

# Youth Development and Leadership



*How might we use youth development and leadership to increase life opportunity and equity?*

## Why Communities Value Youth Development and Leadership

1. **DEVELOPING CITIZENS:** Communities want to raise youth that possess the mindset, skill, and knowledge to solve social problems. They want youth to be connected to and engaged in their communities (and worry that too many aren't). Social progress has not kept up with technological progress. There is a hunger for raising effective, authentic, & ethical leaders that can make a difference for a more just and equitable world.
2. **DEVELOPING LIFE SKILLS:** Communities want youth to possess life skills (e.g. confidence, courage, perseverance, self-control, efficacy, resilience, and social and emotional learning) in their personal, civic and career lives. These equip youth to be able to make their way in the world. These attributes can't be learned only in formal education. It will require youth to try new things, meet people from other backgrounds, and develop strong character.
3. **DEVELOPING IDENTITY:** Communities want youth to develop a positive identity defined by their culture, history, faith, family, geography, and more

## Building Internal Capacity: Encouraging a Leadership Mindshift

From	To
You need to be famous and powerful to be a leader.	I see myself as a leader.
I don't have much to offer as a leader.	I know, value and develop my unique strengths, talents, and culture.
Most social problems are too complex to solve.	I am a creative and innovative problem-solver.
I am going to be successful in life.	We are going to be successful. (Success includes contributing to the well-being of my community).
Leaders are born.	Leaders are made.
Leadership is about the big decisions.	There are opportunities for leadership every day.
Leadership is a position.	Leadership is a choice (nobody needs to appoint you)
Leaders take command of situations	Leaders are comfortable leading from the front, the back or the middle.

Knowledge & Skills Supporting the Mindshift

Adapted from James Toole, 2002

## Building External Capacity: Addressing Access, Quality and Purpose

1. **ACCESS:** Do all youth have access to participate?
2. **QUALITY:** Do all youth have access to high quality programs?
3. **PURPOSE:** Do existing programs focus on the authentic needs of all youth?

**ACCESS EQUITY: *What hinders youth from participation in youth development and leadership programs?***

Issue	What Limits Life Opportunities and Equity?
<b>Communication</b>	People aren't aware of the range of available youth development options because the way they are communicated doesn't work for all populations (e.g. may need word of mouth, social media, phone app, easily accessible database, etc.) to reach all.
<b>Space</b>	Grassroots organizations are limited by not having enough space for after-school and summer activities (e.g. Minneapolis Somali community is the highest density in the state but lack quality space for their many youth activities).
<b>Funding</b>	Programs have resources to launch but then disappear. May exist for one year on soft funding but not able to sustain long-term. Need way to identify and support the best programs to develop a successful business model.
<b>Scaling</b>	Successful grassroots programs that do survive don't have money or facilities to scale to increase participation and social impact.
<b>Logistics</b>	Youth face logistical barriers because of transportation, child care, scheduling or other issues.
<b>Age Restrictions</b>	Multiple communities (e.g. Somali and Homeless and Highly Mobile) report a strong need for quality programs for overlooked 17 to 24 year olds. Many programs stop at 18 years old.
<b>Affordability</b>	Youth development programs are not affordable to families from all income levels (i.e. even mid-level families can struggle). Sliding scales like the YMCA sometimes not enough.
<b>Special Needs Inclusion</b>	Need more leadership programs designed to include and serve those difficult to reach (e.g. mental health, autism, criminal justice, homeless).
<b>Parental Support</b>	Parental attitudes may interfere with their child's participation (i.e. parents might not yet see the value of youth development opportunities as opposed to homework and therefore not support their child's participation).
<b>Flexibility</b>	Need programs that are structured flexibly to reach youth whose lives are unsettled and unpredictable (e.g. use technology to offer leadership opportunities and development such as web-based meetings, public forums, blogs that can accessed anytime).
<b>Quantity</b>	There are not enough leadership and service options for all youth. Program numbers are limited by space and resources.

**QUALITY EQUITY: *What hinders all youth from participation in high-quality youth development and leadership programs?***

Issue	What Limits Life Opportunities and Equity?
<b>Mainstream Program Inclusion</b>	Mainstream youth development programs that are not rooted and culturally grounded in the community limit access (i.e seen as only for white and middle class). Programs sometimes don't include diverse population, don't work well with diverse families, don't want feedback, have low expectations, or can be culturally biased or at least not relevant.
<b>Youth-Adult Partnership</b>	Programs that lack authentic youth-adult partnerships (where youth have real voice and share power) limits youth development and leadership outcomes.
<b>Youth as Problem-Solvers</b>	Need to provide youth with more more in-depth preparation in critical and creative thinking, how to solve problems, and how to be innovative.
<b>Family Involvement</b>	Programs often target youth but don't involve and gain the trust of families It's difficult to have healthy kids without healthy families, and parents may pull their children out of programs.
<b>Role Models</b>	Lack of bi-cultural role models and leaders from same background; youth are motivated when see people like themselves as leaders ("if they did it, I can").
<b>Youth Worker Training</b>	Lack of training opportunities for grassroots adult program leaders (i.e. know the culture but may need more training in and resources for youth development and leadership)
<b>Program Depth</b>	Some local programs lack a focus on long-term outcomes or impact (aren't dealing with root causes of youth problems and possibilities).
<b>Model Programs</b>	Although there are great models of high-quality programs, the challenge is how to spread that excellence to everyone. Need better ways to organize and tap local experts.
<b>Community Trust</b>	Youth development organizations need to spend more time in communities so both sides can build their trust and knowledge. Quote from a participant: "We never see you!" Organizations may lack cultural understanding, visibility, and credibility in those communities.
<b>Innovation</b>	Need new and different options to inspire and spark youth interest (e.g. someone suggested teaching youth to write code and design apps for non-profits).
<b>Feedback</b>	Lack of effective way for many programs to collect feedback to evaluate and improve their programs.
<b>Social Responsibility</b>	Need more organizations that adopt and live by the Mission Impact Council's 10-point definition of social responsibility.

**PURPOSE EQUITY: *What key youth development and leadership issues are not being sufficiently addressed that could increase life opportunity and equity?***

Gaps	What Limits Life Opportunities and Equity?
<b>Civic Education</b>	Need more instruction on youth leadership, global education, and civic responsibility. Parents want to raise next generation of community-minded leaders. Fear that youth are not learning that.
<b>Service-Learning</b>	Need more service-learning as the laboratory or application for civic education
<b>Leadership Identity</b>	Many youth don't understand what leadership is and don't see themselves as leaders. Need a mind shift to see their strength and potential to change the world
<b>Cultural Identity</b>	Youth sometimes let others define who they are. Need to develop an understanding and positive sense of themselves and their culture.
<b>Cultural Exposure</b>	Youth want access to learn about other cultures and the challenges that other communities face. Want to increase togetherness, minimize and mitigate stereotypes, tensions and cultural biases (often promulgated by parents and social media). For example, monocultural charter schools provide needed safety but also want to explore outside their four walls. Youth may feel isolated and not prepared for experiences outside.
<b>Youth Community Identity</b>	Youth are sometimes disconnected from their own community. There is a need to develop the next generation of leaders that care about, identify with and take action to improve their community.
<b>Peace Education</b>	Lack of approaches that build peaceful integration and coexistence of all groups. Teach nonviolent change and provide alternatives to gangs.
<b>Referral</b>	Need mainstream programs like YMCA to not only offer quality programs, but to tune into youth's passions and needs and be a referral agency for other places too. Need to intentionally divest from youth when there is a better alternative.
<b>Parent Education</b>	Need more parent education opportunities to navigate systems (i.e. taught by teachers from same cultural groups as the participants)
<b>Youth Educators</b>	More opportunities for youth to use their passions to learn leadership by teaching adults, peers, or those younger about their "superpower" (e.g. computers, arts, animals, etc.). Represents reciprocal helping —benefits youth and those receiving help.
<b>Mentors</b>	Need more mentors and exposure to community leaders (learn leadership by example).
<b>Culturally-Based Service Options</b>	Create culturally-based service groups where youth could serve their community elders in areas of fixing, maintaining, raking, etc.

# How a Youth Development Focus Might Shape the Future

A team of MIC members were asked on June 2 to imagine a future three years from now where our work in youth development had transformed the Twin Cities and equity. This is the article they imagined would appear in the Star Tribune.

## Star-Tribune

June 1, 2018

Minneapolis, MN

## Newspaper Headline

Youth Tackle Opportunity Gap

## Story

Back in 2015 a group of adult leaders, part of the Mission Impact Council (MIC), interviewed six youth groups from across the Twin Cities to identify youth issues and determine how to address them. Today that work will culminate in a Youth Summit and Advocacy Day at the capitol. Youth-led, “local action groups,” have been meeting for the past year to address issues that confront youth in our community. These interagency groups made up of youth from various cultures, including Somali, Native American, African American, Latino, Hmong, and Caucasian, as well as homeless and highly mobile youth, have been researching issues like: leadership, education, employment, food and nutrition, health and wellbeing, safety and security, etc.

MIC member Greg Hanks, in an interview with the Star-Tribune, told how the youth had gone through extensive leadership training to learn about their own cultures and the cultures of others. The youth also learned what it means to be a leader. Hanks said the youth then selected which local action groups they wanted to work with. Another MIC member, Dr. Nkem Chirpich, illustrated that youth are today’s leaders and as such they should be given the opportunity to lead now. Another member of the MIC, Dr. Willie Dean, underscored the need for youth leaders to be integrated into the process of closing the opportunity gap. “Any plans for, and about youth, should include their voice,” said Dean.

The transformational model used by the MIC includes: 1) leadership training for youth where youth research local issues, improve their cultural competence and learn about leadership, 2) local action groups where youth perform service learning projects that address community issues, 3) a Youth Summit, led by youth ages 12-24, that will report on their findings and accomplishments over the past year, and 4) Advocacy Day at the Capitol where youth will visit with their legislators to lobby for policy changes that affect youth statewide.

Today at noon the group will announce their plan to close the opportunity gap between youth from the urban core and other youth in our community. Following the summit, youth participants will visit their legislators at the capitol. Although, most are not old enough to vote, they expect their voices to be heard. A key component of their request to the legislature will be that teachers state-wide be required to complete youth development training as part of the licensing process to become a teacher.

#### Evidence

1. Research gathered and Local Action Groups doing things in their communities
2. Youth Summit attracts multicultural youth from across the Twin Cities
3. Advocacy Day at the Capitol pushes for youth development training as part of teacher licensing statewide

Thanks,  
Willie

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