Partnerships: Youth-Adult Partnerships

Why are youth-adult partnerships important?
Youth-adult partnerships are valuable to everyone involved. When young people are given an opportunity to be immersed in community life, their voices are heard as contributing members of society. This can be a very motivating force!

In turn, adults offer wisdom to guide young people into new experiences. Young people and adults need to identify the assets they bring to the relationship. Both groups must be honest about the stereotypes they may have about one another, as well as what common visions they share. Ultimately, the community benefits as grateful recipients of significant and meaningful cross-generational service projects.

What is the value of youth-to-youth partnerships?
Young people need to support one another as they work on service projects. A healthy working relationship between peers creates a strong bond that contributes to the overall success of the program. If there is mutual respect and a spirit of cooperation among young people, the project is more likely to run smoothly.

Youth can be roles models for each other. If one young person has more experiences in a specific role, others can benefit from that expertise. When young people support each other, an infectious energy enhances the positive results of any project.

How does mentoring fit in?
A mentor is a person who sets an example for another person, leading the mentee in a specific direction. Mentoring relationships can take on a variety of forms:

• An older student helping a younger one.
• An adult helping a child.
• A student mentoring an elder.

Mentorships have the greatest impact when the relationship moves toward reciprocal partnership. For a healthy partnership to develop, the participants must listen to one another. Both partners have experiences and perspectives to share.

Many partnerships begin as mentoring relationships. As the mentor and mentee spend more time together and place more energy in their relationship, they begin to share responsibility and become partners.

How can we work together?

What do young people bring to relationships?
Young people bring innovative ideas, new directions, and fresh insights to relationships. Young people may help adults change perspectives and attitudes. The energy and spontaneous spirit of young people also motivate adults to approach a project in new ways. This infectious spirit can also motivate and inspire more young people to help with the project.
When given the opportunity to express ideas and opinions, young people may think of new ways to do action-planning. While working with adults, youth take on responsibilities that may not have been possible if working alone. The partnership empowers the young people to take on new leadership roles.

What do adults bring to relationships?
As role models, adults offer their years of experience to benefit young people. By providing trainings, orientation and support, adults help youth learn the basics in any project. Adults often have numerous community resource contacts that can help young people, too.

What are the gaps in the needs and assets of young people and adults?
In many cases, young people and adults want and need the same things in a partnership. They need to feel their involvement is important and truly makes a difference. They both want to be heard and understood, and they need to know what is expected of them.

However, young people and adults also have different needs. For example, adults may prefer more structure in the relationship and young people may need more time to complete a project.

Try not to stereotype either group. Consider the specific needs and assets of our partner.

How do we develop expectations for working together?
It’s important for each member of the partnership to understand the expectations of the other person. In order for the relationship to facilitate open communication, a set of expectations must be established. A complete set of expectations for partnership involves:

• A common goal.
• Mutual respect.
• A specific outline of the project.
• Careful planning together.
• Identifying resources.
• A realistic timeline.
• Training and guidance.
• Action steps.
• Continuous communication.

How do we start a partnership?
Adults and young people both like to be invited into a relationship because of their skills, talents, and potential.

How do we get young people to work with adults?
The first step to partnering with a young person is to simply ask. Find a person who has complimentary skills and would benefit from the partnership. Remember, a personal invitation to become involved is more meaningful than a mass notice.

Set specific expectations for involvement. Make sure each party knows the expectations and is willing to commit to sharing power and responsibility.

Be enthusiastic and listen. Think about how you want to be treated if you were the younger person’s age. Ask if that is how he or she wants to be treated. They key is not to assume anything. If you are not sure, simply ask.
How do we get adults to work with young people?
Think about adults in your community who have taken a special interest in young people or who have expertise in an area of interest to you. The next step is simply to ask the adult if he or she would like to work with you.

Personal invitations are more meaningful and will make the adult pay attention because you asked them.

Know exactly what you expect out of the partnership. Meet together and set specific expectation for involvement. Make sure each person knows the expectations and is willing to commit to sharing power and responsibility.

Be enthusiastic and listen. Think about how you would want to be treated if you were the adult’s age. Ask if that is how he or she wants to be treated. The key is not to assume anything. If you are not sure, simply ask.

What are your roles and responsibilities?
Whether you are a young person or an adult, you need to evaluate your level of commitment to the partnership. The following questions will help you determine what you want to gain and what might be troublesome in the relationship:

• What am I interested in learning, trying, doing?
• Do I have stereotypes about adults or young people that might affect my ability to work with them?
• What should adults be responsible for? What should young people be responsible for?
• What specific things do I want to gain or learn from my involvement (e.g., jog experience? a chance to make the community better? computer skills? community contacts? career exploration?)
• What questions or concerns do I have? What kind of help do I think I will need?
• How much time do I have to commit to this project or branch? How long am I prepared to commit to being involved?

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