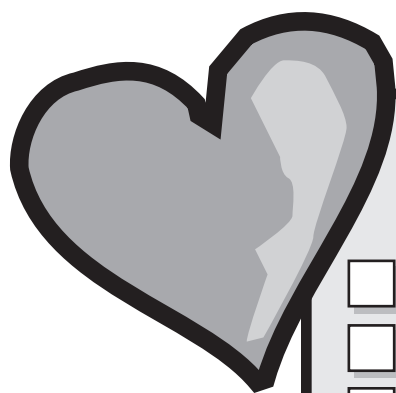
*“Do house visits  
... to create a more  
comfortable atmosphere  
in which parents can  
tell the Volunteer  
how they feel.”*  
— A Volunteer in Ecuador

## A. THE VOLUNTEER AS MENTOR<sup>27</sup>

As a Volunteer, you may become a mentor to a young person in your community. Mentoring can occur in a variety of settings and have various purposes. Regardless of the specific goals and context, a mentoring relationship is typically a voluntary, one-on-one, friendship-based relationship between two people in which one provides support and encouragement to the other in developing new skills and greater confidence. Mentoring can be focused on career planning or life skills development. It can be part of a formal program or can be an informal arrangement. You might find yourself mentoring a young person as he or she takes on a leadership role in the community or makes important life decisions.

Successful youth mentors are those who accept and value youth as they are, guide them, share decision making with them, and let youth set the agenda for the relationship.<sup>28</sup> A study of the Big Brothers/Big Sisters program found that the best mentoring programs were those in which young people had “friendly” rather than “preacher-like” relationships with their mentors. Perseverance, consistency, patience, respect, and self-esteem are important qualities in mentors. Good mentors help young people feel confident and competent, assist them in establishing achievable goals, and link them with other adults.<sup>29</sup>

*“Micronesia Volunteers had a mentoring project directed to high school age youth. The one-to-one pairing between community-based mentors and youth included an average of four meetings per month and frequent telephone conversations. The mentors worked in cooperation to assist the guidance efforts of the parent.”*



### Ways to Show Kids You Care...<sup>30</sup>

- Display their artwork in your home
- Be consistent
- Tell them how proud you are of them
- Ask them to help you
- Applaud their successes

## B. THE VOLUNTEER AS YOUTH PROMOTER

Even if your primary Peace Corps project is not in the youth development sector, you can take on the role of youth promoter in your community. As such, you can make a point of considering youth in all the projects in which you are involved, regardless of the sector, and of encouraging local adults to do the same. Ask how your activities will affect the youth in the community. Encourage your Counterparts to consider this question as well.



Look for ways to engage youth and to encourage others to engage them as full contributing partners at all stages of program planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation, even in non-youth projects. You and your Counterparts may want to be proactive in selecting specific youth as partners, especially if involving them is a new experience for everyone. Construct selection criteria that are linked to the objectives of the activity and be open about the selection process. Help young people build the skills they need to be successful as partners with adults.

Becoming a youth promoter can also mean helping the young people involved in community projects develop skills that can be transferred to income-generating activities. These might include skills in communication, decision making, project planning, budgeting, teamwork, and conducting meetings. Urge communities and the public and private sectors to help youth gain skills by providing paid and unpaid service. Encourage local adults to provide internships and service learning opportunities to promote “hands-on learning” for young men and women.

Remember that it may be quite new for the adults in your community to be thinking about involving youth in this way. Be patient and helpful in supporting everyone involved in this new experience.

## Helping Other Adults Connect With Youth

- Get to know local adults who are good at relating to youth. Learn from them about culturally appropriate ways for adults and youth to relate. Model this behavior.
- Look for new ways to connect the men and women with the boys and girls in the community. Who shares common interests? Who might learn well from each other?
- Invite youth and adults to a social event, a recreational activity, or a meeting together. Consider some “icebreakers” to help them relate to each other comfortably. These can be games or ordinary tasks such as decorating for a party or setting up a room for a meeting.
- Treat other adults as partners in your goal of involving youth more fully. Don’t set yourself up as an “expert” in relating to youth.
- Don’t try to behave or talk like the youth do. This may suggest to other adults that you think this is the best way to relate to youth—it isn’t. Young people usually won’t like it either.
- If you see an adult disrespecting or mistreating a young person, seek advice from a supportive local adult before intervening (unless it’s an emergency).



### C. THE VOLUNTEER AS COMMUNITY YOUTH DEVELOPER

If youth development is the primary focus of your Peace Corps work, your formal role will be that of community youth developer. The skills needed for this kind of work may be different from those of a teacher or others traditionally trained to work with children and adolescents. Adults who take on this role with young men and women have been called “promoters” or “street workers” in some Latin American countries and “animators” in Europe. We use the term “community youth developer.” This role is essentially one of facilitator. This does not mean that you should not share your skills and knowledge, but rather that you should do so by listening, supporting, and being a resource to children and youth who are themselves actively identifying issues and finding solutions.<sup>31</sup>

You may need to build some skills in addition to the youth promotion and mentoring qualities described above. Listed below is a summary of suggested qualifications for this work, developed by a group of youth-serving organizations.<sup>32</sup> Consider this list as you examine which qualities you have already and which you may need to develop.

**A Community Youth Developer:**

- Is aware of self as youth development worker; has the ability to articulate a personal vision of youth development work, to be reflective, and to seek feedback from colleagues, parents or guardians, and youth
- Cares for youth and families; enjoys youth, believes in the potential and empowerment of all youth and family members, and engages all family members in youth initiatives
- Respects diversity and differences among youth, families, and communities
- Has theoretical knowledge of youth development as well as the ability to relate to youth as individuals
- Sustains relationships that facilitate youth empowerment including challenging youth in a supportive manner, maintaining appropriate boundaries, and involving youth actively and continuously in programs that affect them
- Promotes cohesion and collaboration in youth groups
- Plans and implements events consistent with needs of youth in the context of available resources
- Has skills to be a colleague to staff and host community volunteers
- Can work with community leaders, groups, and citizens on behalf of youth and collaborate with other community agencies and youth-serving organizations.

*Tonga youth project  
Volunteers partnered  
with the Commonwealth  
Youth Programme  
to serve as resident  
village tutors to youth  
enrolled in their distance  
education Certificate in  
Youth Work course.  
In one year 40 young  
people completed the  
14-week course.*



## BASING ACTIVITIES ON SOUND THEORY AND EXPERIENCE

While there are many theories about specific aspects of human development, there is wide agreement on general stages of adolescent development. We begin this section with a brief review of these stages. We then examine a theory that emphasizes starting from strengths and assets as a highly effective approach to working with youth. See the box on this page for a brief description of assets in youth and community development. The Peace Corps' experience in strength-based work and its youth development framework are reviewed. We conclude this section with a review of asset types identified through youth and community research that began in 1989. The underlying theory of this work is simple: the more assets, the better. We provide examples of relevant activities from Peace Corps' work. These theories and experiences are provided to give you a basis for thoughtful project planning and design.

### Assets in Youth and Community Development

**Assets** can be considered in two ways: as an approach to development and as a tool for development.

**Asset-Based Approaches:** Those who adopt one of the asset-based approaches with youth and communities value the individual, the culture, and the community first. They learn about the dreams, gifts, strengths, capacities, and relationships of the individuals. Some people who use an asset approach begin their community entry by learning about individual and community life as represented in activities in everyday life. Along with this, they identify the strengths and hopes of the community. They engage in a participatory development process that builds on these learnings.<sup>33</sup>

**Assets as Tools:** Those who work using asset approaches have a variety of assessment, planning, and design tools. One tool is a master list of assets to use when assessing communities and designing projects that will promote positive youth development. (See Youth Development Assets in Your Community in Part Three: Tools, on page 81.) There are also asset-building tools that are systems of recording and connecting capacities of individuals, associations, and institutions in community development. Appreciative inquiry is the name for a process of questioning and building on positive experiences and dreams.<sup>34</sup>



## STAGES OF ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT

A 10-year-old boy at a camp in Togo pretends to be a cold virus trying to attack before being pushed back by a 12-year-old girl playing the T cell. A 15-year-old out-of-school youth in the Philippines paints “STOP Illegal Logging” on a mural in his community under the watchful eye of a local painter. An 18-year-old Romanian student spends an afternoon with a child from a local orphanage. Each individual described here is at a different point on the continuum called adolescence.

Because adolescence is a stage of life characterized by rapid and dramatic physical, emotional, and social change, being with youth requires careful attention not only to the needs of the young people in a particular host community but also to the sex, age, and maturity level of the participants who will be involved.

“Adolescence” begins roughly at the age of 10 and ends in the early 20s, by which time individuals in most societies have taken on the responsibilities of adulthood. Of course, in some cultures the transition to adulthood happens earlier, especially for girls who become wives and mothers while they are still growing. One’s experience of adolescence can vary greatly depending on an individual’s sex, gender roles, ethnicity, ability, caste/class, and religion. And in every culture individuals progress through this period of life at varying rates. Making universal statements about how individuals develop through life stages is difficult at best. At worst, it can be inaccurate and lead us to miss important individual and cultural considerations.

With these limitations in mind, it can be helpful to understand some of the developmental changes that occur during this stage of life. Such an understanding can assist in creating programs and more importantly in building relationships with young people that take into account the opportunities and challenges that this age represents. We invite Volunteers to use the information in the table on page 35 and to keep an open mind and a creative attitude about the growing competence of young people and the many possibilities for their participation in community development.





## Stages of Adolescent Development<sup>35</sup>

	Early Adolescence	Middle Adolescence	Late Adolescence
<b>Physical Development</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hormonal changes cause the onset of puberty.</li> <li>• Growth in height and weight.</li> <li>• Reproductive organs develop.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Growth in height continues.</li> <li>• The body fills out.</li> <li>• Maturation of secondary sex characteristics (breasts and wider hips for girls, facial hair and deeper voices for boys).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Physical growth is complete.</li> <li>• Additional muscle development may occur.</li> </ul>
<b>Cognitive Development</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Most have left behind the “magical” thinking of early childhood, mastered the logical thinking of late childhood, and begun to think in abstract terms.</li> <li>• May take great pride in mastering new skills; can be industrious and energetic.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop the ability to hypothesize and think in abstract terms.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can move easily between concrete and abstract thinking.</li> <li>• Have a well-developed ability to reflect on experiences and apply lessons learned to new situations.</li> </ul>
<b>Psychosocial Development</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hormones can contribute to intensifying of positive and negative moods.</li> <li>• Friendships and membership in formal peer groups are important at this stage. These can include clubs, teams, and gangs.</li> <li>• Most will have developed the ability to empathize with others and a sense of belonging to a larger community.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In cultures that place a strong value on individualism, young people at this stage may feel a conflict between the need to develop their own identity and their desire to fit in.</li> <li>• In some cultures, they may be expected to take on adult roles and responsibilities. Girls may become mothers and/or may have considerable household responsibilities; boys may also take on significant adult tasks such as providing for their families and being involved in physical labor.</li> <li>• This may be a time of formal initiation into adult roles and responsibilities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can manage social situations with well-developed coping and social skills.</li> <li>• In some cultural contexts, youth may have been participating in society as adults for a number of years. In other societies, they may still be focused on exploring what their own unique contributions to society will be.</li> </ul>

## Girls in Adolescence

In addition to awareness of cultural differences, anyone working with young people will need to address the different realities that face young women and young men in any culture. A Peace Corps staff member shares the following observations of girls in adolescence based on 18 years of working with young people in West Africa, the Sahel, and Jamaica:

There is a strong tradition of young people being expected/required to take care of their younger siblings and help their mothers with household tasks. It is refreshing to observe this when everyone is helping without any prodding. However, all too often, the burden falls on the girls. In Jamaica, boys may be required to help their fathers on the weekends, but are often free to play soccer or study after school during the week. Some have suggested that the discipline imposed on girls at home actually helps them in their schoolwork. The girls know how to organize things at home and ideas on paper. At one point, the Jamaican Ministry of Education decided to lower the passing mark for boys on the national high school entrance exam to ensure gender parity in secondary schools!

In Africa, although the tradition is similar, the results are very different. The tasks required of many African girls are much more difficult than those for most Jamaican girls. They may get up at dawn to walk a mile or two to fetch water and then put a pot of this water on a charcoal or wood fire to boil for breakfast. There tend to be many more children to take care of. Some girls drop out of school on their own because they cannot cope. Others are forced to drop out by their desperate mothers. Those who remain in school are often simply too tired to do as well as they should.

— Subregional Programming and Training Coordinator, West Africa

*Be sure to consult “Gender Analysis” (p. 9) for questions to ask to help you understand the needs, roles, and experiences of boys and girls in your host culture.*

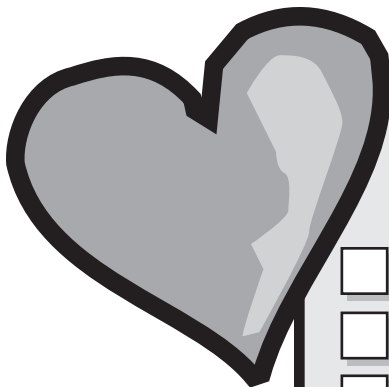


## Becoming an Adult

Cultures use different markers to indicate when a young person has moved from youth to adulthood. Whether an individual is ready for adult responsibilities or not, he or she may be considered an adult by virtue of having reached a specific age. Conversely, in some communities, individuals may have reached a particular age, but may not yet be considered adult because they have not completed certain tasks considered important by the culture. Markers of adulthood may include:

- Reaching a particular age
- Menstruating
- Completing formal rites of passage
- Having more responsibilities within the family
- Being married
- Having children
- Getting a job
- Voting
- Losing a parent
- Leaving home
- Having the freedom to make choices/decisions
- Completing formal primary, secondary, or tertiary education

Knowing when a person is considered an adult will help you determine whether an individual is expected to take on adult responsibilities.



### Ways to Show Kids You Care...<sup>36</sup>

- Let them make mistakes
- Help them learn something new
- Accept them as they are
- Become their advocate
- Trust them

## **APPROACHES TO YOUTH DEVELOPMENT**

So, what does it take for young men and women to progress through the stages of development and grow into competent and caring adults? It is helpful to remember that basic human needs of food, clean water, clothing, shelter, safety, and security have to be met. Like so much of development, these things do not necessarily precede or follow any particular asset but arise out of the complex interactions of people, families, and communities. Some are deliberately pursued and won and some are dividends of increases in financial, material, and human resources, education, and self-confidence. We are not addressing basic human needs. They are important but beyond the scope of *Working With Youth*.

In this section and in this manual, we focus attention on those assets that are related to building relationships and increasing individual strengths. These are the assets that surround those young men and women who reach adulthood healthy and prepared to become responsible citizens and family members.



Experts in a variety of fields have, in the last 10 to 20 years, been exploring **asset-based (strength-based)** ways of doing individual and community development. This approach emphasizes examining strengths and identifying what **works**. It has been demonstrated in the lab and field that people often live up to the expectations of the outsider coming in to assist them. If an outsider looks for positive aspects, this expectation will be met; if this person looks for negatives, so too will this expectation be met. One group of theorists in this “strength-based school” stresses that the act of asking questions influences the group and the outcomes. Therefore, according to this theory, if the goal is to improve a situation and leave it stronger, one should always start positively. The program manager of the youth project in Tonga noticed a dramatic increase in receptiveness to the Peace Corps by the local people when staff and Volunteers entered a community and started by asking what all the “good stuff” was.

Taking an asset- or strength-based approach does not mean ignoring or denying problems. Youth all over the world face a range of problems that may need to be addressed directly, especially when there is an immediate risk of physical or mental harm.

Building on the strengths of individuals, organizations, and communities can help prevent problems and can help overcome them in combination with specific problem-focused solutions. What does this mean about how we approach the daily task of youth work? Let's say that you are concerned that youth in your host community are becoming involved with drugs. An asset-based way to address this problem might begin by helping young people recognize the gifts they have. You might then encourage them to look for ways to use these gifts, and develop others, in service of their goals and aspirations. You might do this by organizing a life skills workshop as part of your primary project, or by engaging youth in your neighborhood in conversations about their future. Removing obstacles such as drug abuse, if they exist, can become part of your discussions with youth, along with offers of support and referral for those who may need it. In this case, the problem is dealt with as an obstacle to the higher goals of being positively engaged in the pursuit of a positive future.

Other international youth-focused organizations, such as the International Youth Foundation, embrace the focus on asset-based approaches. They have urged those working with young people to move beyond defining them in terms of their problems and academic competence. They have given us the “banner” phrase “Problem free is not fully prepared.” They advocate saturating neighborhoods with services, supports, and opportunities to provide young men and women with consistent, caring people; safe, structured, and stimulating places; and a full range of options for training, exploring, and contributing.<sup>37</sup> On the individual level, they stress promoting connectedness, competence, confidence, character, and contribution in young people.

You can learn more about this strength-based approach during your Peace Corps service by participating in the Project Design and Management Workshop.



### **FAMILY LIFE, WORLD OF WORK, ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP**

Peace Corps Volunteers are taught and encouraged to speak in the host country's language, learn about and adopt a positive attitude about the local culture, build relationships, and establish trust. These traits have been part of the Peace Corps' approach to development since the beginning and are very good examples of a strength-based approach to development. The language of assets building for the Peace Corps, used to describe a strength-based technique, was introduced in the mid-1980s in community development training for Volunteers in Micronesia.

Informed from a wide variety of youth activities undertaken by Volunteers over the last decade, a simple positive youth development framework evolved from this purpose statement: To engage and prepare youth for their roles in family life, the world of work, and active citizenship. Over the years, we have learned that the following activities are those that Volunteers can do successfully to make contributions desired by the host country.

*“Ecuador Volunteers held ‘child’s needs’ workshops that focused on the child’s right to live at home without abuse and the ways that parents’ behavior and actions can affect the self-esteem of the child. This focus allowed participants to discuss and address the difficult topic of domestic violence.”*

<p><b>Family Life</b></p>	<p>Activities that involve promoting healthy physical, emotional, and social growth: Wellness activities that include hygiene, nutrition, and sports; training in communication, relationships, decision making, and goal planning skills; prevention of violence, HIV/AIDS, and pregnancies in very young girls</p>
<p><b>World of Work</b></p>	<p>Activities that focus on building the skills necessary for participation in the economic life of the family and community: Literacy, numeracy, academic education, art, vocational skills, computer training, self-employment, employability skills training</p>
<p><b>Active Citizenship</b></p>	<p>Activities that encourage leadership and responsible citizenship by involving young people in their communities: Environmental action, leadership training, and community service</p>

**FAMILY LIFE**

Helping young people develop into healthy adults begins by providing them with what they need to grow physically, emotionally, and socially. In most cultures, this is the province of the family, more than likely the extended family. As a Volunteer, you can work with local adults to support and encourage what families provide or, when necessary, you can provide activities that supplement the family’s efforts.

This youth development area includes promoting basic health and nutrition, promoting participation in sports and other recreational activities, and supporting young people’s emotional development through education in “life skills.” It also includes the more complex and sensitive issues related to sexual health.

When behavior change is necessary, it involves influencing attitudes and community norms in addition to sharing knowledge and building skills. Working in the area of family life education requires talking with youth, Counterparts, and other local adults to create activities that build on healthy practices in the community and considering advice of other Volunteers and Peace Corps staff who have worked in this arena:<sup>38</sup>

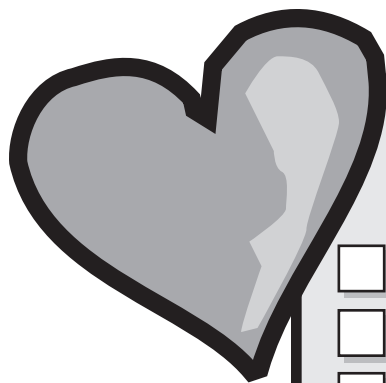


**Action Ideas:**

- 1** Work with those who are already responsible for teaching youth values and behaviors and for influencing attitudes, particularly those related to health.
- 2** Find out if there is a desire for health behavior change in your host community. If so, learn whether local professionals consider the desire healthy. If there are “early adopters,”—youth who practice a “progressive” healthy activity or habit already—build on this.
- 3** Look for ways to infuse physical and emotional health education into formal structures such as schools, teams, clubs, camps, and cultural and recreational events.
- 4** Learn about the cultural norms and practices you should take into consideration when addressing health issues with boys and with girls. Determine whether there are areas best left for local adults to address.
- 5** Education is usually part of the answer to behavior change. Learn what parents and guardians want children to know about sex. If necessary, determine who or what can influence parents on this issue to increase information available to their children.
- 6** Find out which community members are likely to be most effective in delivering messages about delaying sexual activity, preventing early pregnancy, and protecting against HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).
- 7** Learn about how young men and women learn to communicate and interact with each other. Find out what the primary influences are in terms of making life decisions. Look for ways to support those who teach these skills.
- 8** Explore the kinds of recreational opportunities that are already available for boys and girls. Consider ways you can support those in place or create new ones.



*“In a Sports for Youth Project in Belize, Volunteers worked with the Ministry of Health and Sports to promote amateur sports as an alternative alcohol/drug-free education program. Non-competitive/recreational sports have been a major focus of the project, and to this end, they succeeded in reaching over 20,000 more Belizeans participating in sports programs in one year, including Special Olympics. Volunteers did much to promote Special Olympics in Belize, working with the organization to encourage participation by Belizeans of all ages.”*



### Ways to Show Kids You Care...<sup>39</sup>

- Give them lots of compliments
- Give them your undivided attention
- Ask for their opinion
- Let them tell you how they feel
- Tell them what you expect of them

*In Bolivia, a Volunteer helped set up a credit fund for the children of a vocational training center. Her workshops have enabled many youth to start up and adequately manage a microbusiness, in most cases generating an income sufficient to sustain them after leaving the program at age 18. This project and this Volunteer's efforts are spreading to other parts of the country.*

### ★ WORLD OF WORK

Preparing young people for the world of work involves helping them develop a wide range of knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Whether they live and work in a large city or a small village, youth who develop competencies in the areas listed below will enhance their contribution to the economic life of their family and community and to their own personal growth. Youth development activities that are successful in helping young women and men prepare for participation in the world of work address many of the issues listed below.<sup>40</sup>

#### Action Ideas:

- 1** Develop an activity that will assist boys and girls in applying formal learning to real-life work issues and situations.
- 2** Decide which of the following skills your activity will focus on developing:
  - Literacy—including reading, writing, listening, speaking, and various forms of artistic expression
  - Thinking and problem solving
  - Self-esteem, self-management, and integrity
  - Career development and decision making
  - Interpersonal skills

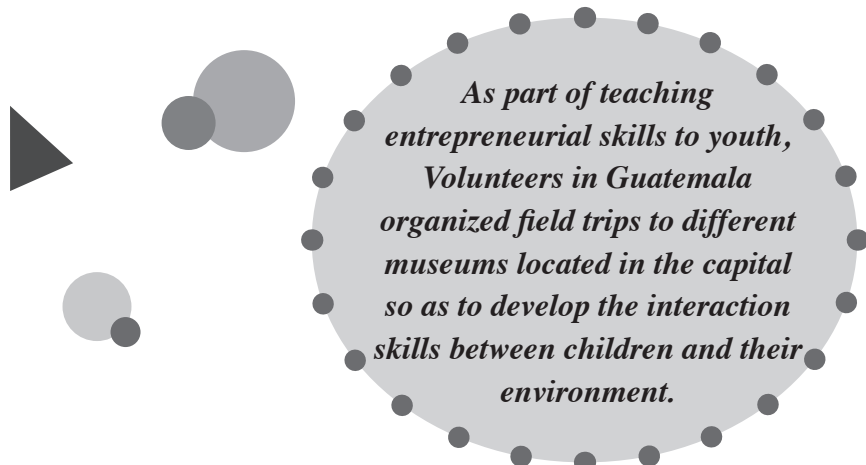




- Taking directions, working with others toward common objectives
- Managing resources such as time, money, materials, and staff
- Understanding and analyzing data and information
- Use of technology
- Skills for a particular job or career—relevant to the labor market

**3** Create activities that guide young men and women in making informed career decisions.

**4** Include follow-up and/or referral opportunities to workshops and classes to support participants in taking the next step in their career development.



*As part of teaching entrepreneurial skills to youth, Volunteers in Guatemala organized field trips to different museums located in the capital so as to develop the interaction skills between children and their environment.*

The national government envisioned that the Peace Corps would pilot a project in which street children and child servants, for example, would be targeted for placement in a six-month vocational training in five municipalities. The youth who were selected mostly by the municipalities (semi-urban) were not the street kids but rather youth who usually had finished eighth or 10th grade. Most of these kids did well with the vocational training. Our experiences working with children in rough life situations like the kid living off the streets teach us that life skills must be initially addressed and relationships with the kid established before you get the child talking about Ohm's law and electric current as a junior electrician. Trust must be built, which takes time and follow-up. Ensuring success with a youth who has had more schooling and socialization initially may set the foundation for a program that can do real outreach and select a few of the really tough cases later on. Starting with only the most difficult youth does not ensure success.

— Youth Project Technical Trainer, Nepal

## *Girls and the World of Work*

*You may want to choose an activity that provides specific support to girls who are often discouraged directly, or in more subtle ways, from pursuing education that will help them participate in the world of work at higher-skilled levels. Making life choices based on one's interests and abilities can be a challenge for young people. Family, community, and cultural expectations may result in tensions between what a young man or young woman wants and what the community demands. It is always important to work closely with your community and with local Counterparts to ensure that your activities are acceptable.*

## ★ ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP

Encouraging young men and women to be involved in the lives of their communities in positive ways serves a number of important purposes. It empowers them as they experience their importance to the community in which they live. The energy and idealism youth bring to activities can make possible goals that had otherwise seemed unattainable for a community. Equally important, it provides other community members a chance to value youth as contributing citizens. The benefits both to young people and to their communities are tremendous. Adults see youth as resources to the community and young men and women are empowered to be involved in civic projects as they grow older.

Successful citizenship building work takes the ideas below into account to ensure that both youth and the community benefit from the activities.<sup>41</sup>

*“In Latvia, fora were organized where youth discussed responsibilities of living in a civil society, democracy, the environment, human rights, and conflict resolution. In Bulgaria, a 10-day environmental festival included a number of community service projects.”*

### Action Ideas:

- 1** Ensure that the activity meets an actual need in the community.
- 2** Make certain that it improves the quality of life for the people served.
- 3** Use the activity to help girls and boys develop a sense of caring for and about others.
- 4** Help young men and women collaborate actively and directly with the adult community members during the course of the activity.



\*\*\*\*\*

A Volunteer in Tonga’s youth project worked with the Tonga National Youth Congress to conduct the first-ever, and very successful, National Youth Empowerment Forum. With the Volunteer’s guidance and support, the planning was done entirely by youth leaders and entailed inviting speakers, designing workshops and programs, securing locations, organizing social activities, and coordinating housing and transportation. The objectives of the event were to provide a forum where youth leaders could share ideas from their villages, offer educational workshops that could be duplicated in local villages, and have speakers address current youth issues.

## 40 ASSETS, EIGHT ASSET TYPES<sup>42</sup>

An important contribution to our understanding of assets building is being made by the Search Institute of Minneapolis, Minnesota. From 1989 to 1999, it surveyed over a million youth in the United States. It has identified 40 developmental assets that correlate with positive outcomes for young men and women, here grouped into eight asset types :

ASSET TYPES	
External	Internal
1. Support	5. Commitment to Learning
2. Empowerment	6. Positive Values
3. Boundaries & Expectations	7. Social Competencies
4. Constructive Use of Time	8. Positive Identity

Asset types 1-4 are **external**. The external assets are located in the environment in which a young person grows up. They include the opportunities and relationships provided to young people by their families, schools, or communities during their childhood and adolescence. Asset types 5-8 are **internal**. The four internal asset types are the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that healthy individuals develop in the course of their childhood and adolescence.

We know that the similarities of youth needs and issues the world over are much greater than their differences. With appropriate care in its application, we can look to this research-based framework for important insights into the work Volunteers do. In the next section, we describe the asset types based on the research, share some examples of how Volunteers have worked with communities to strengthen and build on the assets available, and offer some suggestions to consider when planning work with young people in your community.

After reading the descriptions of the different asset types, you may wish to use the “Youth Development Assets in Your Community” tool on page 81 to determine the specific developmental assets that are appropriate to support each asset type in your host culture. Discuss with your Counterpart and your APCD how to use the asset-type framework to support the goals and objectives of your project plan.



### EXTERNAL ASSET TYPES

Titles of Volunteer activities are in quotation marks in the text of this section. For more details on how to run each one, see “Part Four: Promising Activities,” an alphabetical catalog of information and tips that begins on page 113.

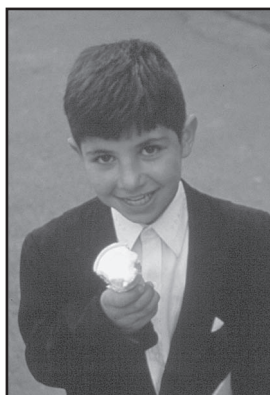
## 1 Type 1: Support

### Findings:

Young men and women need to have fulfilling relationships with adults on whom they can rely as they grow and develop. They need to feel supported by their families, have positive relationships with adults outside their families, and feel that the institutions in their communities sustain them. Young people who experience this kind of support are less likely to engage in a variety of negative behaviors as they grow up. While support may look different in different cultures, what seems to matter most is that the young person experiences adults around him or her as caring and having high expectations.

### Experiences:

Increasing urbanization and outside cultural influences are eroding the strong connections that traditionally exist between young people and adults in many of the communities served by the Peace Corps. Volunteers have found ways to work with communities to counteract this trend. They have facilitated mentoring relationships between youth and adults. Involving parents in the activities organized for children and youth when this is possible, and including local adults in all phases of the planning and implementation, have increased the sustainability of the best activities.



Before involving young people in Ecuador in the “Adolescent Community Baseline Needs Assessment,” the Volunteer started by getting parent approval. The “Future Farmers Club” in Zambia invited local government officials, representatives from NGOs, and veterinarians to speak with young people about their work. The “Take Our Daughters to Work Day Conference” in Morocco and the “Take the Students to Work Day” in Suriname introduced young people to adults in the community in a variety of professions. Volunteers have encouraged partnerships between teachers and students to design and implement educational activities in their communities. In Moldova, they brought together teachers and students from different schools for “Peer Training Seminars for Reproductive Health Education.” In St. Vincent, a Volunteer organized the “Comprehensive Language Improvement Plan” and noted the increased self-esteem of students whose teachers took interest in them in the after school hours.



- Inform parents of activities you undertake with youth and involve them when possible. “The first most important step to getting started is community and parent approval.”

Permission slips and calendars of events work well for this

— A Volunteer in Ecuador



- Look for ways to build connections between youth and other adults in the community. One Volunteer reflected on her experience: “If I had it to do over again, I would have OBSESSED over finding other interested Romanian adults. It’s the only way to ensure the continuation of your project locally after you leave.”

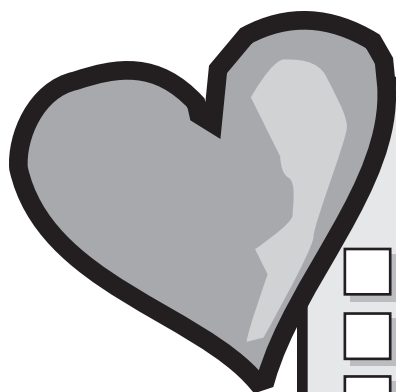
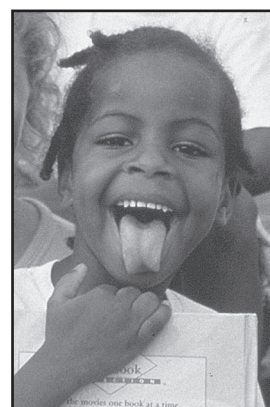
— *A Volunteer in Romania*

- Remember that relationships matter. Take every opportunity to get to know the youth in your community as individuals and encourage other adults to get to know them also. The young people will feel valued and everyone will benefit from what they have to offer. “Have a positive attitude, and have fun!”

— *Volunteers in the Slovak Republic*



- Ask youth who will be involved in an activity what kind of support they need or want.



### **Ways to Show Kids You Care...<sup>43</sup>**

- Laugh at their jokes
- Listen to their favorite music with them
- Catch them doing something right
- Tell them how much you like being with them
- Be silly together

## **2 Type 2: Empowerment**

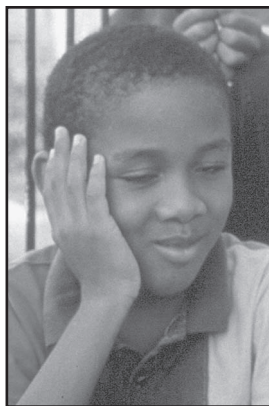
### **Findings:**

Empowerment means enabling young people to participate in meaningful ways in their communities by providing them with the opportunities and skills to do so successfully. It does not mean that young people operate without guidance or supervision from adults. In fact, adults are

responsible for creating a physically and emotionally safe environment for young women and men by ensuring that activities are properly supervised, intervening when necessary to ensure that youth learn skills to solve problems and manage conflict.

### **Experiences:**

In many communities in which Volunteers are working, young men and women are expected to make significant contributions by working in the family's farm or business or by caring for younger children and performing household tasks. Volunteers have often facilitated opportunities for youth to become involved in their communities in other ways. These have included brief events such as "Earth Day on the Street," a sidewalk art competition in Romania, and the "Water Restoration Project" in Paraguay in which young people participated in reforestation activities over several years that built on the work of previous Volunteers and community members. As the Volunteer involved in the latter found, "Without the support of the local youth, this project could never have been accomplished."



In The Gambia, a Volunteer organized the "Health Newsletter," composed of articles written by young people about prevention of HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infections; another Volunteer involved the members of a "Library Club" in Lesotho in repairing books. In Romania, a Volunteer created a "Big Buddies Club" in which secondary school students spent a few hours a week with younger children living in an orphanage, played games with them, took them on outings, and introduced them to the Volunteers' own families.

Volunteers have empowered young people by allowing them to participate in same-sex activities so that they can feel completely free to express themselves without the constraints that can exist in mixed groups at this age. Some of these have included the "Girls Empowerment Workshop" in Tanzania, "Camp GLOW" in the Slovak Republic, "Girls Community Basketball Training" in St. Vincent, and the "Men's Health Clinic" in Jamaica.



- Ensure that all young people feel physically and emotionally safe in the context of the activities you run. Remember, "the Volunteer is responsible for everyone's safety. In a crisis, it's the job of the Volunteer to be the leader. Establish this early, but in a way that does not discourage the students' initiative and leadership development."

— *A Volunteer in the Kyrgyz Republic*



- Involve youth in the decision making. As one Volunteer put it, “A group decision will help the members feel more invested.”

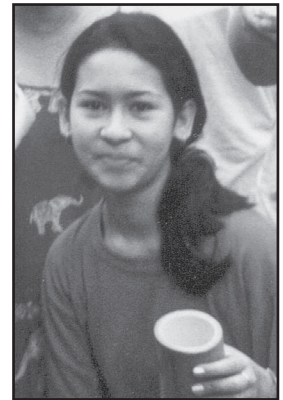
— *A Volunteer in Ecuador*

- Provide young people with age-appropriate leadership opportunities. One Volunteer found that “in the process of helping the [younger] children out, the [secondary school students] gained insight into activism, leadership, and self-empowerment.”

— *A Volunteer in Romania*



- Empower youth by involving them in decision making at all stages and levels of youth development activities. Be sure they are properly trained and informed to do this; otherwise you may set them up for failure.
- Make sure you have an appropriate adult-to-youth ratio, which can vary widely depending on the age and needs of the young people: One adult for every four youth for younger populations and one to 15 for older youth in unstructured environments. The ratio can be one to 30 youth in somewhat structured settings and much less for highly structured environments, like sports, where youth leaders are engaged and everyone **knows the rules**.
- Provide opportunities for young men and women to join same-sex groups, such as clubs or camps, where they can feel free to participate fully and express themselves in a safe environment.
- Find ways to include youth in projects that are not specifically designed for them.



### **3 Type 3: Boundaries and Expectations**

#### **Findings:**

Youth need consistent, age-appropriate boundaries and high expectations in their families, schools, and neighborhoods. They need to be surrounded by adult role models and peers who support safe and healthy behavior. They also need guidance and the opportunity to learn to make responsible decisions as they grow.

### Experiences:

Volunteers have found a variety of ways to involve local adults in activities that send clear messages about safe and healthy behavior. In Ghana, Volunteers provided training for local teachers in a health education activity called “Healthy Bodies, Healthy Schools.” As part of the “Reproductive Health Football Camp” in Zambia, young men learned from their coaches about both football skills and sexual health. In “Take the Students to Work Day” in Suriname, local adults served as role models in activities designed to encourage boys and girls to stay in school, while the “Life Skills Training” activity in Honduras used men and women in the community to conduct workshops about healthy decision making for young people.

Discuss appropriate behaviors and expectations with Counterparts and other adults in your host community. Many Volunteers report learning the hard way about the need to be clear in setting rules and consequences for breaking them when working with youth groups. Involving youth in determining ground rules for activities can be effective in both creating commitment to them and developing their skills in managing their own behavior.



SOME  
**TIPS**  
AND LESSONS  
LEARNED

- “Set expectations for behavior and consequences when the rules are broken. Follow through.”

— *Volunteers in the Slovak Republic*

- Involve young people in developing ground rules for activities. “On the first day of the group, ask the members to make a poster of group rules. Tell them you expect them to stick to these rules. Consider developing a point or grade system.”

— *A Volunteer in Ecuador*

- Look for positive role models among the youth and adults in your area and involve them in your activities. One Volunteer found that messages delivered by “role models from the capital increased awareness of responsible sexual reproduction.”

— *A Volunteer in Zambia*

MORE  
**TIPS**

- Build decision-making skill development into activities for youth whenever possible.





## 4 Type 4: Constructive Use of Time

### Findings:

Young people need an opportunity to participate in a variety of constructive activities during their leisure time. Such activities provide informal opportunities for skill development, stress relief, and contact with positive social networks. The Convention on the Rights of the Child, signed by many countries in which the Peace Corps works, asserts the rights of children to rest and leisure and to engage in play, appropriate recreational activities, and the cultural and artistic lives of the community. Many young people in communities served by the Peace Corps are very busy with activities that are essential to their communities, their families, or their own survival, leaving them little, if any, time to devote to “leisure” activities. Volunteers have found, however, that many young people both need and desire participation in recreational clubs, camps, or events.

### Experiences:

Volunteers have created an array of activities to enrich the lives of young people through sports, arts, and culture. An Ecuador Volunteer worked with street youth to design and create murals (“Mural Painting with Youth”). In St. Vincent, a Volunteer organized “Girls Community Basketball Training” while another planned a “Youth Football Tournament” in his community in Ghana.

In Mongolia, the “English Language Drama Festival” provided a creative outlet for young people studying English, as did an “After School Theater Group” in Ecuador. The “Holiday Carnival” in Romania brought a diverse group of children together for a celebration. At “Camp Peace Corps” in Togo, Volunteers from neighboring communities offered a half-day of games designed to introduce youth to the projects in which the Peace Corps was involved in their area.

A Volunteer in Namibia helped students and their teachers plan and raise funds for a two-week “Bus Tour,” while another Volunteer in the Dominican Republic helped youth to “Produce and Sell Dolls” as a fundraiser for an orphanage. And Volunteers in Nicaragua and Suriname have opened their homes to provide informal literacy and art activities as well as a safe place to laugh and talk (“Volunteer Open House” and “Geography Game”).



- Encourage all young people to become involved in recreational or artistic activities, even if only occasionally. A Volunteer who helped youth organize their own bus tour noted: “The primary purpose of this activity was to educate

the students...about the cultural and geographical diversity of their country and region. The secondary purpose was pure enjoyment.”

— *A Volunteer in Namibia*



- Look for ways to build on or support activities that already exist in your host community.
- Keep competition low-key to encourage more participation and fun.
- Be aware of gender roles in your community and consider their impact on leisure activities. What are appropriate leisure and sports activities for girls? For boys?



## **INTERNAL ASSET TYPES**

The second group of assets involves internal attitudes, skills, and behaviors. Whether a girl or boy is born with these innate dispositions or they are developed under the caring guidance of adults, the result is a more confident and competent person.

### **5** **Type 5: Commitment to Learning**

#### **Findings:**

A young person who is committed to learning in all its rich and various forms is well on the way to becoming a resilient adult, able to face the challenges of a rapidly changing world. Studies have shown, for example, that when a girl is educated she will have fewer children and her children are more likely to be healthy and well educated. In some communities served by Volunteers, formal schooling is limited and restricted to a small number of youth. In other communities, educational opportunities may compete for attention with a variety of distractions.

Learning can take place in many contexts. It can occur at home, on a field trip, at a camp or club, and in the community as well as inside a classroom. Whether in school or in other contexts, it is important to emphasize the intrinsic rather than external rewards for learning. Creating support for educational programs can work to provide educational activities for adults as well. This is especially helpful in communities where adults have not had many opportunities in the past. If parents and guardians are also learning, they are more likely to support their children in doing so.



### Experiences:

Volunteers have supported the commitment-to-learning asset type by helping build a school climate that encourages cooperative relationships among students, teachers, parents, and others in the community. By designing an after school class based on the “Comprehensive Language Improvement Program,” a Volunteer in St. Vincent provided support to young people in improving their writing skills. “Computer Skills Training” taught youth in Belize and Paraguay useful skills for the modern economy.

Two Volunteers in Suriname created a “Geography Game” that they played with children on their front porch. A Volunteer in Nicaragua opened her home to boys and girls in her neighborhood on a regular basis and provided informal reading and math activities (“Volunteer Open House”). The “English Language Summer Camp” in Mongolia allowed interested students an opportunity to improve their English skills during the school holiday.

A number of Volunteers have created activities that focus on girls. The very popular “Girls’ Magazine” in Conakry, Guinea, invited young women and men to write about gender issues. And in Bulgaria, Volunteers organized an annual “Women’s Essay Contest” in which contestants are given the topics in advance and encouraged to discuss them with others in their community.



- “Start reading or telling stories to kids in the nearby school, in the library, and in front of your house.”

— *A Volunteer in Nicaragua*

- Encourage young people to read “by exposing them to the community library...books, encyclopedias, atlases, and reference books.”

— *A Volunteer in Lesotho*

- Be a good role model. “Always save time for yourself for reading and creative art, too!”

— *A Volunteer in Honduras*

- “Be careful with prizes and gifts...it can take away their intrinsic desire to read.”

— *A Volunteer in Nicaragua*

- In some contexts Volunteers have found that experiential learning works best: “Play lots and talk little. Use practical learning, no educational lectures.”

— *A Volunteer in Honduras*

- Consider holding special activities for girls such as girls clubs and tutoring programs. “Girls empowerment workshops provide an effective start in inspiring girls to set higher expectations for themselves and to pursue their dreams.”

— *A Volunteer in Tanzania*

- After a computer training course, a Volunteer recommends, “Invite parents to visit the classroom toward the end of the course, or to the certificate ceremony, and let them see where and what their children have been doing.”

— *A Volunteer in Paraguay*



## **6** Type 6: Positive Values

### **Findings:**

The Search Institute identified six positive or “pro-social” values that it has found to affect adolescent behavior in positive ways: caring, equality and social justice, integrity, honesty, responsibility, and restraint with respect to early sexual activity and use of alcohol and drugs. Values are strongly linked to culture. These values appear to be supported by many US Americans regardless of age or ethnicity,<sup>44</sup> but others may take precedence in your host community. It is important to work closely with Counterparts and other local adults in designing and implementing activities that address them.

Holding pro-social values does not always translate into behaving in accordance with them. Young people may behave in opposition to an expressed value when they believe their behavior will help them achieve a different, but important, goal such as a love relationship or peer approval. However, if young women and men are surrounded by adults and other young people who promote caring, responsibility, social justice, restraint, and other pro-social values they will come to understand their importance.

### **Experiences:**

In large and small ways, Volunteers have encouraged children and young people to develop positive values or reinforced the ones already being



taught by others in the community. This encouragement may come in the form of seemingly small gestures, such as picking up trash or speaking in a caring tone. It may also be built into educational activities that help young people examine specific values and practice using them.

“Life Skills Training,” a workshop in Honduras, provided young people with skills and practice in making responsible life choices and building caring interpersonal relationships. The “Environmental Camps for Youth Leadership” in Honduras used experiential learning activities to teach about the environment and provided opportunities for out-of-school youth to engage in community service. Another Honduras Volunteer taught positive values along with practical skills in “Making Wooden Trash Bins.”

In Zimbabwe, a Volunteer worked with local adults to organize a “First Aid Workshop” to help secondary school students develop the skills to help in medical emergencies. Young people learned about healthy relationships and sexuality in “Peer Education Seminars for Reproductive Health” in Moldova and the “Reproductive Health Football Camp” in Zambia. The most successful activities are those in which Volunteers work closely with local adults and recognize that the adults are the best interpreters and spokespeople for their community’s values and culture.



- Work closely with your Counterpart(s) to determine how best to promote the community’s positive values. One Volunteer provides this advice to those planning to address sexuality issues: “Try to gauge a group’s comfort level discussing sexuality before the sessions on this topic. Then you can tailor your approach to sexuality to reach them more successfully. Discuss this with your Counterparts and invite a respected local facilitator for discussions of sensitive topics.”

— *A Volunteer in Honduras*

- Model positive values in small and large ways and expect young people you work with to do the same. “We played with the [basketball] teams and assisted in promoting sportsmanship and other positive behaviors by modeling them ourselves.”

— *A Volunteer in St. Vincent*



## 7 Type 7: Social Competencies

### Findings:

Social competencies enable young men and women to navigate relationships with confidence. They include the ability to plan and make decisions; show empathy, sensitivity, and friendship; be comfortable with people of different backgrounds; resist negative peer pressure and resolve conflicts nonviolently. Fortunately, many programs have been created over the years to help adolescents develop social competencies. Those that build decision-making skills have been found to be especially effective when they begin in early adolescence, focus on real life issues, and help young people examine a variety of options, think through the positive and negative consequences of these options, and make a plan.

Parents are especially important in helping young people develop strong interpersonal and conflict resolution skills. Programs that support parents and other important adults in their efforts to teach these skills may be a very effective way of reaching youth.

*“After receiving training, Jamaica Volunteers helped develop behavior modification programs and facilitated trainings in conflict resolution.”*



### Experiences:

In addition to modeling good people skills, Volunteers have worked alongside local adults to develop activities that teach younger members of society. Activities include the “Youth Leadership Conference” in Ghana, the “Life Skills Training” activity in Honduras, the “Girls Empowerment Workshop” in Tanzania, “Camp GLOW” in the Slovak Republic, and the “Peer Education Seminars for Reproductive Health” in Moldova.

The “Holiday Carnival” in Romania has as its primary goal the promotion of friendship and understanding between HIV-positive and non-infected youth. Other activities, such as the “Volunteer Open House” in Nicaragua and the “Environmental Camp for Youth Leadership” in Honduras, have infused the building of social skills into activities whose primary purpose was to teach about the environment, art, or health.



- A Volunteer who planned peer education seminars for reproductive health advises: “Identify qualified nationals to volunteer as seminar leaders. We preferred young adults of college age who recognized the concerns and values of youth.”

— *A Volunteer in Moldova*

- “Invite a local role model such as a nurse, doctor, mayor, priest, teacher, judge, pastor, local political leader, farmer, or homemaker to participate in the [life skills] workshop where appropriate.”

— *A Volunteer in Honduras*

- “Local facilitators should be used...to ease communication and delivery of each session’s topics with an emphasis on practical activities rather than lectures and classroom type lessons.”

— *A Volunteer in Lesotho*

- “Provide a safe forum for interaction among children from diverse social backgrounds...to promote the values of equality, respect, and understanding.”

— *A Volunteer in Romania*

- “Encourage healthy cooperating. Teach conflict resolution skills to help them when there are arguments.”

— *A Volunteer in Honduras*



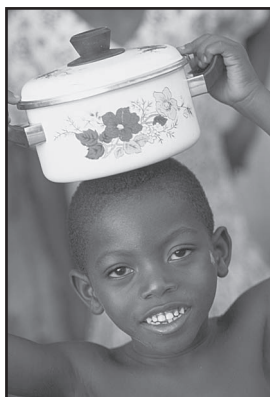
**MORE TIPS**

- Always model good people skills.
- Find ways to integrate social skill building into your other sector activities.
- Design training activities in decision-making and resistance skills that focus on real life situations and provide plenty of opportunities for role playing and other kinds of practice.

**8 Type 8: Positive Identity**

**Findings:**

A central task of adolescence is identity development. This is defined as developing high self-esteem with purpose in one’s life, a positive view of the future, and a sense of personal power over what happens. The last of these components may be more important in cultures that value individualism over collectivism. Depending on the cultural context, young people may be expected to move more toward self-reliance and independence or toward determining their role in supporting the community. In most cultures today young people will need to do both to varying degrees.



**Individualism and Collectivism**

Identity development is strongly influenced by whether one grows up in a culture that tends to be “individualist” or one that tends to be “collectivist.” We share definitions of these terms here to help you understand the identity development tasks that youth in your culture may be facing:<sup>45</sup>

**Individualist:** The individual identifies primarily with self, with the needs of the individual being satisfied before those of the group. Looking after and taking care of oneself in a self-sufficient manner guarantees the well-being of the group. Independence and self-reliance are greatly stressed and valued.

**Collectivist:** One’s identity is in large part a function of one’s membership and role in a group, e.g., family or work team. The survival and success of the group ensure the well-being of the individual, so that by considering the needs and feelings of others, one protects oneself. Harmony and the interdependence of family and group members are stressed and valued.





### Experiences:

To promote positive identity development, Volunteers have developed mentoring and educational activities that allow young people to learn about different career options and that provide them with life-planning education. Some of these activities are aimed at girls, who can be particularly vulnerable as youth. At the “Take Our Daughters to Work Day Conference” in Morocco, grade school girls from rural villages came to a mid-size city nearby for several days of activities that included time with female mentors in their homes and workplaces as well as training to help them think about options for their future. The “Take the Students to Work Day” in Suriname created similar opportunities for both boys and girls.

A Volunteer helped a group of youth in Armenia create a “Youth Credit Union” to learn about banking and money management and to promote the idea that financial institutions, if properly managed, can be trusted. In Ecuador, young people were encouraged to explore their feelings through “Expressive Art” activities. The “Men’s Health Clinic” in Jamaica was designed to focus specifically on young men’s health concerns one day per month. In addition to health services, the clinic provided counseling, job, and education-related services.

Volunteers have created recreational, cultural, and environmental activities that provide opportunities for leadership, service, and interactions with supportive adults and peers. They have also taken the time to build one-on-one relationships with young people outside any formal activity. Helping youth to feel their inherent self-worth, independent of performance and achievement, is a crucial task for every member of the community.

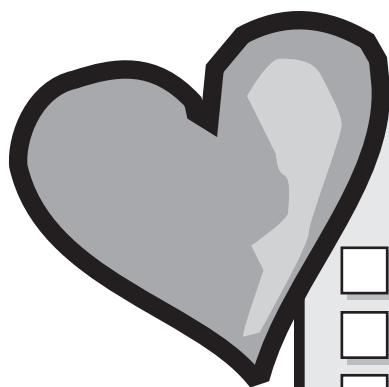


- Build strong, positive one-on-one relationships with youth and help other adults do the same. For “Take Our Daughters to Work Day” and similar activities a Volunteer recommends: “Assign one student per worker if possible. This provides individual attention and encourages the development of a mentoring relationship between the career counterpart and the student.”

— *A Volunteer in Suriname*

- “[Don’t] be too harsh on absenteeism. Those students who are not interested will simply stop coming. That means you’ll only have truly committed students by the end of the training program.”

— *A Volunteer in Armenia*



### Ways to Show Kids You Care...<sup>46</sup>

- Encourage them to help others
- Tackle new tasks together
- Encourage them to think big
- Help them learn from their mistakes
- Point out what you like about them

## PLANNING, IMPLEMENTING, AND EVALUATING A YOUTH DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITY

### PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTING A YOUTH DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITY

How you plan and implement activities with youth will depend on a number of factors. The questions and answers below are designed to help you determine how to best proceed.

Nearly all Volunteers are assigned to a Peace Corps project in one of the following sectors: Agriculture, Business Development, Education, Environment, Health, and Youth Development. Each of these projects is based on a project framework or plan consisting of a common purpose, goals and objectives. The objectives consist of planned activities and desired changes. This project plan is designed with numerous project stakeholders, including former Volunteers and Counterparts, and should fit within host country priorities.

If you are working with youth as part of the Peace Corps project to which you are assigned, reexamine the **project plan**, particularly its **objectives** (both the **activities** and **desired change**) and **goals (long-term impact)**.

In this sample, observe how the youth activities are represented in the project plan.

*This work is too important to be boring.*

— Youth Delegate  
UN Environment Conference  
Turkey



<b>OBJECTIVE</b>		<b>GOAL</b>
<b>Activities</b>	<b>Desired Change</b>	<b>Long-Term Impact</b>
Train out-of-school youth in waterborne disease prevention through camps.	250 peer educators will train 5,000 out-of-school youth in disease prevention through dramas and puppet show competitions.	Goal 1 In-and-out-of-school youth will protect themselves from waterborne diseases.

If you were planning this activity with your Counterpart, your focus would be on identifying the action steps, people, resources, and target dates to achieve what has been written and agreed to. Project plans outline the key activities. There may be other associated actions you will need to take prior to doing those in the project plan. This section stresses youth participation and should give you information to help you work on the capacity-building component as you co-plan the activities.

**What if your idea of working with youth is not part of the Peace Corps project plan?**

Consult with your Counterparts and supervisors to determine the acceptability of the idea of working with youth and its role in reaching project goals and objectives. Once you have their agreement to proceed with their help and the help of other colleagues and friends, discuss your ideas with some youth. From those initial discussions, identify those youth who want to participate in the activity and link the youth and Counterparts in ongoing dialogue and action. It is useful to document discussions and write the negotiated plan and agreements. The notes and planning documents capture agreements for future reference and guidance, while the process of writing provides opportunities for more skills transfer.

**What if you are asked by a local organization to take on a particular activity or become involved in an established program for young people?**

First, you need to determine whether this program can fit into your primary project. Consult with your Counterpart, youth, supervisor, and appropriate stakeholders in the project. If the response is positive, hold a meeting with those in the project and with those who have made the request about the implications of becoming a part of the larger project. Take steps to integrate the activity or youth program into the project by submitting written amendments in the style of the original project plan. If the ultimate decision is not to include it in the project plan, see the response to the next question for ideas on how to handle that.

***Youth as Counterparts: Volunteers in PC/ Paraguay’s youth project found a big benefit to having youth counterparts in addition to official adult counterparts from institutions. As counterparts, youth leaders can help extensively with the planning and implementation of projects.***

Whether or not community support and interest are evident, you and your Counterpart will want to integrate highly participatory consultative and decision-making processes into your work with youth. Therefore, before you agree, consider talking to the stakeholders and assessing whether youth participation will be acceptable to everyone.

**What if an activity emerges from your own interests, the relationships you have built, or opportunities in the community you have assessed?**

In this case, you may have more flexibility and possibly more challenges. Whom do you work with? Why them? What is the desired change? Who is interested enough in this activity to help support it and sustain the effort? Examine the Community Action Cycle in this chapter and also read **I Have a Great Idea— What Do I Do?** p. 63, **An Ecuador Volunteer Finds Meaning in Hair**, p. 72, and **Katie in Costa Rica**, p. 72.

If the activity remains outside the project plan, secure APCD approval. Regarding documentation, you have options. Writing is nearly always a necessary part of the planning and reporting processes. The Peace Corps is always interested in receiving reports of all Volunteer work and accomplishments. The report helps us tell our host governments what we do. It also helps writers of manuals, like this one, to share lessons learned with other Volunteers. Keeping in mind the ways your experience can benefit others, please report on the activity to your APCD.

Regardless of the activity you choose, keep the concept and practice of youth participation in the forefront of your work. Don't forget to laugh and have fun!

*In Samoa, a Volunteer gave music training in choral and vocal techniques to over 600 youth and adults, and worked with youth leaders in developing concerts and performances.*

**WHAT MAKES AN EFFECTIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITY?**

Over the years, the Peace Corps has defined and refined characteristics that lead to successful youth development activities. We urge you, your Counterparts, and the youth involved in planning your activity to use these findings to formulate goals and to consult them periodically to make adjustments along the way.

**Effective youth development activities:**

**Are Safe and Fun**

- Engage young people safely in the activity in a way that is enjoyable and appropriate to their age and stage of development.
- Communicate with and encourage the involvement of parents or guardians.



## I Have a Great Idea—What Do I Do?

If you come up with an idea that is not part of any project plan, think about it carefully and discuss it with your Counterpart, your APCD, and other local adults. Remember to apply your growing cross-cultural knowledge to the planning process. Growing up is a process of becoming a part of society, of learning its values and a particular way of life. When we work with youth, we are involved in this process of growing and learning, whether we are aware of it or not. Working with youth means that we are involving ourselves with the ways in which a society reproduces and creates itself. For these reasons, it is critical that we carefully examine our ideas for working with youth. Do they apply to the culture of the country and society in which we are working? Are the values implied by the assets and interventions suggested by this book acceptable in the local society in which you now live and work? Without a clear and acute sense of cross-cultural understanding, your work with youth may be futile or, worse, counterproductive.<sup>47</sup>

As **Culture Matters**,<sup>48</sup> the Peace Corps manual of cross-cultural understanding, points out, it is important to examine your behavior and values as well as those of your host country and ask, “Is this universal...cultural...individual?”

Use the following steps to assess whether an asset or activity is applicable in your host culture:<sup>49</sup>

### 1. Wait... Observe...

Take your time. Learn as much as you can. Note similarities and differences in the way people act in your host country and the way you would expect people to act back in the U.S. One value that most Americans have is a “Let’s get going” attitude. Slow down. An activity started slowly with a firm understanding of local values and attitudes will be much better than one started too soon without that understanding.

### 2. Play it out in your head...

Think it through with “If...then” statements. What is likely to happen if your idea comes to life? Will community elders think that you are threatening community values? Can this be avoided? Will parents understand what the young people with whom you are working are doing?

### 3. Ask...

There are usually “cultural informants” in your community. Certainly, your Peace Corps staff can help you. Ask them about your plans and about local behaviors you don’t understand. Cultural informants also may be host-country nationals who have lived or studied overseas. Individuals with experience in the U.S. and in the host country can often clarify and explain things and help you avoid mistakes.

Be mindful of how you ask cultural questions. For instance, in societies that put a very high value on hospitality to guests, the question you ask, such as “Can I wear short pants in the field?” may get a very different answer than the question “Do women wear shorts in the field?”

As you discuss potential activities with Counterparts, ask them to think about others you can consult. Ask their advice. Listen to their ideas. Invite them to help you formulate goals and decide how to meet these goals in the context of your Project Plan, the national development plan, and any community level plans.

**Facilitate Growth**

- Involve young women and men in decision making at every step of the life of the activity.
- Have clear objectives.
- Teach tangible skills.
- Prepare youth for adult life.
- Encourage youth to reflect on, discuss, and process what they have learned.
- Recognize young people for their involvement.

**Promote Citizenship**

- Address a real community need, issue, or problem.
- Encourage local youth and adults to collaborate as partners.
- Promote good communication and encourage youth to apply and share knowledge learned with the community.
- Train and support youth and Counterparts in leading and replicating activities. The Volunteer serves primarily as a facilitator.

**Are Simple**

- Are easy to understand and inexpensive to implement.
- Use locally available materials.

The most effective activities will include each of these characteristics. These criteria were used in selecting the “Promising Activities” provided later in this manual. While an individual activity may be stronger in one characteristic than another, the strongest move toward addressing them all.

## **YOUTH PARTICIPATION: WHAT IS IT?<sup>50</sup>**

Youth participation in all phases of the planning, implementation, and evaluation of youth activities is a basic principle of the Peace Corps’ work with young people. Youth participation means providing opportunities for youth to take on greater responsibilities and, through these real world experiences, to build competencies and develop into successful adults. Youth learn by doing and being actively involved in the process. Adults should serve as coaches or mentors, answering questions and helping identify and develop needed skills.



## Part Two: Creating Credibility, Addressing Sustainability, and Building Capacity

Participation means asking young men and women for their opinions and listening to what they have to say. It means respect for the competence of youth, appreciation for the potential they have for further development, and a belief in the common dignity and worth of all persons regardless of age or ability. Participation and partnership mean giving youth challenging, responsible roles, as well as the training and support they need to succeed in those roles.

Empowerment means giving youth authority to make decisions within the policy constraints of the organization and activity. It is the staff's role to ensure that the constraints are honored. This is the partnership. Adults have an important role in its harmony.

When given opportunities, generally speaking, young people will not intentionally make decisions to put people or the program at risk. If they make such decisions, and receive calm and respectful feedback, they will generally examine the concern carefully and make changes if they think the concern is valid. This is the youth's side of the partnership agreement. If you treat them as respected partners, they will act as partners, rather than people in need of close supervision and direction.



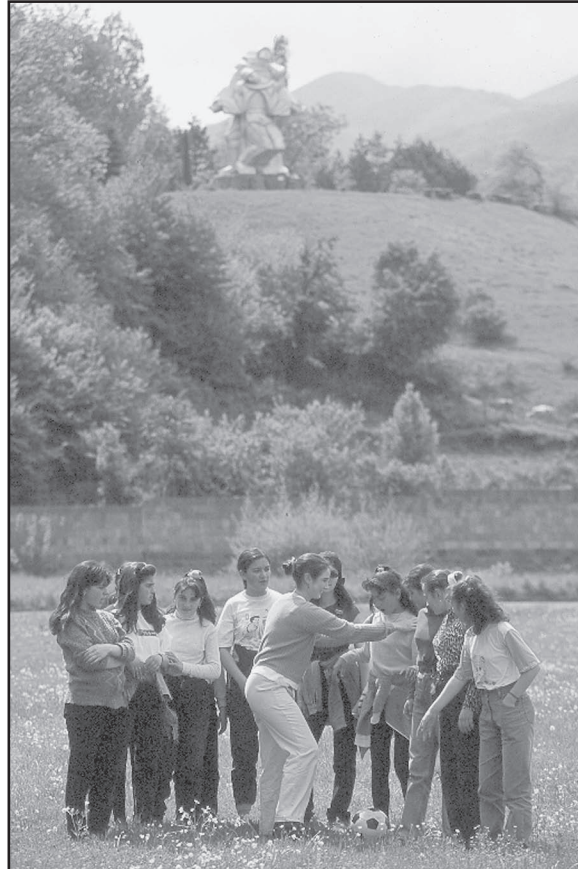
The partnership relationship is one that you build. This may not happen right away. Youth may test you for a while to see if you are sincere in your interest in partnership. If you remain constant in your respect for them and their autonomy yet do not support work outside of the boundary of your agreements, you will have a greater chance of earning and keeping their respect.

Remember that youth empowerment is not the goal of all cultures. In many cultures youth are expected to speak when spoken to, do as they are told, and ask for and not give answers. The sex of each youth can affect their levels of participation in group activities. For example, gender roles often assign more

*I have found that youth in non-Western cultures are much more open to activities and participating than those in the U.S. I was a high school teacher in the U.S. and the contrast between youth and their willingness to participate is incredible...youth living in impoverished circumstances, refugee camp settings, who are internally displaced or who spend...time on the streets have not had the opportunity to participate in such activities and therefore welcome anything new.*

— Youth Volunteer, Costa Rica<sup>51</sup>

power to males or define specific arenas within which males and females are expected to contribute. Yet, even if youth empowerment is not a priority, most societies seek to promote responsible, productive, constructive behavior in their young people. A youth participation strategy can be effective in achieving these objectives.



The **Ladder of Participation** (see figure on page 67) provides a way to view youth participation in community projects. The bottom three rungs of the ladder represent activities and projects in which young women and men are not involved in the decision making. The top five rungs represent degrees of youth participation.

The bottom rung, **manipulation**, is a type of deception where youth voices and images are used in adult-initiated and -run activities in ways that appear as if youth are participating, but, in actuality, the young people have no understanding of the issues and do not receive feedback on their input.

The second rung, **decoration**, is where youth are involved in an adult-initiated activity. The youth have no understanding nor say in organizing. Unlike the lower rung where a deception is occurring, at this level adults do not pretend that the activity is youth-initiated.



## THE LADDER OF PARTICIPATION

**8. Child initiated, shared decisions with adults**

**7. Child initiated and directed**

**6. Adult initiated, shared decisions with children**

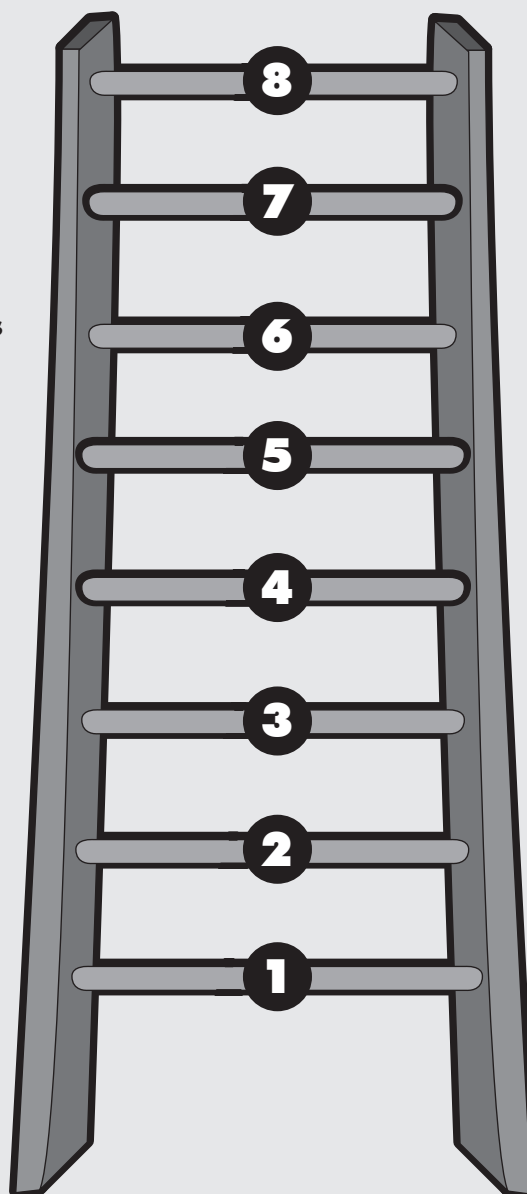
**5. Consulted and informed**

**4. Assigned but informed**

**3. Tokenism**

**2. Decoration**

**1. Manipulation**



Note:

1-3 = Non-participation

4-8 = Degrees of participation

Adapted from Sherry Arnstein's work on citizen involvement and Roger Hart's work on children's participation.<sup>52</sup>

The third rung, **tokenism**, occurs accidentally by well-intentioned adults who want to give youth a voice, but have failed to think through the participation carefully and adjust to youth communication styles and needs for preparation. While they may seem to have a voice, the youth are not given an appropriate opportunity to choose the subject or form an opinion.

Roger Hart refers to social mobilization as the prime example for the fourth level, in which **youth are assigned roles but they are informed by women and men**. An example would be youth engaged in an environmental campaign where everyone, youth and adults, is expected to get involved. Youth may be fully informed and prepared to carry out a genuine task, but the situation is another example of adults directing youth.<sup>53</sup>

The fifth level, in which **youth are consulted and informed by men and women**, refers to projects that have strong youth input and wherein the youth remain informed about the project. Like the fourth level, these are adult-run projects. At the next level, shared decision making begins.

**Women and men initiated, shared decisions with youth**, describes the sixth level. Many projects are for the benefit of people of all ages in the community and at this level youth input is serious and valued. Hart maintains that this is an important level of involvement whereby the adults can foster a sense of “competence and the confidence to participate” in youth participants. He adds that if the adults and youth cannot operate at this level, it is unlikely that they can operate at the higher levels of the ladder.<sup>54</sup>

The two top rungs represent those projects that are initiated by youth and in which youth are integral to the decision-making process. The seventh level, **youth initiated and youth directed**, refers to youth-for-youth activities. The noteworthy point here is for adults to recognize the youth activities, allow them to happen, and not try to control them. In some instances, the adult role may be to create favorable environments for the activities to occur.

Hart contends that the highest level of participation that youth can attain is **youth initiated, shared decisions among men and women**. It is at this level that the youth are sufficiently “competent and confident in their roles as members of the community” and that they comfortably collaborate with adults without forfeiting their voice and control.

We urge you to strive toward activities that are at or moving toward the top of the ladder, but keep in mind the words of Roger Hart as you do so:<sup>55</sup>

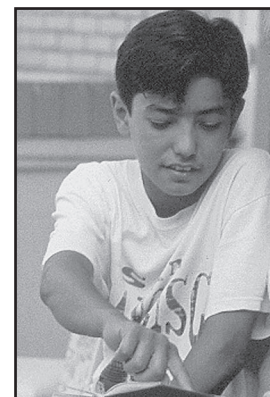
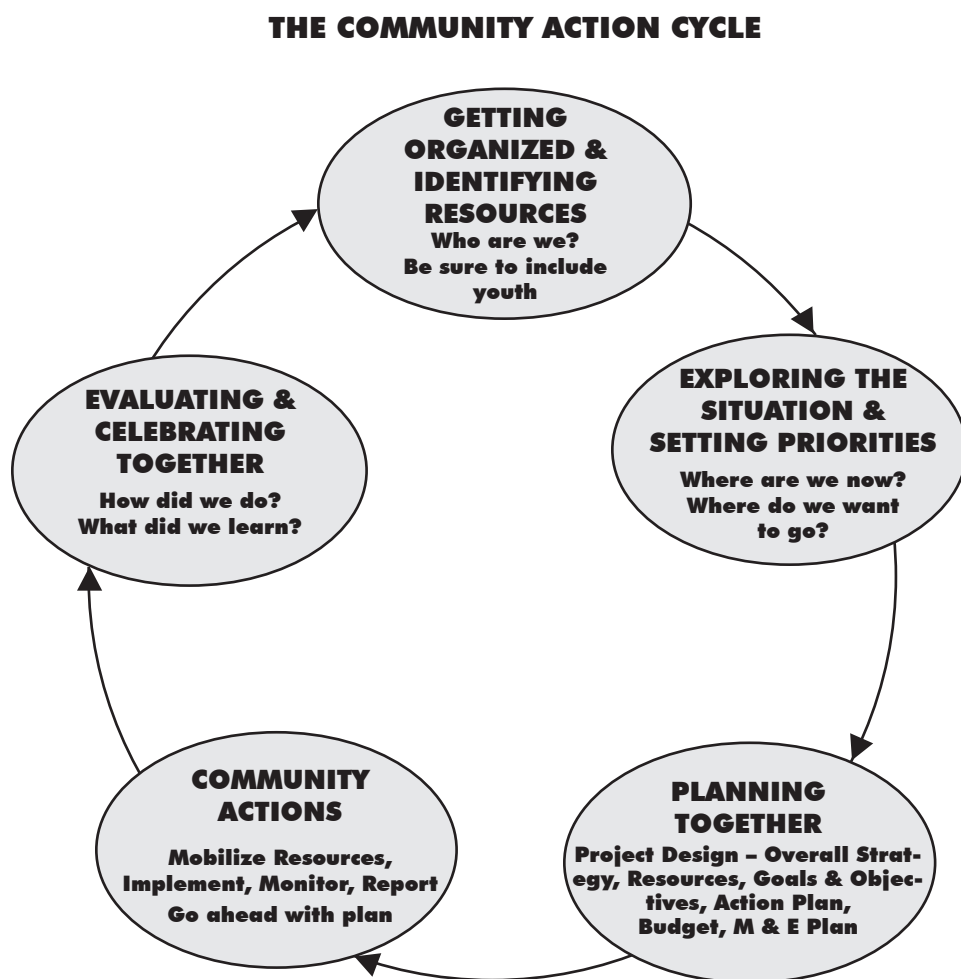
“While the upper levels of the ladder express increasing degrees of initiation by children, they are not meant to imply that children should always be attempting to operate at the level of their competence. The figure is rather meant for adult



facilitators to establish the conditions that enable groups of children to work at whatever levels they choose. A child may elect to work at different levels on different projects or during different phases of the same project. Also, some children may not be initiators but are excellent collaborators. The important principle is to avoid working at the three lowest levels, the rungs of non-participation.”

## **THE COMMUNITY ACTION CYCLE<sup>56</sup>**

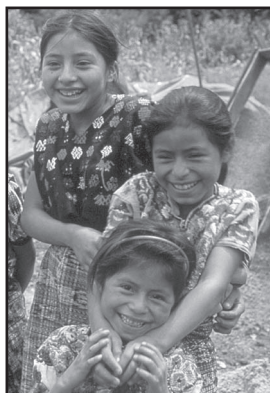
Planning and implementing a youth activity should follow the typical process that a community moves through as it identifies its priorities and takes action to make desired changes. This process is outlined in the diagram below. Communities may be at different stages of this process in various activities when you arrive. Your activities with youth may fit into any stage of the cycle with new or existing projects.



If you and a group in the community are developing a large activity, forming a planning committee can be helpful. You may want to consult the “Advisory

Boards” tool on page 95 for ideas about how to choose people for your committee. Be sure to consider including the following people:

- ▶ **A diverse group of young people.** They bring insights of the aspirations and needs of youth in different circumstances and they know how to reach their peers.
- ▶ **Youth who currently have some leadership role,** formal or informal, in the groups of youth you would like to involve in the activity.
- ▶ **Community leaders** such as business people, community elders, adult board members of non-governmental and community-based organizations, and elected officials who are concerned with the issues you want to address. They are people who can make something happen. They have the power to “accredit” and support your activity or to stop it, and they can also help you access resources.
- ▶ **Community professionals/technical experts in the public and private sectors** and government officers who work with youth and/or have expertise in the issues you are looking at. This will help ensure that the activity is technically well planned and is eventually institutionalized.
- ▶ **Concerned adults** including parents or guardians who will be able to work as partners with youth.



The “Planning Tools” and “Managing Group Dynamics” activities on pages 92 and 96 may be useful as you and your committee move forward. Once your committee has formulated an idea that is supported by youth and adults in your community and has a sense of how to move forward, it is probably time to do so. Keeping in mind that midcourse corrections are necessary even in the most carefully planned activity, take your first steps and see what happens.

## **Youth Friendly Meetings That Adults Will Enjoy Too<sup>57</sup>**

Regardless of the kind of activity you choose, you will probably be holding meetings of some kind. *Keep the following in mind when planning even informal gatherings:*

- **Keep it simple**—little or no paperwork, simple talk.
- **Keep it informal**—hold short meetings with food provided.
- **Let them talk; LISTEN and nod; ask simple expanding questions**—don’t interrogate them, don’t ask “WHY?”



*One Volunteer offers some advice.*

## **A Few Tips on Working With Girls<sup>58</sup> ...that can work for boys too**

As Volunteers working, or trying to work, with adolescent girls, we all share some commonalities regardless of our location or sector. Our behavior is critical to our success.

Here are a few tips that might be helpful to keep in mind:

- 1.** Good impressions are vital. Work within the cultural norms. If parents are to share their children with you they need to know you respect their moral behavior and codes.
- 2.** Your initial months at site are for you to learn about your community and, in turn, have your community learn about you. Take advantage of this time and begin this process with no preconceived notions.
- 3.** Once the girls in your community begin to share their concerns with you, try to reach a consensus. Formulate a clear and simple goal and then work hard to facilitate its creation. But remember—it is their activity, not yours.
- 4.** If the girls in your community voice a desire to do something you are not knowledgeable in, don't panic. Work to find who can transfer the skill or knowledge they desire and act as a catalyst. In the meantime, you can be using your In-country Resource Center to familiarize yourself with the subject.
- 5.** Know that working with girls will require many "extracurricular activities." These include visits to parents, addressing parents' complaints and suspicions, and dealing with the extra sensitive nuances that working with adolescent girls entails in many of the countries in which we serve. Be delicate and patient, for this alone can make or break an activity.
- 6.** Once the implementation of the activity begins, involve the girls in every step of its execution and monitoring. In other words, let your group plan its work and identify its own leaders. If changes need to be made, let your group identify them and make them.
- 7.** If the activity involves a training component, train while working, not through formal training courses. In addition, if dealing with a high percentage of less-literate girls, devise fun visual aids and methods to convey the information.
- 8.** Keep the lines of communication open between you, leaders, sponsors, and the girls themselves. Become friends with the participants and listen to their concerns. Give credit where credit is due. Do not take praise for the activity, but do ask for feedback.
- 9.** If things are not working out, talk about it, find out why, and then try again.

*— A former Volunteer in Tunisia*

## An Ecuador Volunteer Finds Meaning in Hair<sup>59</sup>

At the request of a Volunteer working at an orphanage in the capital city of Quito, the African-American Volunteer support/awareness group Black Out paid a visit to her place of work. Twenty-five little girls live in the orphanage, nine of whom are black. Although the children's caretakers do a great job with their limited resources, they simply did not know how to care for the hair and skin of the black children. Upon arriving at the orphanage, we encountered a room full of wonderfully energetic girls ranging in age from 5 to 14. After making our introductions, we split into two teams. One group of Volunteers entertained the non-black children with games so that they would not feel left out of the activities. The other group taught the black children and their caretakers the art of maintaining black hair. Judging from the varying states of disarray of the heads before us, we were going to have our hands full—literally.

We began by talking about self-esteem and sisterhood. Then we gave them a lesson on using ordinary household goods like eggs, oil, aloe, and bananas to care for their hair and skin. Finally, we went to work combing, greasing, and braiding. As we practiced the ancient ritual of the laying on of hands with a comb in one hand, some grease in the other, and a child between our knees, the conversation centered on geography, life, and the stack of Essence, Ebony, and Emerge magazines we had brought. That's when it happened! At some point in the evening, the room transformed itself. Time, place, language, and nationality fell away and became meaningless. Our kinship and love were conveyed by the texture of healthy hair, the glow of oiled black skin, the smiles of everyone enjoying this moment of connection, and the wonder in the eyes of a child discovering her beauty. By the end of the night, we were all changed and our bond as a people was solidified. We realized that our strength lay in our diversity. Being "black," or more correctly "a child of Africa," does not mean that we must speak the same language, act the same, have similar beliefs, or live in a certain neighborhood, city, or country.

— A Volunteer in Ecuador

## Katie In Costa Rica

In 1997 I had the pleasure of visiting a site where a youth Volunteer, Katie (not her real name), was just settling in to her community and told me she didn't know why I was visiting, since she hadn't really done anything yet. She really didn't know how far she had gone. After all, she'd only been in-country for about 10 months, at her site for only seven. How far could she have possibly gone, since she was only just starting to feel fully comfortable with her community? As a Youth Volunteer, Katie was hoping to really make a difference—help kids read, teach hygiene education, see some of them actually go on to high school or even college!—but she knew it would take so much time. She would have to wait to see changes in the community, but she knew that she had to get the trust of the community first, before helping them push themselves to improve their lives. So she went about her daily life as so many Volunteers do—doing some work, meeting a few people, going to the store, figuring out the best way to wash her clothes, keeping up with her exercise routine.

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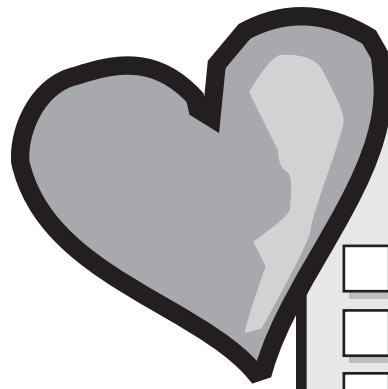
It was her jogging that she really lived for in those beginning days. At first, Katie didn't know how the community would react. Her training taught her that the customs and culture of the area might not take well to a woman jogging around town in shorts, but she checked with some people she had grown to trust, and they didn't seem to mind. Katie was perfectly safe in her town as she jogged down the beaten path of the river, across the old rail bridge tinged with light coppery rust, and back down the light dusty road, past her rented house and onto the grounds of the school where the boys playing soccer would stop, nearly tripping over themselves, to watch her run by as they wondered exactly who this *gringa* was.



As she got to know more of the youth in town, some of them would come out to jog with her. It was the boys at first who, with slight trepidation, asked if they could join her. She enjoyed their company, but the boys soon realized this jog was a lot of work. At some point, some girls started jogging too. Short distances and just a handful at first, but they started meeting Katie at her front gate when she was ready to start her routine. Over the period of a few weeks, she had well over 12 girls jogging with her full-time—more than the number of boys. Once in a while, a mother or two would even join them. Katie was sure that it was pure fancy and just the mothers' way of ensuring that their daughters were being taken care of, but she enjoyed the extra company anyway.

It wasn't too long before Katie decided to expand the jogging to include more physical activities—volleyball, sprints, basketball, and the ever-present soccer. The girls continued with her, the boys right by her side, and the mothers joining in every once in a while. It still was only 10 months into her service, but Katie was feeling good about her time so far—she met some neat youth, she got to meet some of their parents, and she could jog to her heart's content. Now if only, she thought, she could get some work done, teach them something, lead them to improving their lives. How could I tell Katie that she had forever already done this? The boys in the community were now participating with an adult for the first time on something that BOTH enjoyed doing. The girls had started athletics—unheard of in her community before then. And the parents—the mothers getting involved in jogging? How could I tell Katie she had so perfectly encouraged her new home to change and she had done it so successfully...?

— *Peace Corps Country Desk Officer*



## Ways to Show Kids You Care...<sup>60</sup>

- Love them, no matter what
- Empower them to help themselves
- Ask for their opinion
- Introduce them to people of excellence



## What about Harmful Cultural Practices?

As you learn more about your community you may encounter practices and rites of passage that are not considered positive outside the culture in which they are practiced or a particular subset of that culture. Consider the following advice from a former Volunteer when deciding how to address this:<sup>61</sup>

Outsiders cannot tell communities that these [practices] are wrong.... [They can] find groups of individuals in a community who do not advocate for these rituals and work with them...change is difficult, but when the information is given [about why certain practices] are harmful...a community can begin to understand and look for alternatives. Volunteers need to be extremely careful when expressing their opinions on these topics, as they can become “an enemy” of a community quicker than most realize....

[In one community where unsafe rituals of passage were used many] young people believed that if they did not participate they could never be leaders or influence the community.... We offered a Peer Education project where youth developed leadership skills and opportunities to act as agents of change within their community. Peer education officers and adult trainers from the community who went through these rituals and did not want young people to suffer these things stepped forward to do the training. No outsiders were involved in the direct implementation of training or discussions. Many times young people are not spoken to about their bodies and its functions and, once these youth were educated on topics, they were able to present to the community their opinions on alternative ways to enter into adulthood.

— A Volunteer in Costa Rica



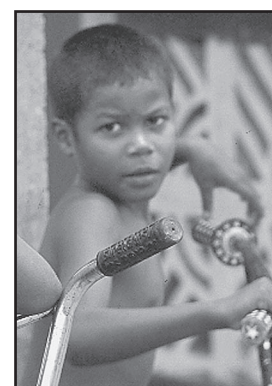


## EVALUATING ALONG THE WAY

We typically think of evaluation as a serious, often scary, accounting that takes place at the conclusion of an activity to determine whether the goals have been met. In fact, evaluation works best if it is interesting or even fun for those involved and part of the entire life of an activity.<sup>62</sup> Making evaluation an ongoing part of any activity will allow you to fine-tune your work along the way.

Preparing for evaluation should be part of your planning process. As with all other stages of an activity, both the design of the evaluation and its administration should involve youth and local adults. Thinking about how you will know if you have been successful in reaching your goals can help you design a better activity from the start. Reframe your goals as evaluation questions. For example, you might ask some general questions:

- ▶ Are we informing parents and other significant adults of our activities with youth? How have we involved these adults in the activities?
- ▶ Have youth been involved in the decision making at the planning, implementation, and evaluation stages of this activity? When has this worked well? What could we do differently next time?
- ▶ Are young people learning tangible skills? What are they and how can we measure them?
- ▶ Am I serving primarily as a facilitator? Am I training youth and local adults to replicate and continue the activity when I leave?



You can gather information in the journal in which you record your own observations, and ideas about how to improve your activity. Reread the notes you take and jot down your reflections. Conversations with the youth you work with can also provide useful information. Ask them informally the questions you are asking yourself about the activities you are engaged in together.

It can sometimes be difficult to get honest feedback about an activity with which you are closely associated. Participants may not want to be impolite by being critical. Consider asking a local adult or youth to talk to participants informally, or conduct more formal interviews, or focus groups, to evaluate your activity. Be sure to also seek feedback from parents or guardians, your Counterpart, and other local adults in evaluating your activity.

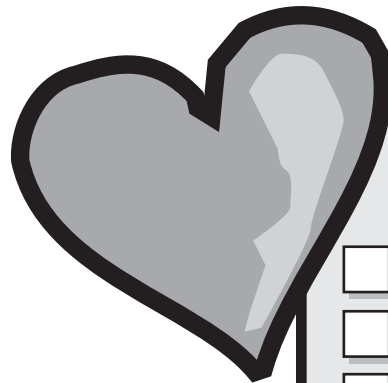
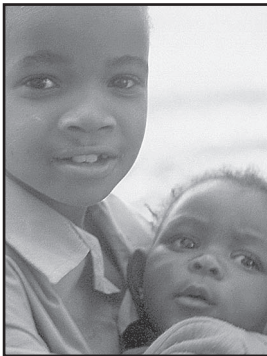
You can use a variety of other tools in designing your evaluation. Traditional measures include very specific things such as attendance rate, number of books read, or performance on a pretest and posttest. If you decide to use tests or quizzes to collect data, remember that young people may have had negative experiences with tests in the course of their formal schooling. Be sure to present them as tools to evaluate the activity, not the participants.

Evaluation forms or questionnaires can be useful in collecting information. You can use a simple questionnaire with a numbered scale to ask participants to rate different aspects of your activity. If participants have good literacy skills, you can also invite written narrative comments as a part of a feedback form by asking such questions as: What part of this activity was most helpful? What part of this activity did you find least helpful? What suggestions do you have for improvement?

Better yet, be creative and use the resources of your host community in creating evaluation tools that are fun such as:

- Games
- Simulations
- Role plays
- Art or music activities

What is most important in designing and conducting an evaluation is choosing methods that draw on the skills of the youth and adults gathering the information and sharing it with each other and others who can benefit from it. Be sure to consult the sample “Evaluation Tools” on pages 109-110 for some specific ideas.



### **Ways to Show Kids You Care...<sup>64</sup>**

- Ask them about themselves
- Share their excitement
- Ask them to help you
- Learn what they have to teach
- Be flexible

## Reading Non-Verbal Signals<sup>63</sup>

As your activity progresses, keep your eyes and ears open for signs that things are working or that something may need to be adjusted. Non-verbal cues can be particularly helpful in assessing how you are doing.

**1. Attendance.** If people don't come, it may not be meaningful to them. Look for:

- Too much talk/no action
- Too much confusion/no facilitation
- Too much control by staff or one or two members; no sharing of responsibility.

Low attendance can also mean it is too difficult to get to the meeting. Time and transportation can limit attendance.

**2. Enthusiasm.** Look at what gets people excited. When do people pay attention and generate ideas? What gets people down? Watch for sighs, side looks, side conversations. Remember that different cultures display enthusiasm differently.

**3. Clarity/confusion.** Check people's understanding. Confused people often don't ask questions. They think they are the only ones confused. Watch for blank looks and long silences. Encourage questioning. Different cultures have different non-verbal signals for confusion.

**4. Complaining.** Even if the complaints are unfair, look for the dissatisfaction or frustration behind them. There may be something else going on. Look for a lot of "but" statements, or disruption or rudeness in meetings.

**5. Follow through on plans.** Many volunteer groups don't have good follow-through. Your job includes being a "cheerleader," encourager, and advisor. If follow-through is very poor, help the group check its commitment to the activity/task; group morale; leadership of the group or the task; and whether the task is too ambitious or too big.

**6. Growth in membership.** If the group grows, something is going right. It's meeting some needs. If it doesn't grow, that's a good sign that it's not tuned in to the needs of those it's serving. Look into this. If males start showing up at a predominantly female group, the needs being met may not be the ones you had in mind. Likewise, if the refreshments or other perks are good, youth may come for them and not for the mission.

All these points are subject to interpretation. They are signs that you need to do some investigating, not that you necessarily need to change anything. Also, remember that non-verbal signals can vary with youth from different backgrounds or cultures.

## **SAYING GOODBYE**

Acknowledging the end of any relationship is important. When adults and youth are working together, it is particularly important for the adults to be sure that this is done well. Look for ways to bring closure to your relationship.



I started easing into the goodbyes only a month before I left. Reason: if you vocalize it earlier, then all of the interactions from that point are based on your leaving and this can be a painful and drawn-out process. I started handing over professional responsibilities much sooner. I started easing out and becoming a sideline player with eight months left in service.

As my goodbyes, I took my closest friends, young and old (one or just a few at a time), around and we took pictures, silly ones or fun ones or work-related photos. Then the last week, I had them all developed and we all got together and made memory books and talked about what we wanted to have happen in our futures, and then we wrote them in our books. On the back of each book, I wrote my address and we talked about it being their responsibility as much as mine to write. Also, with a close friend, I left enough money to cover the charges for paper or mailing so that my friends (young and old) all had the opportunity to keep in touch. This was the last week, and then I slid out of my site as quietly as I had come in. I had also written a small creative story for the children I worked with and left a copy for each of them explaining goodbyes and such.

This way things were casual, we had a project and something to reflect on, and the goodbyes were with smiles and not tears. Last memories are lasting ones. Make yours a celebration in your mind.

*— A former Volunteer in Guyana*

## When you leave...

- ▶ Participate in all the farewell dinners and parties.
- ▶ Find ways to express your gratitude to young men and women who have been special friends/colleagues through small gifts, dinners, lunches, certificates, public recognition...
- ▶ Take the youth who have been leaders in your work to meet with key collaborating partners, agency staff, and business contacts in order to facilitate their capacity to follow up after you leave.
- ▶ Give away materials and resources that were helpful to you such as contact lists, books, and your laptop.
- ▶ Exchange contact information for correspondence.
- ▶ When you get home, follow up with letters or e-mail. This can be difficult to sustain for a long period of time, but can help you and the youth you worked with early after your departure.

— *A former Volunteer in Thailand*



