

Sharing a New Story:

Young People in Decision-Making

A report for:



by:

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Youth participation is also an ongoing area of interest for the Australian Youth Research Centre, which has been responsible for conducting this research. The Centre has a commitment in its research, development, consultancy, support and evaluation work to the active 'agency' of young people - to their capacity and willingness to act upon issues that affect them and their communities.

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Ani

Summary of Findings

This report focuses on young people in decision-making. Through the voices of young people, it explores:

- What young people in decision-making is and why it is important;
- What is currently happening in the area;
- The challenges and issues for young people in decision-making roles;
- What helps and what gets in the way.

It offers a reflective toolkit, which has been developed for working alongside young people in decision-making roles.

In terms of what works for young people in decision-making roles, there are three key elements:

- **Meaning:** doing something that has a bigger purpose and therefore that ‘I believe in’;
- **Control:** making decisions, being heard and thus also having the skills to see the task through and do it well; and
- **Connectiveness:** working with others and being part of something bigger.

The report challenges all organisations involving young people in decision-making roles that “taking it seriously will mean changes in the way we do business as organisations and as a community”.

The report makes the case for new roles, connections and meeting points between young people and with their communities.

Summary of key findings

What young people in decision-making is and why it is important:

Young people in decision-making is part of the broader issue of youth participation in community life. It is most often used to refer to young people on boards and committees but there are many other ways young people are, and can be, involved in public decision-making.

One of the young researchers involved in the report highlights the “adult-centrism” in the literature about young people’s role in decision-making. “So often, it is still about what adults do for young people – missing the point of working with and alongside young people.”

Working alongside young people in decision-making roles is important:

- as an issue of human rights;
- in leading to more effective decision-making;
- in recognition of young people’s ability to act;
- in respecting young people’s full citizenship now;
- as being about growing into citizenship;
- in ‘capacity building’ in young people and their communities; and
- in building connections between young people and their communities.

What is currently happening in the area

Internationally and in Australia, there is an increased emphasis on young people in decision-making, with the strongest leadership coming from the community sector.

Government mechanisms for working with young people tend to be:

- Youth councils;
- Youth roundtables;
- Youth advisory committees;
- Input to government policy;
- Consultation; and
- Involvement in activities.

The report highlights the need to listen to the voices of all young people, including those who might be marginalised, stating “there has been a tendency when looking at issues of young people in decision-making, leadership and youth participation more generally, to end up thinking, speaking and targeting the more privileged, those who already have a secure place and those who have encountered few barriers to participation”.

The challenges and issues for young people in decision-making roles

Some of the recurring themes and challenges for young people in decision-making roles include:

- Young people are involved in token and ‘decorative’ ways;
- Young people are involved marginally but adults make all the decisions;

- Young people are involved in making 'decision-less decisions' where the decisions are limited to issues that do not really matter;
- Young people make decisions but nothing happens;
- Young people are included in decision-making but the project is under resourced, making action difficult; and
- Youth is transitory: experienced young people become too old to fulfil their 'youth' role.

This last point, in particular, was highlighted by the younger researchers. "Children and young people are unlike other minority groups, in that soon after they become 'expert' at being representatives, they grow out of being young people." The report finds that this issue makes meaningful representation and succession particularly important.

What helps and what gets in the way

The report looks at two of the most common assumptions about young people: 'young people can do nothing' and 'young people can do everything' – finding that both positions leave young people unsupported and alienated.

The key elements that assist young people in decision-making roles are:

- Being involved in a task that excites and stretches them;
- Being equipped to do the task well; and
- Knowing that they are in good company for the task.

The common issues that get in the way of young people in decision-making roles are:

- Young people not being properly supported and equipped for a significant task;
- Resourcing issues, including the very practical aspects of how young people can get to places easily and meet the expenses of travel; and
- Organisations not understanding the need for young people to balance their commitments to the organisation with their already complex lives.

The report also examines the specific issues of what hinders and what helps young people in:

- Leadership roles within organisations;
- Youth councils or reference groups made up of young people;
- Young people on mostly adult boards;
- Partnerships or community development roles;
- Peer leadership; and
- Roles as activists for causes or social change.

Across these different settings, the young people's stories are distilled into seven practical pointers for groups who wish to work well alongside them:

1. Storytelling;
2. Listening;
3. Recognising and affirming capacities;
4. Resourcing;
5. Re-working structure and process;
6. Honouring each other (through formal roles, naming of expectations, rites of passage);
7. Nurturing informal relationships (bonding, networking).

If **meaning, control** and **connectedness** are at the heart of what we are trying to achieve, then these seven pointers help to ground that in 'how?'

A toolkit for working alongside young people in decision-making roles

Dealing honestly with issues of youth participation is hard but the important thing is to start somewhere and to be open to learning within the process.

In the spirit of 'perfection is the enemy of good', this report explores the notion of 'better practice' for young people in decision-making roles, drawing on the three key elements of meaning, control and connectedness.

Meaning. *Better practice is about meaningful engagement and recognising young people as co-creators of their communities. It is not about participation for participation's sake.*

Control. *Better practice is about guarding against the tendency for 'public puppetry' where young people are ostensibly involved but have no real say in the decision-making process. It is also about providing the resources, structures and skills to enable the task to be undertaken.*

Connectedness. *Better practice is about recognising that young people's concerns often involve critiquing political decisions and that working alongside young people in decision-making roles often requires going against the cultural and political flows.*

The report goes on to provide some reflective tools, a 'toolkit' of questions, and a framework that groups and organisations can use when working alongside young people in decision-making roles.

Background

At the beginning of the Twenty-first Century, working alongside young people in decision-making is becoming a 'hot issue'. Many groups and organisations are realising that such work is important, but are not sure where to start or how to continue. The central purpose of this document is to provide some tools to assist groups and organisations to 'think into' the issues.

There is renewed interest in youth participation both within Australia and globally. In Australia, workers with youth have been advocating young people's leadership, advocacy, contribution, and voice in the ways that communities are structured, for decades. Around 1985, International Youth Year, this issue received public prominence. Yet again within the last five years, there has been rapid expansion in attention to the role of young people in governance, and the words 'youth participation' have become even more 'politically correct'. This flurry of activity, often directed or mandated from the top, also brings its own challenges, which will be explored in this report. Because we as communities are not used to working alongside young people in decision-making processes, the ideals are not always matched by good process.

Gerison Lansdown (2002), one of the researchers to explore this topic most thoroughly at a global level, makes the observations that there needs to be a broader inclusion of young people in general:

- Currently there are still many projects and agendas that are controlled largely by adults;
- It is important for these processes to progress from consultation to participation, thus empowering those involved;
- There needs to be a recognition that peer leadership skills are not the only thing required, and that young people need to be able to speak to wider populations rather than simply to their peers, as they have things to tell the rest of us;
- Young people in these processes need to have access to the relevant information;
- There needs to be work done with adults as well as young people to promote the rights of young people to participate;
- The concept of participation needs to be built into the organisational structure, showing

commitment rather than being as part of the fashion that is currently prevalent;

- There need to be systematic evaluations of youth participation within particular settings;
- There are no blue prints, but merely principles;
- Organisations need to share their experience of youth participation to help make sense of what works and what does not.

These observations form a starting point for this research.

In mid 2002, Initiative staff from The Foundation for Young Australians approached the Australian Youth Research Centre at The University of Melbourne to ask for a small piece of research. The research was to explore the issues of young people in decision-making.

It would result in:

- A short summary of recent thinking and better practice;
- An exploration of the issues from the perspective of young people who had been on the 'front-line';
- Resources for the sector and for The Foundation itself, to help 'think into' the issues.

A team of four young people who were initially interview respondents, also took up the invitation to become more deeply involved in the research process itself. They engaged in interviews, an internet-search of current projects, a literature review, and editorial responsibilities, enriching both the process and the result.

This research was completed in April 2003, and this report is the result. This is phase one of an ongoing exploration, and so these ideas and resources will continue to evolve beyond this report. We discovered that we were exploring a dynamic scene, and so our source material was well dispersed throughout different networks. It is now our hope that wide circulation of this report will draw comments, feedback and further rich input from the field, and that the tools will continue to become useful for the sector, and for The Foundation itself. Readers are invited to send comments and information to the Australian Youth Research Centre (contact details are in this report).

Through this project we wanted to prepare some tools for the sector. In doing this research, though, we recognised that all the practical tools in the world would be of limited use unless there was a solid and integrated conceptual base behind what we do. This has involved taking a step backwards and looking at a bigger landscape.

For instance, there is a lot of material written on the topic of youth participation, but what might a holistic approach to young people in decision-making look like? In a space so contested in approach, and so surrounded by different assumptions and languages, how might we claim an evidence base so that it becomes clear what better practice looks like? How might we evaluate projects or proposals, and on what basis? Also, this is a topic that is easy to separate into specific areas (eg involving young people on boards and committees) but how does this fit with issues of who gets represented, patterns of inclusion and exclusion, young people's participation in public life? How might we make sense of these things in a way that does not neatly draw in the borders around this topic - tunnel vision - but explores it in context? Beyond the lists of do's and don'ts, what is it that works for young people themselves, and what gets in the way? How does this relate to our background awareness of young people's very different opportunities to make empowered decisions in their everyday lives? This report begins to explore these questions, based on the stories of the young people involved.

This report addresses these topics through basic questions:

- What is 'young people in decision-making' and why is it important?
- What has been happening?
- What can young people teach the rest of us about what works, what helps, and what gets in the way?
- How might we set up arrangements that work?

Underlying this project is a basic assumption that young people need to be not only having input into decisions that affect young people, but also decisions about their communities as a whole. From their unique vantage points they will see and articulate things that others cannot. We also need to be hearing from not just those in positions of privilege, but those on the margins, as these will be the ones to bring prophetic voices about the changes that are really needed. Doing this properly will require radical shifts in thinking.

The first part of the paper makes available some of the most recent thinking about young people in decision-making, from Australia and globally. We have a critical look at the term 'young people in decision-making', and explore what it means. A rationale is presented: why would communities and

organisations care about this? This section is brief but it draws from an already huge body of work around youth participation.

We then briefly explore what is happening at international and local levels. As the project centres around input from young people, a thorough review is beyond the scope of this paper, but the material provides a context for thinking into the issues.

The middle part of the report goes straight to the experts: twenty-one young people who have been involved significantly in decision-making at different levels. This section presents the findings of the original fieldwork that was mostly conducted in October and November 2002. Specifically, these are about young people's own insights and understandings of how organisations and communities have assisted or not assisted them in their own tasks of decision-making. The decision-making in question here is collective versus individual, and formal or public versus private, although we argue that the two are strongly intertwined. The young people provide stories of what has helped (enabling factors) and stood in the way (barriers) as they worked in many different settings, from decision-making on boards and committees to peer leadership to youth activism. Although the young people gave input that was relevant to these specific settings, the deeper themes in their stories are reflected across all settings. These are distilled into **three essential elements**: *meaning*, *control* and *connectedness*. The things that they say both support the literature and challenge us to think further. Their stories reveal that involving young people well is not a uni-dimensional scale about power and control, but that there is a range of different angles or priorities upon which organisations could be working. Some of these are not difficult, but simply require consistent, intentional awareness of the issues. Others will involve considerable self-examination at a personal and organisational level. The young people's stories provide insights for different settings, and these are distilled into **seven pointers for practice**.

The emerging framework (three essential elements and seven pointers for practice) highlights key topics that groups might think about, and these unfold into the toolkit. These topics, still based upon the young people's stories, might over time become the basis for a set of more developed process measures and indicators. How do we know what good process looks like? What are the things that we need to have in place?

However, just as there is no definitive 'young person' or standard 'group', there is little sense in giving prescriptions. Rather, a call to better practice is really a call to 'reflective practice'. The final part of this paper contains a conceptual framework, some reflective tools, and a toolkit for groups who are thinking about working alongside young people in

decision-making. Each of these draw heavily on the insights of the young people who were consulted, together with stories from the field, with case study examples of how other groups are doing it. We have taken Lansdown's point that it is important to hear what other groups are doing. Case studies ground the ideas and provide examples: who is doing these things well, and what does it look, taste, and smell like when it is working? This is not a comprehensive approach - particularly in the community sector, where there are many powerful things happening. The particular stories included have been provided by the young people themselves, and by others who are active in the sector. Interestingly, we did not find many people who claimed to be experts, but more often, we found the people who were treading this new ground were carefully surrounding their process with questions and reflection (and consulting young people!). This final section of the report lists some of the most poignant questions, and these are presented as a reflective tool for organisations seeking to make some further headway themselves. These are resources for thinking into the issues, which might encourage groups to find their own ways ahead, together.

For The Foundation for Young Australians, the Australian Youth Research Centre and other organisations in the youth sector, this conceptual framework may also become a useful resource in other ways. First, it could serve as a starting point for critically evaluating structures and processes, and for sifting proposals and ideas. Secondly, it could serve as an organising structure for compiling an evidence base about the impacts of good process and what works (and how and why) as it maps points of linkage into different literatures and growing areas of research. Currently the upsurge of interest in youth participation is more politically driven than evidence based, although the evidence is beginning to emerge (eg see Kirby and Bryson, 2002; Hannam, 2002; Holdsworth, 2002b and 2003). Except in a narrow psychological sense, we do not really understand the impacts. It is important to keep working towards contextually sensitive social frameworks for making sense of what we are doing.

Not surprisingly, there are clear parallels between the three central themes emerging from this study - meaning, control and connectedness - and things any young person needs in order to participate in social life at all. This makes sense. Surely our work is not simply about equipping high powered youth advocates, but equipping all young people to critically and creatively engage in the communities in which they live.

Introduction:

Sharing a New Story

This report is about hearing, inviting, supporting, equipping, honouring and celebrating young people in decision-making roles. It represents an open invitation to tell - and to become - a new story about how young people are involved. It is written alongside a company of young people, primarily for those who are wondering about inviting, working with and supporting young people in decision-making roles: ways to think about it, and ways to do it. Through this project young people are drawing our attention to the things we do, but also to the stories that we tell and the language we use to tell them.

Although this research was tailored to hear the voices of young people, this is clearly not just about individuals' issues. It is recognised that groups and organisations have limited understandings of these issues; it would be useful to mirror this research with some other research with organisations and groups in order to hear the stories of organisations not coping and the challenges *they* face as *they* learn how to work with young people.

In one way the title: *'sharing a new story' is a little ironic*. The issue of how to become involved or to involve young people in community decision-making processes is one of the oldest challenges that the youth sector has faced. Generations of young people have been telling the rest of us that (mostly) we have not managed this too well. This is not an easy thing to do, but it is important. As those who have worked in the scene for decades will testify, the same stories circulate and the same blockages emerge in relation to youth participation in public life.

In another way, though, the call to tell a new story is *not at all ironic*. Now there are significant *new things happening* - new 'methodologies of hope'. Further, social change creates both opportunities and imperatives (important new reasons) to organise community life differently to the way we have done traditionally.

The early years of a new millennium mark a useful moment of reflection. So this document is about naming and claiming a moment where we need to take stock of the older stories, but also about tuning our ears to some new ones - then, hopefully, being co-creators of new stories. The company is good. There is a lot of good work going on now, and this builds upon some strong work done by young people of earlier generations and those who worked alongside them. This topic represents a growing edge

in current thinking and activity, across Australia and globally.

One layer of the challenges is about public 'discourses'. Discourses are the shared stories and sets of assumptions which frame the way that communities think about issues. Here the two most evident in relation to youth participation are:

- 'Young people can do nothing': *They need to be shaped and moulded and grow up before they are useful.*

Or the line in reaction that sometimes emerges from the youth sector:

- 'Young people can do everything'. *They merely need the constraints on their action to be removed.*

As the young people interviewed in this research explain, *both sets of assumptions leave them unsupported for action and alienated from their communities*. The challenge is to discover new storylines that acknowledge our inter-dependency as communities. These will be storylines that explore and celebrate the relationship between the young and not-so-young as vital to both.

There is also a need to explore the story of young people in decision-making within the context of bigger stories: social structure, social process and social change. Social research warns us that it will be important to hold some complex ideas in tension. For example, at the same time as the political push to include young people in *public decision-making* occurs, economic and labour market changes are actually excluding increasing numbers of young people from opportunities to make *significant decisions within their own lives* (Dwyer and Wyn, 2001). It is near-sighted to focus on one of these patterns without acknowledging the other.

This focus on decision-making is at the 'sharp end' of questions about youth participation more generally. A significant part of young people's connection to their communities is about having valued roles, having an audible voice and being heard. Flagging this as a global issue, the International Youth Foundation (International Youth Foundation, 2001) recently asked: 'How can we ensure young people grow up feeling a part of society, not outside it?' Disconnection from communities is costly for all involved. This matters more now because of social change. In industrialised western societies there is an increasing focus on

production and consumption as a measure of human value. As a result, increasing numbers of young people are finding themselves denied a place in their societies. During the process of writing up their material for this project, this point was emphasised by the young researchers. Olivia (a younger researcher) writes:

These times see us with limited prospects for youth who have had no work experience ... and also with that, a discouragement for youth that they don't have the power to change things.

This points to a need for new roles, connections, and meeting points: ways of (re?)engaging communities with their young people and young people with their communities.

When looking at issues of young people in decision-making, leadership and youth participation more generally, there has been a tendency to end up thinking about, speaking to, and targeting the more privileged: those who already have a secure place, and those who have encountered few barriers to participation. Other research (eg see Kirby and Bryson, 2002) suggests that these are the young people who find it easier to participate. Gabrielle, another of the younger researchers, says:

What I've noticed is that there is a small population of young people getting involved, and not a lot of other people. Because you've got a lot of normal ordinary people who are kind of interested but don't have the background or confidence to get onto a youth round-table. Who is missing?

Research participants were all too aware of this point as well:

There's a danger in local government and YACs that young people of very similar backgrounds and experiences are the only ones who can contribute. There's a real need to engage young people who have the desire and demand for change.

How to involve young people who are less privileged, or marginalised will be a perennial challenge, but this will also provide opportunities to hear some of the lesser-told stories.

Hearing, inviting, supporting, equipping, honouring, and celebrating young people in decision-making roles is a challenge not to be taken lightly. Involving young people badly may do more harm and cause more cynicism than not involving them at all (Kirby and Bryson, 2002). Taking it seriously will mean changes in the way we do business as organisations and as a community. This also highlights the need for good resources.

I think the biggest problem, when trying to involve youth in leadership and decision-making, occurs where organisations aren't targeted directly toward youth, such as when the government tries to involve youth. The state government has a totally uninspiring youth website and, from my understanding, attempts to involve youth through the website have been dismal failures. They seem

completely uninformed and aren't getting the message out in the right way ... However, it's not just the state government who are having problems. I know of very few organisations who have dealt with this effectively. (Jessie)

However, there are some lesser-known stories of groups that are working exceptionally well alongside young people in decision-making processes. All involved have a new story to tell. The stories are often hidden because these people are busy doing their work rather than trumpeting about their success. This paper is both an invitation to hear some of those stories and a resource to help you find and to tell your own. If you have been seriously looking to address these issues, you are already on the cutting edge and the rest of us need to hear your stories. There can be real encouragement in hearing what is happening. As Olivia said:

This research has made me realise that there are organisations out there that are trying to help the youth become leaders ... [It is often] a discouragement for youth that they don't have the power to change things. However, programs like this help to stop that ... Well done and thank you for letting me be a part of this!

This project signals our intention for an open exchange. It is an invitation to share your stories of what is happening and what works! We would also like to hear about other resources that people are finding useful.

For our part, we would like to offer three original items of value:

1. A collection of stories from young people who are involved in decision-making: 'what works, what helps and what gets in the way?' Their stories are congruent with the emerging literature, which is mostly written by adults, but they add some very concrete 'how'. They also *thicken* the stories of how it all works (see the box on the next page);
2. A kit of reflective tools for groups and organisations, based upon the stories of the young people. The young people call our attention back to some of the basics: meaning, control and being connected to their communities, which is surely what this is about, and seven grounded pointers for practice;
3. A gathering point for new stories (a template and contact details are included).

To understand these issues well we need to hear a chorus of voices. It is wise to the cumulative wisdom of those who have been wrestling with these themes for years, who can name them easily, some of whom are represented in the literature. We also need to listen directly to the expert voices of young people who have been involved and know first-hand what works and what gets in the way. *All storytellers are welcome.*

Young people in decision-making - language-ing a new story

The story of *involving*, *recruiting*, *inviting* and *supporting* young people in decision-making is important but one-sided. Each of these things is important, but without the other side, the young people are rendered passive by the way the rest of us tell our stories. Anna (a younger researcher) suggested that these verbs are about doing *to* and *for* young people instead of doing it *with* them or just letting them do it. This is a hard shift to make. It is also an important shift to make, because the way we story things shapes the way we think about them.

'Thick' and 'thin' stories

It is too easy to write *about* young people or about their issues. But until our stories about youth participation reflect the experiences of the young people involved, they will be of little use on the ground. The idea of 'thick' and 'thin' stories (Geertz, 1972; Geertz, 1973) rests at the heart of this report. A *thin* story is one that is written about another - in this case about young people - with little sense of their experiences or understandings. A *thick* story, on the other hand, is one that seeks the explanations, meanings, understandings of those involved. This will be a much more complex story, but it will be grounded and useful.

When we tell and write thin stories we miss really important clues about how things happen: the social processes that enable young people to become decision makers in their lives and communities.

In the youth sector, one of the things that happens when we listen to each other's stories is that our *own* stories of what we are doing also become thickened - that is, more complex, more robust, more useful (Wierenga, 2002). To hear these stories means asking very open-ended questions of each other and of young people about what works, what helps, and what gets in the way. It also means listening well to the answers.

Method

A significant part of this research has been the *involvement of younger researchers*. These people initially responded to the project for the purpose of being interviewed. In the phone and e-dialogues that followed, they also indicated an interest in being involved in the research process itself. Four young people were employed as temporary research staff through The University of Melbourne, with funding provided by The Foundation for Young Australians. This has added some extra dimensions to the project in terms of interpretation of interview materials, literature and understandings of better practice. It has been a good process to be part of a team who are living the issues. The whole team's input has led to a far richer, more inclusive and diverse result.

The project team consisted of Dr Ani Wierenga from the Australian Youth Research Centre, and four younger researchers: Anna Wood, Gabrielle Trenbath, Jessie Kelly and Olivia Vidakovic. These four people are all university students. This was a research team that never actually met, because people lived variously in Victoria, WA, Queensland and Tasmania. Gabrielle, Jessie and Olivia conducted some interviews, wrote these up, and also contributed their own reflections and learnings about both the topic and being involved in the research itself (see Appendix C). Anna was heavily involved in the internet and literature searches, the reviewing process, the editorial conversations and in framing the report. People wrote different pieces, Ani did most of the shaping of the document, and everyone¹ was involved in the final edit.

This project falls directly within the '*youth participation*' policy and practice framework of The Foundation for Young Australians who commissioned the research. The Foundation's vision is: 'to create positive opportunities and outcomes for Australia's young people, by leading the development of innovative strategies that enable them to reach their potential and participate fully in society' (The Foundation for Young Australians, 2002).

Youth participation is also an ongoing area of interest for the Australian Youth Research Centre, that has been responsible for conducting this research. The Australian Youth Research Centre has a commitment in its research, development, consultancy, support and evaluation work to the

active 'agency' of young people: to their capacity and willingness to act upon issues that affect them and their communities.

This research project was carried out through five inter-related phases:

1. Literature and internet search, and organisation into thematic collections;
2. Organisation of research program, and preparation for interviews (this included negotiating with and coaching the research team);
3. Interviews;
4. Data analysis: development of themes, case studies and reflective tools;
5. Report preparation.

1. *Literature and Internet search*

This first phase involved familiarisation with the national and international literature. This phase continued throughout the research: Ani splashed around in it and Anna was more systematic - sifting and cataloguing it. Together we discussed what the criteria for better practice might look like, what was evident in this material and what was missing.

2. *Organisation of research program and preparation for interviews*

The second phase involved contacting young people who were involved in decision-making roles. The Foundation has a large database of young people who have registered their interest in being involved in initiatives like this. An open invitation was sent out. Twenty young people responded, with at least one from every State and Territory. Of this group, 16 were eventually interviewed. In November, some gaps in the emerging data became clear, and another five young people, located through networks, and one organisation's CEO, were identified and interviewed².

This phase also included adapting the research program as six of the young people who volunteered to be interviewed also responded to an invitation to become involved in the research process itself. Two of these were unable to follow through, and had to

1: Except Olivia who had gone overseas.

2: We were not expecting these 20 young people to be **representative** of all young people in decision-making roles. Rather, in the process of qualitative research, there is an expectation that, from listening **in depth** to key people's own stories of lived experience, some common themes will arise and these will both enrich our understandings and create new shared knowledge around the issues.

cancel the interviews they had organised for health and family reasons. Details of the negotiation and 'coaching' process for young interviewers are attached in Appendix B.

Involving young people this way meant that it was best to have an *adaptive* research program that could grow to honour the things they brought to the process. For example, after her own interview, Gabrielle chose to interview a friend about a particular adult-youth partnership project, engaged in her own fieldwork as part of project, and wrote up her own observations.

3. Interviews

In this research we interviewed 21 young people from across Australia. These were individuals contacted through The Foundation for Young Australians' e-mail list. Each respondent already had significant experience in decision-making and leadership roles.

Five of the interviews were conducted by young researchers. Another four had been organised but these were by the young interviewers who had to leave the process at the last moment.

Respondents ranged from 15 to 24 years old. While some came from relatively privileged backgrounds, others were part of social groups that had traditionally been marginal to discussions about youth participation, for example Aboriginal young people, those with migrant backgrounds, or those who had overcome these significant (self-identified) barriers to their own participation:

- Lower socio-economic background - lack of resources;
- Chronic physical illness;
- Depression;
- Extreme anger and disenfranchisement - 'I had a bad attitude';
- Crippling shyness.

The 21 young respondents (see Appendix A) also represented a broad range of experience in leadership and decision-making. Between them, they had:

- Served in decision-making capacities within groups or organisations;
- Been peer leaders;
- Been representatives on committees largely made of adults;
- Participated in or led youth councils or reference groups;
- Been involved in community development or partnerships with community;
- Been activists for their own or for other causes and social change;
- Been youth advocates or consultants.

In interviews we asked respondents to tell their stories about their own experiences. How did they end up so involved in decision-making roles?

What was it that got them there? What is it that keeps them there? What does being involved in this way do for them? What had communities, groups and organisations done to help, and to get in their way? Did they have stories of where things had worked particularly well? Horror stories? What could be learned from their experience that would help to equip others?

We were aiming to explore these things in depth so that we could learn about helpful process and better practice. In interviews we placed a particular focus on the questions 'what works for you?', 'what helps?', and 'what gets in the way?' Many of the respondents had several experiences to talk about, both positive and negative. This meant they were able to draw some really useful contrasts between helpful and unhelpful practice.

4. Data analysis

Themes became apparent in the interview data. These were written up by the interviewers. Each of the young interviewers also wrote a section of personal reflections and attached these to their write-ups of their interview. They analysed both the emerging themes and what they had learned and the process of being involved in the research. Their reflections are attached (Appendix C).

These reflections, although very different, worked well together. They identified the key points and together formed a loose framework for organising the report structure.

- Gabrielle's work involved a strong critique of the gaps in how young people can get involved in decision-making roles, who can become involved, and who is marginalised in that process;
- Jessie provided an in-depth analysis of the characteristics of relationships that enable adults and young people to work well together;
- Olivia's work provided encouragement for those who would dare to embark on this journey and her interview write-ups detailed particular things that organisations could do to equip, stretch and support young people's growth as leaders and decision makers;
- Anna brought her perspective to the literature, and she wrote this up along with her reflections about representation and the language often used to talk about young people in decision-making.

These are the different voices that weave through this report.

5. Report preparation

Due to time and resource constraints (this project had grown and exceeded both budget and timelines) the report writing itself was less than collaborative - Ani pulled it together. However, the younger researchers were involved in the final edit.

Young People in Decision-Making: Why and What?

Why is it important?

Working alongside young people in decision-making roles is important because it is about *human rights* and *social effectiveness*. It is about *citizenship*, recognising and building capacity, and about building connections between young people and their communities.

It is about recognising the *rights* of all to be involved in the decision-making that affects them:

Young people's interests are frequently disregarded in the public policy sphere in favour of interest groups with more power (Lansdown, 2002).

It is about making *better decisions*:

Young people have a body of experience and knowledge, which is unique to their situation (Lansdown, 2002).

Communities need to benefit from that insider-knowledge.

It is about respecting young people's *full citizenship now*:

We are born as citizens, are we not? Young people have something to contribute as young people - not as the adults that they will be later (Anna).

And, depending upon the way citizenship is understood, it is also about continuing to *grow into citizenship*:

Youth participation is a prerequisite for the development of the skills of active citizenship as it entails balancing young people's social rights and responsibilities (The Foundation for Young Australians, 2002).

It is about *recognising capacities*: young people's own 'agency' or ability to act:

[Young people] are not merely recipients of adult protection, but active agents in their own lives (Lansdown, 2002).

They are social actors with skills and capacities to bring constructive resolutions to their own situation (Lansdown, 2002).

It is about *capacity building* in young people:

It is through learning to question, to express views and have opinions taken seriously, that young people develop skills, build competencies, acquire confidence, and form aspirations. It is a virtuous cycle. The more opportunities for meaningful participation, the more experienced and competent the young person becomes. This in turn enables more effective participation which then promotes improved development (Lansdown, 2002: 7).

And *capacity building* in their communities:

It harnesses young people's energy and enthusiasm, enabling them to contribute to community building (The Foundation for Young Australians, 2002).

This is not just about young people's needs. *Communities need the input of their young* - not just on 'youth issues', but around wider concerns - because they will often raise the questions that no one else will raise and point out things that no one else will notice. This is about being open to a diversity of voices.

Finally, and probably most importantly, working alongside young people in decision-making processes *builds connections between young people and their communities*:

Participation is an important way of helping to build a sense of connection between people and the communities in which we live (NSW Commission for Children and Young People, 2001).

In these ways, the reasons for working alongside young people in decision-making roles mirror the more general reasons for young people's participation in community life. They also mirror the wider rationales for involving *all* groups in the decision-making that will affect them.

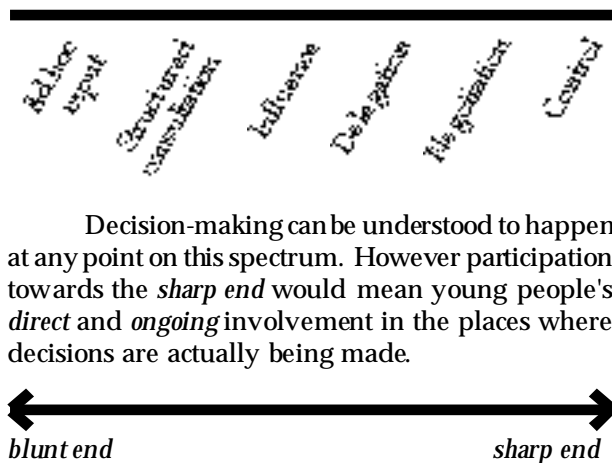
What is it?

Young people in decision-making is about young people having the capacity to make decisions and control outcomes. One useful way of understanding the phrase *young people in decision-making* is through continua of children's and young people's youth participation in community life. There are many such continua around, all measuring slightly different things along slightly different axes.

Gill Westhorp's (1987) spectrum has served a basis for continued thinking around these topics. The Foundation for Young Australians' own resource paper, **Youth Partnerships and Participation** develops her ideas further, exploring the advantages, disadvantages, and options for each of the six types of involvement on the spectrum (see The Foundation for Young Australians, 2002):

<http://www.youngaustralians.org/pdfs/Publications/youthpart.pdf>

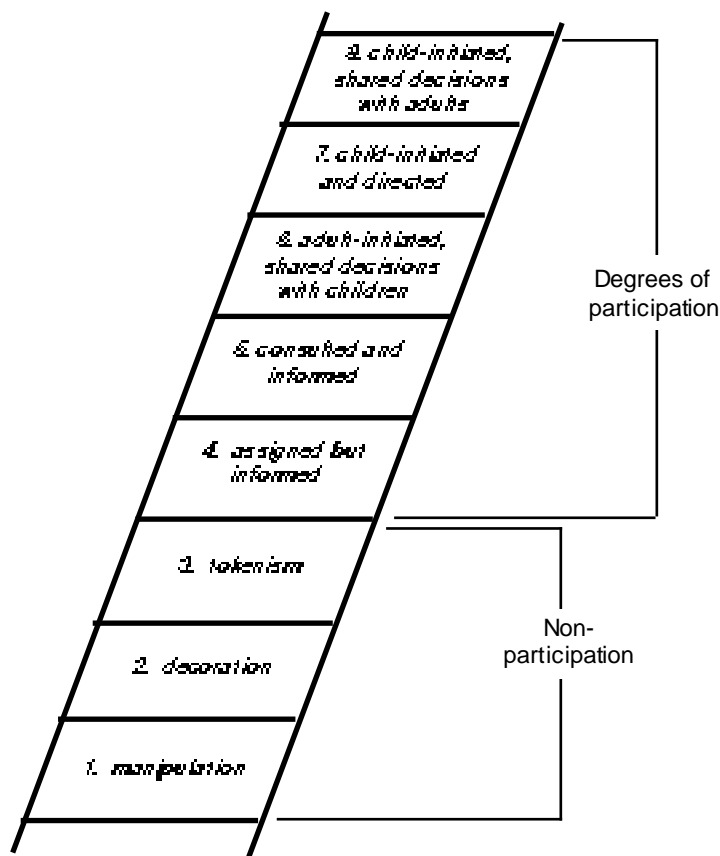
Figure 1: Westhorp's continuum of youth involvement



Decision-making can be understood to happen at any point on this spectrum. However participation towards the *sharp end* would mean young people's *direct* and *ongoing* involvement in the places where decisions are actually being made.

Probably the best known and most widely used model for understanding young people's participation in community life was developed by Hart (1992), and is shown in figure 2. It shows that the types of participation can vary widely. It also calls for a little honesty in the recognition that many things that look like participation might, in fact, be forms of non-participation.

Figure 2: Hart's Ladder of Participation



There are a couple of things that turn young people in decision-making into a live and ongoing issue. The first is that young people have less access to structural power than many other groups. Young people are one minority group that has considerable

numbers below the age of legal majority. The second is that, unlike other minority groups, children and young people keep losing their best representatives and spokespeople because they keep growing up.

Because of these things, young people's involvement in decision-making also needs to keep being re-negotiated. Full participation in every community decision-making process is an ideal - and the appropriate forms will vary. For example, beyond individually elected young adults, the only way in which significant numbers of young people can currently be involved in national, state and territory governments in Australia is through consultation. This currently happens through web chats, round tables and advisory bodies. On the other hand, the community sector is currently showing that young people can have a significant role in the governance of organisations.

Increasingly the phrase 'young people in decision-making' has been used to refer to young people on boards and committees. However, there are other ways in which young people can be involved in public decision-making. These include (but are not limited to):

- Research;
- Program design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation;
- Peer support, representation and advocacy;
- Policy analysis and development;
- Campaigning and lobbying;
- Development and management of their own organisations;
- Participation in and use of the media;
- Conference participation;
- Youth councils and parliaments.

(Lansdown, 2002)

Again, there is a whole spectrum of possible ways in which young people could become involved in these activities (think again of Westhorp's continuum, described above). Also, any of these processes could be adult-initiated and led, or youth-initiated and led processes (see Hart's ladder, left). This picture is also dynamic: leadership emphases can change over time.

The reality of young people and decision-making reaches far beyond young people in boards and committees.

The young researchers involved in this project have constantly called us back to focus on bigger stories of social participation, engagement, inclusion and exclusion, power and voice. They talked of the decisions that they and their peers could and could

not make. In this way, their editorial voice within the research process has kept us real - connected to context and everyday stories - and this has actually demanded a broader, more holistic focus.

Olivia pointed out the importance of forging new roles and new processes - of young people being able to find roles to connect *at all* to their communities. Under changed economic conditions and altered life patterns, this is becoming increasingly hard for young people, except for those who are best resourced. In her reflections she wrote:

These times see us with limited prospects for youth who have had no work experience. Many employers will not even employ inexperienced [people]. So with this comes more dependency on the government for money to live, and also with that, a discouragement for youth that they don't have the power to change things.

Gabrielle asked: in the talk about young people's increased involvement, who is being included and who is being excluded?

Who is missing? Aborigines, new migrants who don't speak English pretty well... they're the young people we should be listening to. Not just a token.

In saying these things, these young researchers point to some bigger stories of structure and process, not just within groups and organisations, but within the whole of the way that our communities are organised. It is important to acknowledge these things in this research.

The concept of 'public decision-making' is by definition 'adult-centric' because of adult-defined public organisations and structures. What tends to get overlooked in this framework are projects, programs and public decision-making activities initiated by young people themselves.

Anna pointed to this pattern in adult-centrism in some of the literature about young people's participation: so often it's still about what adults do *for* young people, missing the point of working *with* and alongside (and sometimes behind) young people.

The basics are about letting them decide what the focus is - providing them with what they decide they need, be it funding, support, training and so on; giving them space to think and decide their own directions.

Within this document she wanted us to see young people represented as active rather than passive. This is about content but also the language used to frame the topic. This is hard to master when writing a report that is primarily targeted at adults! For example, this report was initially going to have 'involving young people in leadership and decision-making' in the title but that didn't work.

Likewise, it is really important that any exploration of what is happening highlights what

young people are initiating themselves, as well as the ways in which their involvement has been defined, solicited and mandated by others. If we overlook these things as 'public decision-making', we do a disservice to young people in our storytelling, making them more passive than they really are, and also limiting the scope of stories that we can hear and tell. Having said this, it is much easier to gather and share published information on the latter, for example things mandated by governments and large organisations. These are the groups, organisations and programs that have funding, manuals, resources and web pages, and also a measure of organisational stability over time. Here we share the information that we can access, recognising its limitations. We are simply flagging that this section of the report - this topic - comes with a traditional 'adult defined' bias. Even though they are much harder to document, once we acknowledge this we might notice, recognise and be in a position to support other things happening at young people's grass roots levels. Both the grass roots organising and the documentation of these developments is becoming increasingly possible through the internet.

A final point here is that young people's involvement in community decision-making processes may often be about highlighting where they and their peers are not being heard. Protest movements, graffiti, sit-ins or walk-outs are often storied by adults and media in a negative way, but they often involve young decision makers who are emphasising the lack of space where they have been able to exercise a legitimate voice. Voices from the margins are important to communities, because they can be prophetic, highlighting the things that hurt those with the least power, and highlighting the things that need to change.

Recent thinking and useful theoretical frameworks

There are lots of different theoretical frameworks, different stories, or different languages used for talking about what has been happening. Do words matter? In one way, no. Despite the fragmented literature, it is important to draw upon a broad evidence base across these conceptual divisions, about useful approaches and what works (The Forum For Youth Investment, 2001). In another way, yes. These things matter because the language that we use frames the way we can think about issues, and this in turn shapes what we do. The language we have used reflects where we have come from, but it need not constrain where we can go, so at times a stock-take and purge may be necessary.

Below is an exploration of some of the different ways in which the issues of young people in decision-making are being storied, including **Citizenship**, **Youth Participation** and **Youth Development**.

Some of these approaches may be more useful than others. Below we also suggest an *alternative framework* from within the tradition of community work: the notion of *capacity building in young people and their communities*.

Citizenship

Recent writing have suggested that there are two very different understandings of young people's citizenship, and these have been termed 'minimal citizenship', and 'maximal citizenship' (Holdsworth, 2002a; after Evans, 1995).

A *minimal citizenship* approach emphasises:

- Civil and legal status, rights and responsibilities to society;
- That citizenship is gained when civil and legal status is granted;
- That a good citizen is law-abiding, public-spirited and exercises political involvement through voting for representatives.

Maximal citizenship, on the other hand, means:

- Consciousness of oneself as a member of a shared democratic culture;
- A participatory approach to political involvement;
- Considering ways to overcome the social disadvantages that undermine citizenship by denying people full participation in society.

These two approaches can frame what we do on the ground quite differently. The notion of minimal citizenship is about shaping young people for what they will become. Maximal citizenship, on the other hand, respects individuals' birthright to citizenship, and focuses on what young people are, and bring, now.

Youth participation

This is an 'umbrella' concept which provides a widely shared, common ground. It has also proven useful in that it is essentially about practice. In order for it to have any leverage though, it needs to be anchored within a set of assumptions about *why* participation is important.

In terms of the material that has been written about youth participation, it seems that there are two main approaches. The first focuses on *youth development*: how young people can be shaped by being involved. The second is rarer and more radical and actually involves *re-shaping our communities*, and the role of young people in that. We argue that the latter is a far more useful model than the former. In terms of choosing a central framework for understanding what we do, a youth development model is insufficient, and sells youth participation short. Youth participation becomes passive or limited to a set of arrangements that already exist (young people are shaped to fit their context rather than the

other way around). The implications of these contrasting assumptions are explored below. We suggest that there is a case for exploring youth participation through an alternative lens: capacity building in young people and their communities. First we will explain why.

Youth development

I don't know that I like the word development. Young people are going to develop without help. (Anna)

A youth development approach focuses upon developing young people into well-adjusted adults and community participants. Its one strong point is its *focus on practice*. Historically this has been the dominant approach, particularly in material emerging from the USA, New Zealand, some Australian government sources, and the International Youth Foundation. Although much of the grounded work that has been done under the banner of youth development is extremely valuable, and adds significantly to the evidence base of what works, in terms of a conceptual framework it is problematic. The team researching this report has developed some concerns about this approach.

Firstly, a development approach emphasises the end point as properly formed adults (whatever they are) rather than what young people are now, might contribute now, and might teach the rest of us now (Wyn and White, 1997). In these ways, this is both a *deficit model* and an *adultist framework* that might be best approached with caution.

Secondly, a youth development approach by definition actually *limits the focus of what is happening to young people*, and this is part of the problem. Youth development encapsulates the idea that only young people need to develop. In order for young people to truly be able to participate meaningfully in their communities, this research, along with many other voices (eg Dwyer and Wyn, 2001), points to the need for adults, as well as young people, to be constantly changing and adapting. In the task of dealing wisely with the world as it is, we are all learners. When negotiating social change, most of us are novices. When looking for new or creative solutions, we are all pioneers and, as the young people in this research emphasise, in relation to working well with young people, most other people are inexperienced. Yet much of the relevant research writing about youth development is underpinned by older assumptions that young people are the focus: they are the only ones who need to grow and change. This is not often matched by an emphasis that the rest of us also need to grow and change, and in fact that young people might teach the rest of us some of the things that we need to understand.

Thirdly, development approaches have historically been about *imposition*. A development approach has underpinned many *top-down* initiatives

targeted at young people, often shaped without their input, one prime example being schooling. The desired outcomes are framed *for* young people. Even though the newer youth development work talks about community and youth development as running parallel to each other, these have traditionally had very different modes of operating. Community development practitioners know that successful work with communities has to happen from the *inside out*, starting from the passions and stories of those involved.

Youth development approaches emerged in the USA, one of the countries that did not sign the International Convention on the Rights of the Child³. This was a way of developing a language, story or conceptual basis for youth participation that was not based upon the notion of rights. With an Australian policy background based upon the UN convention, coupled with current understandings of what good community development practice looks like, we can do better.

If we do not pay heed to these things within the youth sector, we also pass up a significant opportunity. Development frameworks have assumed adulthood to be the end point of learning. Social research tells us that increasingly, as social conditions change, learning is a lifelong activity. This levels the playing field a little, potentially putting young people in a much stronger position to speak on the issues of their communities. If youth participation is couched in terms of youth development, it will not reflect young people's areas of expertise or adults' parallel struggles to make sense of, and act powerfully within, a changing world.

Probably much of the appeal of the youth development approach has been its focus on practice. It is a verb, it is about doing, while the citizenship and rights material stays at a fairly theoretical level as background assumptions. For all the reasons stated above, we suggest a different language to frame practice: about *capacity building* in young people and their communities. This approach comes from good community development practice and it is compatible with the notion of young people's full citizenship now.

Capacity building in young people and their communities

There is no doubt that young people (like the rest of us) need to be continually skilled and equipped to engage in social life. To this end, it could be argued that one of the most helpful frameworks emerging from the literature is about *capacity building*. This idea has emerged through the international NGO and community work movement since the 1990s. It has

moved beyond more *colonial*, often state driven, developmental and educational approaches, which have often come armed with their own 'interventions' (Mayo, 1975). In this way, some youth development approaches could be said to mirror some traditional community development approaches which are imposed and have come armed with ideas of what should change in the other. A capacity building approach is based on recognition that all groups of people have capacities that may not be obvious to outsiders and that it may take time to discover these (Smith, 2002). Good community work is about the shared discovery and building of these capacities.

Capacity building is about education but is not prescribed or agenda-driven. The approach is built from observations of good community work: what works, in a range of settings. Because of this, it recognises the *social* nature of good work, that capacities can be built within people, organisations, networks, and even in the context of crisis (Eade, 1997). So in terms of its application with young people, the focus will be upon building capacity in young people but also within organisations, networks and communities.

Although to date most projects and organisations that focus on capacity building have applied this approach to areas other than youth participation, this should not prohibit us from adopting this sound framework or applying the learnings. It is about:

1. Building internal capacity to deal with the current problem or issue; but also
2. Strengthening *load bearing* or carrying capacity more generally (Fagan, 2001).

These points fit with what we know from research with young people, for example:

- The work around 'resilience' (the things young people need in order to be able to 'bounce back' from setbacks eg Fuller, 1998);
- The evidence base surrounding young people and wellbeing (Glover *et al*, 1998; AYRC, 2003);
- The importance of youth 'agency': young people's ability to shape a life, and make a difference (eg Wierenga, 2001; Wierenga, 2002);
- The literature on young people and social capital (eg Loong, 2002; Mitchell, 2000).

First, a capacity building approach frames familiar ideas within a social (that is, community based, historical) context. This approach makes room for honest acknowledgement that, in the midst of rapid social change, both young people and their communities are facing *new challenges, many of which we do not actually know how to deal with*. It is about equipping ourselves and each other to meet these creatively. It acknowledges the need for young people to develop new skills, insights and

3: Thanks to Janet Jukes of YACVic for helpful conversations around this topic.

relationships but also for the rest of us to do so too. It is about building internal capacity, but also our shared capacity to carry whatever we meet along the way.

Secondly it offers an in-built assumption that young people have a lot to teach us. By coupling action with learning, a capacity building approach is about learning - *both ways* (Fagan, 2000). When applied to work with young people, this presents a subtle but profound change of emphasis from a youth development approach. The focus becomes one of mutual discovery rather than one of changing, shaping or moulding the 'other' (ie the young person).

It seems that when energy is directed wisely into transforming a social situation, personal, relationship and community growth is the result. Capacity is built within individual lives, within groups and organisations, and within communities. During this research, this pattern was repeatedly highlighted and affirmed within the young people's own stories.

Other frameworks

There are other useful theoretical frameworks or different languages used to frame current stories of young people in decision-making. These include:

- **Social exclusion:**
(see: <http://www.youthinformation.com/infopage.asp?snID=818>)
This framework is widely used in the UK and is more widely applicable. Based upon a *human rights* framework (eg the right to participate), it is foundational to much of the British thinking around youth and community work, and highlights social differences, through key issues like representation.
- **Youth empowerment or advocacy** (eg Victorian Youth Advocacy Network, 1992b; Forster, 1998; Irby *et al*, 1998): In the US and Canada, this material often brings an alternative voice to the more prevalent 'development' discourses. Material based on this approach often brings a more political dimension (eg Cowan, 1997): that programs which simply are oriented towards young people's service to their communities do not allow them to develop the critical skills that they will need to build different, more equitable societies;
- An approach centred around **youth activism** (eg Healy, 1999) also emphasises young people's place in naming and acting upon their own issues; and
- The literature around **young people's voices** (Flowers, 1998; Watts, 1993) continues to draw attention to the things that young people are saying, often silenced, that the rest of the community might need to hear.

(These latter three approaches have found their place amongst Australian workers with youth.)

- **Youth 'agency'** (eg White and Wyn, 1998; Wyn and White, 2000; Thomson and Holdsworth, 2002) is a more theoretical perspective - exploring issues of young people's ability to be powerful actors in their own lives and as shapers of their communities.

These are some of the approaches informing different pockets of research and writing, and they 'speak' in different voices. In telling new stories it seems wisest to recognise both the contribution of young people *and* their communities: to find ways of exploring shared dialogues. To this end it is important to draw upon storylines that recognise interdependence - the relationships between the young and the not-so-young - as vital to both.

What Has Been Happening?

This chapter unfolds in five parts, briefly outlining:

- What has been happening on the ground;
- Challenges and live issues;
- Recent thinking and useful frameworks;
- Emerging principles; and
- Evaluating and researching young people's involvement.

This is a dynamic scene, continually evolving as we have watched. For this reason, wherever possible, web-links have been provided.

What is happening on the ground?

Internationally and at all levels of government in Australia there has been increased emphasis being given to this topic. International Youth Year in 1985 served as a catalyst for these developments. However, both in Australia and globally, the strongest leadership is coming from the community sector.

In **Global priorities for youth: youth participation in decision-making** (Lansdown, 2002). Lansdown charts a global rise in interest and activity around this topic (see <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unyin/helsinki/>). In this context, young people in decision-making is linked strongly to both issues of human rights and social effectiveness. Lansdown points out that it is imperative that at a policy level, those who are being affected have a say in the decisions being made. For the first time ever, in 2002, the UN committee which explored young peoples' issues in Helsinki also included significant numbers of young people. In other forums also, this is increasingly expected and slowly happening, although there is still a long way to go.

In Australia this message is being increasingly heard. Recognising the need for good process around young people's involvement, state, territory and federal governments have all now launched information and consultation strategies attached to websites. Many local governments now support Youth Councils. The current mechanisms for governments working with young people tend to be:

- Youth roundtables eg:
http://www.thesource.gov.au/youth_roundtable/default.htm
- Youth advisory committees and youth councils eg: <http://www.yacs.wa.gov.au/>

- Input to government policy through forums or online chat with ministers eg:
<http://www.youth.affairs.nt.gov.au/html/decision/table/index.html>
<http://www.generate.qld.gov.au/>
- Consultation on specific issues; and
- Involvement in other activities that are linked to these things.

There is also an increasing trend to include youth representatives on public decision-making bodies (water boards etc). In terms of most young people's ability to have an impact on public policy however, young people's input at government levels is still largely about consultation.



Consultation
(blunt end)

Governance
(sharp end)

Elsewhere within the community there has been varied movement. For example the idea of student participation in school governance has been strong for many years and schools have responded diversely to the challenge (Holdsworth, 2000). The idea of Student Action Teams is currently being explored, and this involves young people choosing their own real, community based projects of wider concern (eg environment, justice, or community safety), supported by school infrastructure (Holdsworth, Cahill and Smith, 2003; Holdsworth *et al* 2001b and 2001a). Young people are also now running their own philanthropic bodies, targeted at social change in the community, from within their schools (Education Foundation, 2002); see: <http://www.rumad.org.au/home.htm>

Both in Australia and overseas it is the community sector that is leading the way in terms of young people in governance roles, with some decision-making bodies either substantially or fully made up of young people. Australian examples of this include The Foundation for Young Australians' newer grant-making projects at state and community levels: <http://www.youngaustralians.org/>

CanTeen: <http://www.canteen.com.au/>

MillenniumKids: <http://www.millenniumkids.com.au/>
and

The Create Foundation: http://www.create.org.au/create_world/ctw_html/about.html

Challenges and live issues

Both in the literature and in the field there are some very familiar and recurring stories about the challenges for young people in decision-making roles:

- Young people are involved in token and *decorative* ways (eg see de Kort, 2000);
- Young people are involved marginally but adults make all the decisions;
- Young people are involved in making *decision-less decisions* (Bachrach and Baratz, 1970 and 1962) where the decisions are limited to issues that do not really matter;
- Young people make decisions but nothing happens;
- Young people are included in decision-making but the project is under resourced, making action difficult; and
- Youth is transitory: experienced young people become too old to fulfil their *youth* role.

Over recent years youth participation has become 'politically correct'. Because this is a growth area, from the field there are also some newer stories of emerging and increasing challenges:

- It is mandated from the top but we are not so sure how to make it happen. Now that it is becoming a matter of political correctness, cynical attempts at youth participation and *window dressing* (Rayner, undated) are even more likely;
- In many areas, the growth of activity around young people on boards and committees has not been matched by either expertise or the commitment of resources;
- There is better representation from young women and those better resourced, but how do we enable marginal young people's input? Those less privileged are not participating in consultation - but voting with their feet (Kirby and Bryson, 2002).

There are also some emerging challenges for the way we think about young people in decision-making:

- Perhaps in the youth sector we have been working with some limited stories here: does tunnel vision towards adult controlled forums do a disservice to young people? One interesting new development is the impact of the internet on *grass-roots organising* of any kind. Increasingly, young people can access resources through the internet (eg <http://www.youthactionnetwork.org/>). Also, through the internet, people become 'ageless'. This gives as much credibility and organising 'clout' to a young event organiser as an older one. For example, the action groups around

the recent World Economic Forum protest activity in Melbourne, which mobilised up to 30,000 (mostly young) people through the internet, were also in many cases run by young people;

- Where young people's concerns have no legitimate avenue for expression, and where people feel that their decision-making capacity has been limited by others, organising and action often takes the form of protest. This kind of action is no less about young people in decision-making than any other socially legitimated role. Research into young people in decision-making also needs to acknowledge that this kind of activity can be no less intentional, and that increasing numbers of young people are locating themselves here (green movements, peace movements, anti-racism movements, ethical consumer movements, human rights protesters, 'anti globalisation' activists etc).

Issues of representation

This was a particular issue for the younger researchers. Children and young people are unlike other minority groups, in that soon after they become expert at being representatives, they grow out of being young people. These patterns, coupled with young people's traditional lack of access to power structures or to spaces to make their voices heard, make the issues of representation and succession particularly important.

The younger researchers were also keen to draw out ideas of *who* was being represented:

Maybe it is a cultural issue ... Both Alison and Helen [who Gabrielle interviewed], without realising it, talked about their situation in a way that represented other young people. It was obvious that being involved in the community came naturally to both of them and it could be because of background they were able to contribute. (Gabrielle's afterthoughts)

For others, the message that they are longing to bring to their communities is much more about what needs to change. As newer inhabitants of this planet, young people are often good at questioning the way that, and pointing out the impacts of, things are done. Perhaps this kind of contribution could be understood as the more 'prophetic' voice of youth. The research team suggested that this kind of questioning was not always encouraged:

... the whole idea of trying to change society and the world is hidden ... that could be why there are a lot of disempowered groups in society because people don't have access to opportunities that help to develop skills to speak out ...' (Gabrielle's afterthoughts)

Members of the research team felt strongly that we need to always link our thinking about young

people in leadership to the issues of representation and marginalised groups, and empowering disempowered young people. This relates to their skills but it also relates equally to structural issues: access to opportunities (to speak and to be listened to, to organise and be respected, to question and be heard), as well as looking at those who could already speak well, and looking at the silences and the silent:

... instead of focusing on those who are in leadership and decision-making positions, focus on those who are not and see how we can do things better. (Gabrielle's afterthoughts)

Not all young people are able to readily access opportunities for participation:

My question is how to match up young people with community activities and opportunities to make a positive change. At the moment, opportunities ... are not very well published and people only find out about them through friends or through contact with the organisation. (Gabrielle's afterthoughts)

It is the same people involved again and again. A related concern was expressed by Anna, when she talked about what she calls 'professional young people'. When we discussed this, it became clear that it was not just an issue of involvement and access, but also an issue of representation:

Training the *** out of one young person and then them not being a young person any more. They become an adult trapped in a young person's body - you lose the young person's perspective. Can a 'youth activist' really know what your average teen thinks and wants? (Anna)

In saying this she raised the issue of distancing: by being co-opted into the system do young people stop representing other young people? Where does the idea of resourcing and equipping specific promising young people sit with the idea of representing others? If it causes their perspectives to change dramatically and to reflect more 'institutional' understandings, is a highly trained young person still able to bring a perspective from their generation? If so, which perspective?

A conversation in the office two weeks ago had Anna questioning: 'Oh no - am I a professional young person?' I asked: 'So aren't you allowed to be skilled and articulate?' We both looked at each other: case in point. Perhaps no other writer has expressed this concern more clearly than Anna. In all this talk of training and equipping young people, *if* young people are expected to be in some way representative, these are questions that warrant some ongoing attention.

Emerging principles

Many lists of principles are emerging that guide adults in working alongside young people in decision-making roles. These are the 'distilled' stories of wisdom about what works in different settings.

Some of the simplest ones are also the most profound and challenging, eg this list from the NSW Commission for Children and Young People:

- Kids have a place in decision-making;
- Participation is part of the organisation's culture;
- Adults adapt to kids' ways of working;
- Strong relationships with kids (NSW Commission for Children and Young People, 2001).

Or this one from an exploration by the Children's Society in the UK, about working with young people and children as partners in change:

- Being clear about the purpose of participatory activities and events;
- Acting *with* rather than *for* children and young people;
- Tailoring methods to the needs and interests of children and young people;
- Working within a rights and social justice framework;
- Developing the experience and commitment of staff;
- Ensuring resources match reality;
- Promoting partnership and working;
- Encouraging reflection and development (Willow, 2002).

The UNESCO Youth Participation Manual (de Kort, 2000) draws upon the Australian Youth Foundation and Woollcombe (1998) in suggesting the following principles for program formulation:

1. **Definition of benefits.** All benefits for young people should be defined. They may simply be that involvement is enjoyable or educational; in other cases payment for consultation on specific issues may be involved.
2. **Democracy.** Youth must adhere to democratic principles such as personal choice, fairness in the political process and respect for minorities and ethnic groups.
3. **Development.** Activities should raise young people's awareness of the social, political, economic, cultural and personal aspects of the issues affecting them.
4. **Education.** Activities should provide opportunities for both formal training and informal skill development.
5. **An enabling environment.** In setting up youth participation, the surroundings and chemistry should be conducive to youth culture and lifestyle. Care should be taken to avoid formality and official bureaucratic processes, which can hinder creativity.
6. **Enjoyment.** Participatory activities should be fun, exciting and challenging.
7. **Informed choice.** Young people should be informed about what is involved in participation and should not be forced to participate.

8. **Real power.** The youth council or parliament should have power to influence decision makers so that young people perceive their efforts as worthwhile. Adults should be prepared to let youth take control.
9. **Focus on relationships.** Activities should provide opportunities for building active and supportive working relationships between young people and other members of the community. Respect and open communication should be stressed.
10. **Relevance.** Activities should address issues and needs perceived as real by the young people involved.
11. **Adequate resources.** Sufficient time, space, funding, and information should be allowed for activities. These resources should be incorporated into the normal budgeting process.
12. **Support and supervision.** Young people should be provided with the support necessary to promote success and deal with setbacks.
13. **Ownership.** Youth should feel that the work being done belongs to them.
14. **Time alone.** Youth should be given time alone without adults, preferably in small groups. This gives quieter members of the group an opportunity to express their ideas. (de Kort, 2000: 22-23)

Similarly, Holdsworth (2003) draws upon this UNESCO work, to suggest that youth participation must:

- **maximise control by young people** (enable ownership and influence):
 - young people should be included in decision-making;
 - programs and policies should be designed to ensure full youth participation, including advisory and management roles for young people;
 - young people should have the power to influence the outcome of different situations;
- **benefit young people** (provide tangible outcomes):
 - young people must benefit from the services made available to them;
 - young people have the right to participate fully in and received outcomes from the social, cultural, political and economic spheres of their country;
 - services need to be accessible to young people to enable them to participate in such areas as education, training, employment and political action;
- **recognise and respect the contribution of all** (provide for access, equity, inclusiveness and diversity):
 - all young people should be enabled to participate;

- equity for females and males, young people of varying levels of ability and for all ethnic, national or religious groups should be ensured; it should be recognised that there are diverse subgroups of young people who may require special attention to overcome past and current exclusion from participation – rural young people, indigenous young people, young women, young people with HIV/AIDS, and so on;
- discriminatory laws and practices that limit participation will need to be removed;
- **involve real challenges and development** (be of recognised value, reflective and responsive to needs):
 - action and activities carried out by young people should be seen by young people and by others to be important;
 - support should be provided for young people to learn how to be more effective participants;
 - programs need to include opportunities for participants to reflect upon learnings and to adapt and modify programs in response to emerging needs.

(Holdsworth, 2003; drawing on de Kort, 1999: 17-18)

Evaluating and researching young people's participation in public decision-making

This is a relatively new area for Australia but all indications are that it will be a growth area. While preparing this report we were in contact with several people and organisations who were also focusing on this 'hot' topic.

Again, supported by a strong NGO and youthwork sector, some of the leading-edge work is emerging from the UK: *The Carnegie Young People Initiative* (UK) is a research project that aims to improve the quality and increase the breadth of young people's participation in public decision-making. They have been mapping what is happening, promoting the evaluation of good practice and developing standards for the public and voluntary sectors: <http://www.carnegie-youth.org.uk/>. In their book *Measuring the Magic: Evaluating and researching young people's participation in public decision-making*, Kirby et al (2002) systematically explore the work that has been done to date in this area, including impacts, processes, future challenges for evaluation and research, and gaps in evaluation and research.

In the *B'Year* project, young people have been trained and supported as action researchers by teaching staff from Birmingham University. The young people are conducting peer research on young people in decision-making in which they are exploring how the voices of young people are heard.

They have just presented this research to community workers and leaders at a conference which they organised themselves in early 2003 (Simpson, 2003; B: Yearl, 2003):

<http://www.youth-action.org.uk/network/bayc.html>

Meanwhile in Canada some good work has also been happening around evaluating different models for young people's involvement in policy-making. *'Re-focusing the Lens: Assessing the Challenge of Youth Involvement in Public Policy'* is a joint project of The Ontario Secondary School Students' Association (OSSSA) and The Institute On Governance (IOG). The report (1999) can be found at: **<http://www.iog.ca/publications/lens.pdf>**

Findings: What Works, What Helps, and What Gets in the Way?

In this study, we asked the young decision-makers questions such as:

- How did you get here? (We wanted to understand about the social processes that make young leaders and decision makers.)
- Where have you felt most effective in decision-making and how did you know you were being effective? What is it here that works for you?
- In terms of the things that organisations, groups and communities have done to support you, what has worked for you and what has stood in the way?

(See Appendix B for complete list of questions.)

The young people who were interviewed came to these questions from very different positions. One was an activist about youth suicide, while another was on a premier's advisory board. They were:

- youth representatives on committees largely made of adults;
- young people who were part of youth councils, round tables and reference groups;
- peer leaders through schools, school councils, universities, clubs and camps;
- people involved with community development or partnerships with others in their communities; and
- activists for their own causes, wider causes and social change.

Many had differing experiences with several organisations, which they were able to contrast to good effect (see Appendix A for list). There were also 'before and after' stories, about organisations that had gone through a process of reflecting and restructuring. These stories helped to highlight elements of both helpful and unhelpful processes in each of these settings.

These young people's stories reveal how they grew into decision-making roles, and illustrate 'what works' for them in terms of social process. This chapter is a gathering of the stories that they shared, either through their interviews or in the things they wrote to us. Because of their involvement in such a range of activities, they were able to share stories of what works, helps and gets in the way in each setting.

There were also some recurring patterns in these stories. All of their stories eventually came together around three main themes: *meaning*, *control* and *connectedness*. Within young people's stories there were also *seven practical pointers* that surround and ground these.

This chapter points to what might be learned from these young people's stories and then applied to other situations. It explores how they got there, why they stay there and what they get out of it (as well as some of what gets in the way). The young people's lived experiences of decision-making in different settings will be explored, and then the common patterns - the things that these stories might teach us are brought out.

How did they get here?

Nearly all of the young respondents talked in terms of their journey into leadership and decision-making roles as being a personal transformation, supported by individuals or communities that firstly encouraged their participation, and then their growth. It is a progression. The question: "How did you get there?" was often followed by the answer: "I kind of grew into it".

These stories were often about *serendipity* (or happy accidents), or even whole sequences of happy accidents: the connections that had not been expected. These always happened through networks and prior involvement:

I only ended up involved because of a friend being there. (Anna)

They wanted a young person to help with a community arts centre. (Gabrielle)

A simple pattern emerges: being involved and engaged leads to more opportunities to become involved and engaged. The flip side of this equation is also true: those who are not involved often stay excluded, both in terms of real world opportunities and the way that they are thinking. Independently of each other, Jessie, Gabrielle and Anna made the point that although they themselves had found a way to make a difference, they also had friends who had been excluded from these processes. These friends may have cared deeply about their communities, but did not feel that they had the opportunity to contribute in this way.

Jessie notes that this may sound like magic, but it is actually about consistency and care invested

Prue's story: growing as a leader (Olivia writes)

Prue used to be the kind of girl who was shy, sat in the corner and whose face turned bright red when she was put in a tricky situation. Now, after being a leader for many years, she has gained the confidence, knowledge and experience to combat many problems and to communicate effectively with all types of people in all types of situations. Prue was a Peer Support Leader in Grade 10, volleyball captain of her team for two years, Senior Prefect, captain of the tennis team, volleyball coach for three years, leader for Grade 7 camps, teacher at Sunday School, media officer for the local netball club, assistant secretary for the netball club and was a coordinator for leaders of the Year 7 camp. If all that wasn't enough, she was the winner of the Lions Youth of the Year Award at local and zone level, won a leadership award at the VCE Conference, has won many sporting awards and is currently completing The Duke of Edinburgh's Gold Award. How did this happen? Among other things, Prue identified the following things as being important:

- That she was incredibly self-conscious until a teacher (Mrs Jenkins) encouraged her in Grade 9 to try some new things;
- Parental support;
- Leadership opportunities through meetings, camps and sport;
- Intentionality: the school aimed to strengthen their students' confidence and leadership skills;
- They had Peer Support Leaders (who were young leaders) who helped younger students to cope with school life and anything that was going on in their lives. Peer Support Leaders acted as role models for younger students, and also received training to become other types of leaders in the future;
- Teachers presented awards at weekly assemblies, which encouraged students to achieve.

There was basically a solid infrastructure that was set up to encourage and support young people into being leaders.

They told stories of how they had discovered capacities within themselves that had surprised them:

We had the chance to impact on hundreds of people. It was empowering and overwhelming - a privilege and a responsibility to do it well. (Adam)

They had also engaged with others in ways that had inspired them:

Friendships together. We never would have even spoken to each other if it wasn't for this. (Kylie)

Regarding what is in it for them: what keeps them involved and draws them back, there were some common themes at the heart of these stories:

- **Meaning:** doing something that has a greater purpose and that 'I believe in';
- **Control:** making decisions, being heard and having the skills to see the task through and do it well; and
- **Connectedness:** working with others and being part of some bigger group.

over time. There is a strong case for groups and organisations to be intentional about what they are doing.

What works?

Although the settings and practical foci of young people in decision-making roles can be quite different, there were some common elements in young people's stories about what was working for them. We explored some themes that go to the heart of the matter: What is in it for them? What does being involved in decision-making roles give them? Why do they do it? Why do they stay with it? They talked about how they had grown in the process, come to understand themselves better, and done things that they never would have thought that they could do:

I look back now and see how I grew through each and every thing. I learned that it was OK to give things a go. (Ruvani)

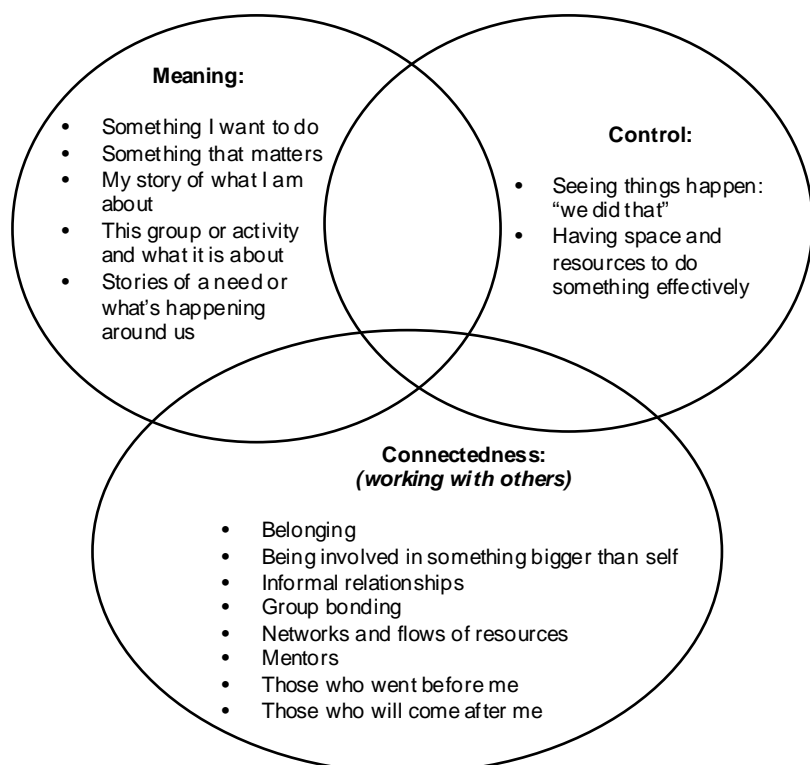


Figure 3: What works - Themes of Meaning, Control, Connectedness

In other words, although people fall or grow into these roles, what has kept them there was finding that they believed in the task, they had the capacity to do things, and they were in good company.

The core themes were being involved in a purposeful task that excited and stretched them, being empowered and equipped to do this well, and knowing that they were in good and supportive company for the task. These characteristics often belonged to organisations and groups (and to individual members or workers) that had clear intentions, had operated for some time (refining, learning to trust each other, building cultures), were focused on their own purpose, had wrestled with issues, and had regularly engaged reflectively with young people.

The 3-circles framework in figure 3 (adapted from Phillips, 1990), provides a scheme in which to understand the kinds of things that these young people were saying.

Rather than being discrete, the three themes of **meaning**, **control** and **connectedness** overlap. Each of these themes deserves more attention.

Meaning

Meaning or purpose involves establishing significant connections between young people's own stories of 'what makes them tick' and the mission at hand. The extent of recognisable overlap of their own stories about what is meaningful with the bigger stories of 'what we are doing here' will be reflected by the extent to which young people engage. It means both listening well to young people's stories and also exploring the purpose of the task at hand and why it matters. These things sound basic but they are easily overlooked.

One of the interview questions was about how respondents knew they were doing it well. The central response was about being able to see the results of energies put in:

I could just see that we were making a difference. We discussed things and we could see the difference that was being made. (Prue)

What gives confidence? Feedback. Outcomes. Things you've produced. A newsletter. Having a happy group. Then you'll want to come back. (Anna)

Control

At the front end is a sense of having achieved. Behind this are all the resource and control, process and power issues that are perennial to the youth sector. And behind that are a community's assumptions about the value of young people, now.

Knowing you have the power to change something ... We used to be not really publicised - not really acknowledged - now that we can change things other young people are coming to see us. (Philip)

Respondents explained that satisfaction lies in:

- Doing things that acknowledge, draw upon and extend their strengths;
- Being or becoming resourced and equipped to do the task properly;
- Having space to be young people (and to be excellent at it).

Growth as decision makers is bound up in development of character, but also in the development and awareness of community. Growing in leadership and decision-making is a risky process, and it involves stretching the boundaries of what individuals know that they can do.

Connectedness

Connectedness is about relationships within the group but also with a wider community.

We're being supported a lot more - they're acknowledging that we're there. (Philip)

It is about recognition, existing, having a place and being acknowledged. (Philip)

When charting unknown territory, the surrounding relationships need to provide security, and a sense of doing this together. This is about feeling part of something bigger – a cause or creative project. If it is done well, it means being in company with those who are there now and those who had been there before - and drawing upon their wisdom. As Jessie says:

None of us had done it before and so everyone was learning together. So you're alone but never alone.

What goes wrong?

On the other hand, the young people told stories of 'battle scars' from both being excluded from decision-making processes, and being thrust in unprepared with a 'you can do it' approach.

Young people are being let down by both negativity and idealism. Negativity tells them that they can't do anything. Idealism is hopeful but it can be blinkered to realities. Many of the stories of attrition (loss) revolve around young people not feeling properly supported and equipped for a significant task:

- Fading out: "We just went round in circles and nothing ended up happening so we lost interest";
- Freaking out: "I didn't know how to handle the task" or "We didn't know how to cope with the things that were happening within the group";
- Burning out: "Everything depended on me and after a while I couldn't handle it".

In other words, the bad experiences that people talked about were ones where:

- They lost a sense of purpose and coherence (lack of meaning);

- They felt like they couldn't do anything (lack of control);
- They felt alone (lack of connectedness).

According to the young people interviewed, these kinds of decision-making experiences could leave them feeling confused, unprepared, overburdened, and alienated from others around them.

The stories of these young people bring home the message that it is not just young people who are inexperienced in working with organisations and groups, but that groups and organisations can have fairly limited understandings when they expect things from young people. It is not just young people that need 'developing': we are all in this together. On this basis it would be useful to mirror this research with further work with organisations and groups, and to hear the stories of organisations not coping and the challenges *they* face as *they* learn how to work with young people. Although this research was tailored to hear the voices of young people, this is clearly not just about individuals' issues.

Some insights for different settings

The young people's stories came from different settings. Below are some of the insights to come from respondents' stories relating to:

1. Decision-making roles in organisations:
 - a) in mostly adult workplaces, boards and committees;
 - b) in 50/50 arrangements (of adults and young people);
 - c) on youth councils.
2. Young people as community participants:
 - a) in partnerships for community development;
 - b) as peer leaders;
 - c) as activists for own causes, wider causes and social change.

1. *Decision-making roles in organisations*

The young people spoke about their roles on decision-making bodies and committees. These involved sitting on mostly adult boards and committees, 50/50 arrangements and youth councils. One main issue in all three settings was being unfamiliar with the processes. The formal meeting process is not friendly to all young people. Ben had some suggestions about accessibility for people who are untrained or less familiar with the process and not-so-trained:

At national youth round-tables you will sit up straight. There are expectations that young people will conform. Only certain young people can go there.

But this formality is not necessary in all situations:

Get real, they're going to be young people – why should they have to be anything different? We have no formal meeting etiquette. No executive, no minutes. All we require is some sort of recording and some sort of outcome. This year that meant two formal presentations to council.

Sometimes the physical environment is not very inclusive:

Walk up to a building that is big and marble. I've heard stories from young people who have just turned and walked away at that point. Seek a more productive environment. We used to meet in the council chambers. Now we meet in the back of a café. (Ben)

a) *Decision-making roles in mostly adult boards and committees*

Young people on mostly adult boards and committees report sometimes feeling quite powerless:

I don't remember what we were voting on but I didn't really agree. I said to them that I didn't want that. But they did it anyway. (Belinda)

One particular thing that got in the way of effective decision-making roles for young people on mostly adult boards was not understanding the language used, or the context or background of issues under discussion:

Township meetings - I'm very quiet there. There are two of us and then around 10 to 15 adults. I know most of them. It's more than being intimidated - sometimes it's just boring. I'm lost, so there's nothing to give an opinion about. (Belinda)

They all laughed at me when I said 'what's asphalt?' I was just sort of like 'don't laugh'. I don't ask many questions now. (Belinda)

Jargon is a really easy way of excluding young people. (Ben)

Also being in an unfamiliar setting can be very intimidating:

I felt way out of my depth. Initially I didn't say a lot. (Adrian)

The negative stories often reflect a lack of experience on the part of adults, as much as any inexperience on the part of the young person:

People either tend to speak to the young like they are very, very young - or speak over their heads. (Ben)

What helps? Respondents suggest some more inclusive approaches:

A certain professional expertise is required. Adult bodies need education to accept young people and to include them in a productive way. If you invite or include young people, expect to have to learn about good process - and how not to make them feel inadequate. (Ben)

Ask 'do you have anything to say on that point?' If you are going to have young people there,

encourage them, make them feel welcome. Take an active interest. Greet them, encourage them into conversation, let them know that their contribution is valuable, and ask questions about what they are saying. (Adrian)

Again, young people may feel intimidated to talk to the whole group, so sometimes a one-on-one conversation is the best way to explore the issues. Then, perhaps, supportive adults can advocate on these issues to the group.

One good way around this is mentoring, shadowing, buddying. Some support to brief, debrief and translate. Also an advocate on the committee. This person needs to be able to hear the young person's voice and amplify it if necessary, translate if necessary. (Ben)

Mentors were a feature of young people's stories of successful involvement in adult committees (for briefs, debriefs, translation, history, advocacy)

The groups need to provide the young person with ways of giving feedback. Asking the young person - checking what they think about issues - if not in the meeting then in the breaks. The chair needs to think about meeting process - and consult with the person who buddies or mentors them. It's about creating an inclusive environment. (Ben)

What helps young people on mostly adult boards in general?

- Being welcomed;
- Understanding the context in which decisions are being made;
- Being heard;
- Being extended in meetings (what do you think of that point?);
- Conducting a training and awareness-raising session for group;
- Being mentored;
- Being valued.

b) Decision-making roles in 50/50 arrangements (adult/young people)

These are boards or committees with 50% older and 50% younger people. These can work really well because neither older nor younger have the casting vote. This means that people need to work together. Scott explains: "Before this, many (including myself) had never been on a board." Here he outlines some insights that may be useful:

- We are sometimes slow at things;
- It has been important to have staff in place who can see that you are *able to function* in this role and not being manipulated;
- The issue that people need to understand on the board is that boards make decisions not people and every director on a board - even a charity one - every member is as liable as the person who recommended the decision;
- Early members don't understand but don't ask, tend to sit back and observe. There is a tendency to not want to look dumb;

- It's about asking the questions and knowing that's OK. So I (as chair) make sure during breaks throughout the day that I can follow that up. If we're in a meeting and I can feel what they are thinking, I will encourage them to ask the question, or ask the question myself.

c) Decision-making roles on youth councils

Youth advisory committees are becoming increasingly popular. These look very good, and when established and resourced properly, can really bring young people's voices into the places where decisions are made.

In terms of things that get in the way, Ben identifies three things that come up frequently:

- Lack of resources;
- Lack of real guts issues or being able to talk to them;
- If we challenge something, the committee's future is limited, and its priority diminishes.

Respondents' stories indicated that there is a fine line between trusting young people to do their own thing, and leaving them unsupported.

What helps?

A commitment is needed from governments, councils and other organisations to go beyond window dressing and explore ways that youth bodies can be really effective. Respondents mentioned that they needed:

- To learn the skills for the task but also the skills to work well together;
- Bonding time so that the group can learn to know and trust each other;
- Skilled facilitators at meetings (not taking a lead role but there to help name what is happening, and suggest ideas for process when called upon);
- Conflict resolution - both skill development and direct facilitation when it is needed;
- Secretariat support if formal record keeping and fast action is required (record keeping and fast communication are skills in themselves);
- Training: to organise projects, to build up funding, and to lobby;
- Awareness of different models of group process.

Generally in the teen council we need training. Even to start with we need 'this is what a council is about'. Because really most of us hadn't ever been there. (Kylie)

We thought it was a good idea to take turns running meetings and taking minutes but how? It never got done because no one knows what they are doing. (Belinda)

Respondents sometimes mentioned their groups' different levels of maturity and commitment to task. A few end up carrying the load.

I think just because I was willing. While I was there they had the option not to do stuff. I was overly involved. Feeling overly accountable. Doing quite a lot... I ended up doing too much, which is why I left. (Anna)

This was a very common story in the interviews. In reality this is no different to what happens in adult groups. However, it helps to have mentors and other people around with whom individuals can 'reality check'. Some judgements are harder to make unless there are experienced, listening people around to help frame the questions.

Interestingly, the topic of *conflict* came up consistently within these conversations as an issue that needs further exploration:

Decisions were hard. We wanted them done right. And so we'd end up in conflict.

They got eight high-achieving young people together, and expected us all to interact with each other and get the job done. There was conflict, personality clashes. The meeting exploded, there were tears. It can actually be really distressing. Before going there I hadn't had much experience of conflict; neither had some of the others. You can take that for granted with executives but not with young people. Some people were shattered.

This kind of story was prevalent around all youth councils. As three of the respondents pointed out, it is hard enough to learn how to do the task properly without having to discover the complexities of human interactions at the same time. All talked about lack of experience, not just with the task at hand, but with naming and dealing with conflict.

They felt that these things were lacking or conversely, would have been helpful:

- A sense of competence and familiarity with what we have been asked to do;
- The presence of adult support, not to control, but to help name some of what is happening;
- We need to be not just working together to meet outcomes, but also familiar with the concept of working together;
- Groups need safeguards in place, induction processes, teamwork, an understanding of the framework in which the group operates, a chance to build interpersonal skills with each other, support;
- Give us an opportunity to bond. As well as a formal induction, we need to go bowling to bond and suss each other out;
- Trust games;
- Train us.

It seems that good process cannot only avoid harm but also teach some useful lessons:

With good facilitation, conflict can be positive. We learned about having a say, and the round robin concept. All this requires input.

I learned that it is not necessary to befriend everyone. But the importance of being able to trust

the group and work together. The importance of wisdom and facilitation.

Groups seeking to establish and maintain youth councils will need to take the issue of conflict resolution more seriously.

2. Decision-making roles as community participants

a) In partnerships and community development

Working together as partners takes people beyond their experience into new territory. This is limited by people's assumptions about themselves and each other.

What has helped?

- Learning to listen to each other;
- A clear focus so that there is somewhere to start;
- Sharing new stories about what is happening;
- An ethos of 'we are all learning here';
- A time of preparation and training: to highlight assumptions and to intentionally name some new expectations;
- Intentional structure and process so that people do not get trodden on;
- Bonding times;
- Learning to laugh together.

b) As peer leaders

Young people are often invited into leadership positions where they take special responsibilities for their peers. Too frequently in interviews, the young peer leaders reported having found themselves unsupported or alone:

It was like a complete loss of confidence. I turned my frustration in on myself and I got very depressed. It didn't occur to me to ask for help. Perhaps I had support but I didn't feel like I had it. (Jessie)

Respondents pointed to some practical things that would help:

- The role of adult or staff listeners and storytellers in helping to encourage and inspire:
People who work in the Centre made me want to be more involved in what's going on. (Anna)
- Being equipped:
I'm happy to be involved but I would like a little bit of on-the-job training. (Jessie)
- The role of facilitators:
Good facilitation is really important. Otherwise people naturally get really cliquey. (Anna)

c) As activists for own causes, wider causes and social change

Young people may choose to act upon their own concerns and follow their passions. This will often involve them in confrontations with power structures, eg in making a case to a local government

about a youth centre, in attempting to change school policy, or in publicly campaigning for awareness about human rights issues.

What gets in the way?

Feeling of isolation and disconnectedness can arise if there is no way to express frustrations or fears. Young people's points of hurt and passion need to be acknowledged so that they become positive forces rather than simply being expressions of anger. Jeff explains it this way:

I had a bad attitude. I was at a bad suicidal stage and this [being heard, respected and invited into a space where I could speak] pulled me together. I was dealing with school, fighting, swung a chair at a teacher. And then this thing saved my life, gave me confidence.

When asked what had really helped, Jeff pointed to his mentor, who had helped him to make the transition from angry reactionary to impassioned public speaker and youth advocate. He had found some important things: forums for his voice and company for the journey. These are the lessons here, about creating the formal and informal spaces that will allow individuals to contribute rather than to simply lash out. Meanwhile Jeff is keen to pass on the favour:

I got lots out of it, eh. I want to give others the chance to change, and to get their voice heard.

Ben says:

Young people can work well by themselves - we've seen it happen. However, they can also be very easily fobbed off. If you don't answer the door for long enough, they'll stop knocking. So advocacy is important.

Another thing to heed when working with young activists is *timing*

Long timelines can be really disempowering when working with young people. They don't have long. We had a group of young people who organised a petition for a skate park and then did all the research - where it would be and what it would cost - the council virtually couldn't disagree. So they came back and said that it would happen in five years. At that point all the young people lost heart. Most of them wouldn't even be living there in five years. This sort of thing really disempowers young people. (Ben)

Ben suggests that it is important to have short timelines, and regular reporting so young people know what other work is being done.

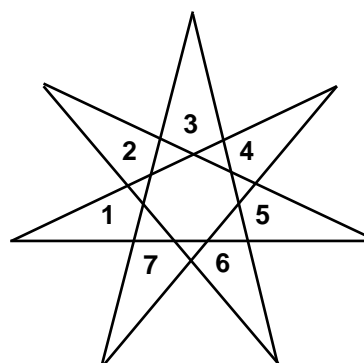
Respondents' stories about youth activism show that these are the things that help:

- Advocates to publicly *sanction* the storying and the listening processes (ie 'these are voices that we need to hear');
- Partners in crime: people to share the doing and the learning;
- Resources (practical, knowledge-based, and skills);
- Good communication so that there is an awareness about change, process and timing;
- Institutional and organisational support: clearing legitimated spaces so that young people can do what they do well;
- Mentoring.

Seven pointers for practice

There were some common patterns across the different settings. The young people's stories highlight seven pointers for practice.

Figure 4: Seven pointers for practice



- 1 Storytelling: talking things through together (about what is going on, the task at hand, about how we fit);
- 2 Listening and being heard;
- 3 Discovering and affirming strengths (capacities);
- 4 Resourcing and equipping people to do the task well;
- 5 Refining structures and processes;
- 6 Honouring each other through formal relationships;
- 7 Nurturing informal relationships: group bonding and cohesion.

Young people's stories elaborate on these seven pointers:

1. **Storytelling: talking things through together**

Storytelling is about talking things through together. It starts with lived experience. Working well with young people means lots of storytelling, both to fill in the background (from all sides), and to discover alternative storylines for the way that things can be.

It is important for decision makers to have forums to make sense of their own life and purpose:

People need to know themselves, because this is fundamental to leadership. (Kristiana)

This applies both to young people and to the adults working alongside them. Those who work

well with young people know the importance of self-awareness. Discerning the task and one's capabilities is not a solo effort. Talking things through was seen by the young people as being central to understanding what was going on and understanding what needed to happen, but also to understanding themselves and the things that they had to contribute. They really appreciated it when others took the time to do this with them.

A lot of young leaders work on their own with very little support. I was the only team leader; who was there for me to ask questions of? It was discouraging but it's also about the mentality of the people who put you in that position. I was the star recruit. 'You're young, you'll know how to fix it. Come on, do your stuff'. Meanwhile I'm asking 'but how *do I* do my stuff?' (Jessie)

One of the hardest things was caring about issues in the absence of a community of others who shared those concerns. This diminished young people's capacity to share stories. This was particularly an issue among rural young people.

In order to support young people in any decision-making roles, it is important to claim spaces where parties can share the stories of what is going on, what they are doing, and why.

2. Listening and being heard

This is an extension of the last point but it also demands its own space. Storytelling needs to be informed by listening. The best kind of listening, some argued, is not about passive agreement:

[What young people really need is] *another person who will ask questions to the point where it really shows that they are listening*. To point out where they might be going. To make suggestions without being critical. (Jessie)

Some of the most empowering experiences that the young people spoke about involved others intentionally and regularly taking time out to listen to them. Particular mentors were often singled out as good listeners. Others pointed to structured times when they could be heard:

Each Monday morning, half a dozen school leaders of varying ages came together for a morning tea meeting with staff representatives, the principal and the deputy principal. The purpose of the meetings was purely designated as an opportunity for student concerns to be raised and discussed in an open forum. It made us feel like they wanted to listen - *that we had a voice, an identity, and a right to speak* (Ruvani)

In her write-up of interview material, Gabrielle notes that working across generations requires a lot of give and take:

Older people (people in the union were often over 40) appreciated what young people had to do and say as long as they listened and didn't push their own agenda too hard.

Gabrielle notes that people's egos can be a real problem: "humility is a rare quality".

Jessie writes that, when communities work with their younger people, there are often preconceptions that act both ways:

Perceptions are the biggest enemy of everyone involved in youth leadership and decision-making issues. Not only the perceptions of how young people think they will be received, as mentioned above, but also of other people who may believe that youth are selfish and unreliable. Whilst there may have been an element of truth in the experiences from which these perceptions were drawn, many of the difficulties have arisen through misunderstandings between the two parties.

What helps? Jessie continues:

Therefore, any plan to conquer the barrier between youth and older generations must have two key elements.

Firstly, there must be acknowledgement by both parties that attitudes towards each other exist. To deny this is to deny that any problem exists. Secondly, there must be a commitment to look beyond these attitudes and keep an open mind. A conscious effort must be made to ensure that challenges faced are blamed on these stereotypes, whether consciously or unconsciously. This leads into respect, because it is about acknowledging a person as an individual, rather than by their stereotype.

3. Discovering and affirming strengths (capacities)

This is about recognising and releasing capabilities and capacities. It is about affirming each other's strengths in action as well as in words, and publicly as well as privately. It draws on storytelling and listening and flows on to resourcing and equipping.

The best way for young people to discover their own strengths and capacities is by doing things:

Alison did say that experience was the best teacher and that she had learnt more from participating than from the training. (Gabrielle)

It taught me that anyone can do anything. At school I was very quiet, self-effacing. I never would have done any of this. (Anna)

It seems that the thing that most often gets in the way is that adults assume seniority and refuse to accept that young people bring their own strengths and wisdom to decision-making.

Callum was part of a cadet-style youth group. He tells a story of being involved in such a way that it was assumed he was a 'blank slate' or had nothing to contribute:

We were given little choice on these camps. The leaders thought that they knew what we wanted. As I got more rank I was amazed that I got no more choices.

Meanwhile, Jessie explains:

My worst experience regarding leadership happened a few years ago when I was in a co-leadership position with a woman twice my age who couldn't accept the concept of co-leadership as opposed to leader and assistant, where the younger person is obviously the assistant and their opinion second-rate. It was a disaster. It took a long time to repair the damage to group unity and my self-esteem, even though I had the complete backing of the hierarchy.

My best experience [of partnerships with adults in decision-making] was when I was in Spain recently.After reaching Santiago I met some people who had also walked and wanted to go to Portugal like me. When we arrived in Lisbon, these people had no ideas on accommodation or the like, so I organised taxis to a hostel and became the designated responsible adult by the hostel staff. These people were between ten and thirty years older than me, but everyone seemed more amused by the irony of it than put out by it. (Jessie)

What helps?

Having the trust of those in charge. Having space to do things, to get them right or wrong and to learn from the experience, without being fearful of reprimand. Being given the opportunity to validate why others (adults) should trust us (young people). (Jessie)

Other young people pointed to the importance of training (both ways) in order to be able to do this, and the chance to feed back insights (both ways).

Recognition is also an important part of this equation:

Individuals don't have to be on the committee to receive empowerment and [skill] development. In fact many people are looking for a different kind of involvement. But in terms of being on a committee - even the title means the ability to do something - it is encouraging. Once given a position, members often start doing things that were always available to them ... because of the sense of responsibility and greater sense of ownership. (Scott)

These conversations also raised the question of how to 'protect' young people from the risk of burnout without patronising or eroding their capacity to decide to be involved. Scott suggests:

It's about staff being aware of members and what is happening for them in their lives. It comes down to being aware when people are having a hard time, talking, being open, feeling, timing some breaks. Also it's about trying not to let everyone do everything straight away, for one - you learn more if you have time to take it in and reflect but two, you'll burn out. Although it is a challenge in the bigger time commitment to roles to control this, awareness and openness help lots.

These first three pointers inform the 'capacity building' ethos of continually combining action with reflection and learning. Respondents' stories suggest that this also needs to be done in a spirit of openness

and humility: 'we are all learning here' and 'perhaps we need each other'.

4. Resourcing and equipping people to do the task well

This pointer continues to build upon the last. It is helpful to think about resourcing and equipping at three levels:

- Practical resources;
- Ideas and information;
- Useful habits and practices (skills).

This pointer is important because it is about starting from the expectation that people will be able to do things if they are properly resourced.

What gets in the way?

In terms of practical resources, some very practical barriers were mentioned:

- Transport: not being able to get to places easily (particularly rural respondents);
- Money: for example needing to bear the expenses of travel, or not being able to access petty cash before purchasing items like train tickets (often students do not have much spare cash);
- Time: commitments to organisations need to be balanced with young people's already complex lives⁴.

Young people have a lot of things going on in relationships, HSC, uni, work, tough to *fit it all in*. This has been a big challenge for me, particularly at the board level, which may take 10 to 20 hours per week - as well as being away from home 15 to 16 weekends of the year. (Scott)

Respondents also mentioned:

- not having background experience in running meetings - it takes a lot of energy to reinvent the wheel as well as do the task;
- being unprepared for conflict, and ill equipped both as individuals and as a group to handle it when it arose;
- differing levels of maturity and perceived responsibility for what was happening;
- nothing much was happening. 'We couldn't organise our way out of a paper bag.'

What helps?

At the level of practical resources Ben suggests that organisations ask the questions:

What is it worth to the organisation to have young people involved? How do we support them if they are voluntary?

⁴ NB there is a growing body of evidence that young people who have grown up since 1970 are needing to learn to balance increasingly complex demands on their time and energies - in a sense to become 'managers' of life, and are often quite unsupported to do so (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997; Dwyer and Wyn, 2001; Stokes et al, 2003).

Where an intense level of involvement is required, this may mean thinking ahead about things like accommodation, travel expenses and petty cash. It may mean paying young people for their involvement. At a broader level, even simple things could help people feel valued and able to participate:

For example, food. If people come straight after school, they are probably very hungry. (Ben)

Ideas and information are really important resources. The young people suggest that one of the hardest things was being involved in things but still not knowing what was going on. Gabrielle writes:

Alison thought that the organisation of the project was an area of concern, with the participants not really knowing what was going on until the last minute. The reasons for this are the charity being under-funded or management not having the necessary skills. Alison suggested that communication should be improved, as well as opportunities to learn from past mistakes: ie feedback sessions with [the organisation] and the young people.

Information is important. Adult-led organisations are not always good at giving reasons or explaining the context of *their* decisions. For young people who are exploring what it is to be a leader or decision maker, this can be intimidating and disempowering. After interviewing Kristiana, Jessie writes:

When Kristiana asked the school to allow the formation of a fencing support group, they refused. There was no apparent reason... She discovered later that support groups receive funding from the school and believes that the school was unwilling to allocate money to another sport. The worst part was the way in which the affairs were handled. No explanation was offered as to why the decision was made; it was just a 'no'.... For Kristiana, this was a big disappointment. Here was an opportunity for the school to progress and advance, but she was 'cut down'. 'What's the point of being a leader if I can't lead?' she said. She felt that teachers were rejecting her ideas on the basis that they came from a young person, rather than judging them on their merit. In her opinion, the teachers involved were on a power trip, running things how they saw fit because that was how it had been done in the past. If someone from the school had explained to her why her ideas were being rejected, she wouldn't have become so disenchanted. 'I need understanding,' she said.

Access to information is an important contribution to feeling some measure of control.

Christine, the CEO with CanTeen suggests:

Working with young people means not assuming years of background knowledge, and spending time sharing the background information so they can explore topics in informed ways. (Christine, CEO)

Meanwhile other resources of habits, practices and skills were constantly singled out as something

people felt they needed. Many young people told stories of initially feeling 'right out of my depth'; training had been powerful in terms of increasing their capacity to do their job. This is not just about practical skills but also about interpersonal ones. It is one thing to have the skills for the task, and still another to handle the things that happen between people.

Training is an important part of this resources pointer. However, in terms of working alongside young people in decision-making roles, training also comes with its own issues. Despite affirming the importance of training, some respondents were wary of manipulation of young people through its content and process:

How much is training an issue of just draining out the young person point of view and filling them up with an adult point of view and perspective? (Anna)

It might be just as well to frame all training with this question.

A 'purist' approach ('let young people be young people' or 'young people will know how to do it') would have young people receiving minimal input from adults. However, in light of these young people's stories, it is worth asking the question: is it fair that young people should have to re-invent the wheel about group process as well as about the task at hand? This is particularly pertinent at a time when better practice is pointing towards all-youth councils.

Rather than subjecting young people to adult ways of thinking, most of the youth advocates and young people consulted in this research saw training as a means to build group autonomy and decision-making capacity.

... so we have some idea what we can do. We might not do our meetings that way but at least we have some idea what they could be like - and then we can make up our own way. (Belinda)

In interviews, young people shared the importance of having control over the content of their training programs as well. Training topics that they had found particularly empowering included: time management, group dynamics, conflict resolution, meeting procedures, handling the media, and exploring their personal leadership styles. They appreciated having input into the focus of their training. Their stories also pointed to the importance of having adults trained, if they are going to work successfully alongside young people.

5. Refining structures and processes

This is less exciting than a lot of the other pointers but equally important, according to the young people's stories. It is strongly related to the last point about resourcing and equipping, and it is a backdrop to the next pointer as well. This is important because it is about creating structures that 'enable' people to

do their thing well rather than getting in the way. It is about removing barriers so that young people's voices can be heard.

What gets in the way?

Structures are often not built with people in mind. Layers of bureaucracy can seem (and be) impenetrable for young people. They can make decisions and nothing happens, or nothing seems to happen.

What helps?

Working alongside young people might also cause us to re-look at structures and boards. What will enable us to do this well? A couple of the respondents told stories of organisations that had intentionally re-configured themselves so that young people's voices could be heard at the top. To them this made all the difference:

Things happen now that they've removed all the middle-men. (Philip)

This is also an issue of streamlining communication between different parts of organisations. Besides being heard by those at the top, it is also important that young people be able to hear about what was happening to their suggestions:

Our voices don't just disappear any more. (Philip)

It is one thing to be heard, but organisations also need to let young people know what has happened or is happening as a result. This is important particularly if the results are going to take time. This is a pre-condition for respectful partnership.

6. Honouring each other: through the formal relationships

Honouring each other goes a little beyond resourcing and equipping, and structures and processes, into looking out for each person amidst the daily activity. It is about intentional group process: *honouring each other from the moment of recruitment or joining, to the moment of leaving and succession*. It is about naming expectations, roles, and relationships and appropriately reflecting changes as they happen.

The specific areas that the young people pointed to are:

- recruitment, representation and membership;
- clarity of roles and responsibilities (eg job descriptions);
- rites of passage;
- mentoring and buddying;
- leaving and succession.

This 'honouring' pointer is important because it asks groups to think through how they might do justice to each person, logistically in terms of what they are asking them to do.

[Being involved in this research] has also taught me that the people who are involved need some kind of support structure, which could be a combination of mentoring and informal encouragement as well as more structured activities that allow them to become more effective in their work. (Gabrielle's afterthoughts)

What gets in the way?

In *recruitment and representation*, a key problem was tokenism. Single young people are often expected to be the voice of youth and to talk for young people – to speak for a consensus of 'everybody young':

One young person alone on a committee is supposed to represent everyone. The young person may be someone's next door neighbour - there because they were an easy target. (Ben)

Token young people may not be articulate or well equipped to speak, or be able to represent other young people's interests well where this matters.

Clarity of roles and responsibilities was also important to the young people in this study. While some had job descriptions, others did not and noted feeling the lack of this. They linked this to the feeling that they had somehow ended up in places with no real understanding of what had changed or about others' expectations.

Because young people keep growing out of their roles, *leaving and succession* was regularly flagged as an issue:

Being 24 I guess that I am really old in this game. Somewhere in the draft you said the participants are 15 to 22; if only I was 22 again (sigh). Is there any info on what happens to young people when they stop being 'experts'? Do they still get involved in the community or is the focus lost? (Gabrielle)

This has an impact on both the group being left, and the one doing the leaving.

What helps?

Young people suggested the importance of linking recruitment and representation to a population with whom they consult:

Representing the young people in this community means phoning youth workers, police liaison, Centrelink, and the youth refuge. It took a few months to establish that network. (Adrian)

Another suggestion was about involving young people who are already youth advocates or involved in action. However there appears to be a direct clash between this latter ideal and the ideal of drawing new young people into the action - between old and new blood. This is a recurring issue in the field, and these are two ideals that need to be held in tension or one given priority.

Job descriptions, rites of passage and good process around leaving and succession are areas

where a little bit of thought might go a long way to improving young people's work conditions and feelings of being valued. For example, *rites of passage* - the commemoration of important moments and transitions - were a part of feeling welcomed, honoured and respected by the group. Welcoming is one example. These processes could be done formally or informally.

The young people in the study identified *mentoring and buddying* as vital to their roles as decision makers. They pointed to the need for one-on-one support.

Where you have an interface between youth and the rest of the community, you just need one person who will bat for you. If you've got that, things will work. (Jessie)

Advocacy becomes an important part of this role.

Some groups are beginning to explore issues of *leaving and succession*, and how to create good process around these. How is it best to draw upon the wisdom of those who will leave, so that there is still continuity and collective memory within the group? One respondent also pointed to the importance of honouring young people in the way they leave:

If their term of office is coming to an end, can they come away with references? It's really important to provide young people with acknowledgment. They have done a good job and you value their input: present a document saying that. Then they can use it in the future. (Ben)

As much as anything else, honouring each other is about awareness of human process. It is about creating some ways to think about the needs of each person as they move into, through, and out of their role. Groups may find it a useful process to formalise these ideas in roles, job descriptions and events.

7. *Nurturing informal relationships: Group bonding and cohesion*

If the last pointer was about claiming some formal process by which to look out for each other, this pointer is about the informal process. This is about making room for the *informal bonding* with and between groups. Jessie and the others involved in this research highlighted some key processes that need to happen within groups, in order for tasks to be completed well: respect, trust, support, and understanding. Meanwhile, several others pointed to the importance of good plain *fun*.

Bonding is important because it lubricates interactions that could otherwise be quite tense:

Bonding within. We fight a lot and we have a lot of different opinions so we need to be able to cope with that as a group. (Philip)

What gets in the way?

Many of the respondents' stories showed what happens in the absence of group cohesion:

We didn't ever bond as a group. Without trust we couldn't hold it together and do our task. The group just disintegrated. (anon)

What helps?

Responses point to the value of fun, sharing, time to get to know each other, and time to build trust.

That induction weekend we shouldn't have gone straight into business. We should have gone bowling. Get to know each other, and a chance to suss each other out. (anon)

I've learned that I don't need to be the friend of everyone in the group. But we do need to be able to work together. Perhaps some trust-building activities at the start? (anon)

Jessie writes:

By creating an atmosphere of trust between leader and girls, Kristiana had developed an optimal learning environment to grow and develop. As everyone supported each other and they completed the challenges, their self-confidence grew. In the absence of self-doubt, there was no reason why the challenges could not be completed. As everyone began to acknowledge this, they started to realise their potential.

Similarly... In [the lab in which I work], the trusting environment facilitates efficiency and productivity. To trust the people who represent you is to free your mind of worry, enabling you to concentrate on the task at hand.

Drawing upon her own lived experience and the interview material, Jessie teased out what the key qualities of respect, trust, support, and understanding look like:

Respect is the glue that keeps the group together despite their differences. Whilst parties within the group may disagree over personal matters or otherwise, respect allows for the parties to acknowledge the underlying value of other parties within groups. This lays the foundation for effective communication as parties are prepared to listen, as members recognise the value of what each member has to say.

Trust may be a by-product of respect and is directly linked to the productivity of the group. More importantly, all parties involved must trust each other for a group to function properly. If one or more members are consistently wary of the other members, then those members will be reluctant to be forthcoming with ideas that they may have. Furthermore, the time they spend covering themselves is time that could be spent on the project at hand.

Support is the commitment to assist and encourage other members, and is critical for the long-term survival of the group. Support may come from members within the group and external parties who are not directly group members. Supporting

someone is not having all the answers to their challenges, but being prepared to explore the challenges together with them, to find the best possible solution.

Understanding occurs when the unit is working well together. It allows members to recognise the special talents that each member brings to the group and use these talents to maximise the group's potential. Furthermore, it acknowledges the weaknesses of and the differences between members within the group and of the group as a whole, so that those issues can be worked around.

Jessie concludes:

These characteristics are inter-connected; the presence of one such characteristic will give rise to the others. Each characteristic is equally as important as another.

Conclusion: What all this means

The young people's stories of their experiences in decision-making roles have pointed to some key understandings:

- First, about three different but strongly related dimensions of 'what works' for them (meaning, control, and connectedness).
- Secondly, about some pointers to focusing energies - about how, in practice, to build capacity for young people in decision-making.

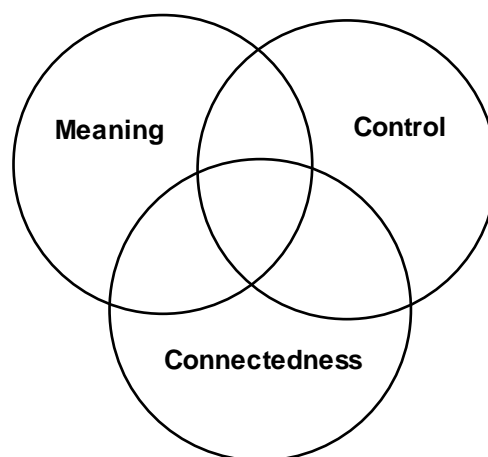
If the three key elements captured in the circles are the aims, then the seven pointers for practice are objectives.

Reflecting on the three circles

The young people's stories highlight that working well alongside young people in leadership and decision-making is not just about issues of control and power sharing. It is also about recognising the dimensions of meaning and connectedness. All three have been strongly inter-related in the way that they play out in the young people's stories. For example, the young people say that:

- A sense of meaning or purpose is owned much more strongly when committed to by the group (connectedness > meaning)
- What we do becomes meaningful when things that we work towards actually happen (control > meaning)
- Young people's connectedness to others is enhanced when they have input to the conversation (control > connectedness)⁵

Figure 5: *What matters, what works: three themes which interconnect*



These young people's comments are both in agreement with the wider literature and also provide some extra insights. Their stories reveal that working well alongside young people is not uni-dimensional; there are different angles or priorities upon which organisations could be working. Some of these are not difficult, but just require consistent, intentional awareness of the issues. Others will involve workers, groups and organisations in considerable self-examination.

One way that Figure 5 could be understood is as a cross-section of group or community dynamics across time; these are actually the three strands of a plaited cord. Compared to a single stranded cord, a three-stranded cord is much stronger and more useful. As many in the field are already discovering, the real art is in the act of weaving them together! Each group will need to find their own way of doing this. The reflective tools in the next section of this paper may help with this process.

All of this also links strongly with the idea of 'agency' - young people as decision makers more generally or as actors in a social world rather than simply being acted upon. The elements of control, connectedness and meaning are about being able to make a life under current social conditions. Although the three circles scheme elaborated here reflects the young people's experiences, it was drawn up in this form by Nancy Phillips (1990) as a summary of basic human developmental needs. Young people's stories both reinforce Phillips' schema and develop it further. Phillips' third circle was called 'bonding' which does not capture all of the things that the young people are talking about here in relation to decision-making. For example, beyond relationship-based bonding, they also talk about a community's deeper connectedness to, and ownership of, the social issues that are being raised by young people.

Each core element also links with a growing evidence base about what enables people, young people included, to make lives and to contribute to

5: *This works at the level of groups, but also within communities - see Jeff's story and Ben's insights (page 32).*

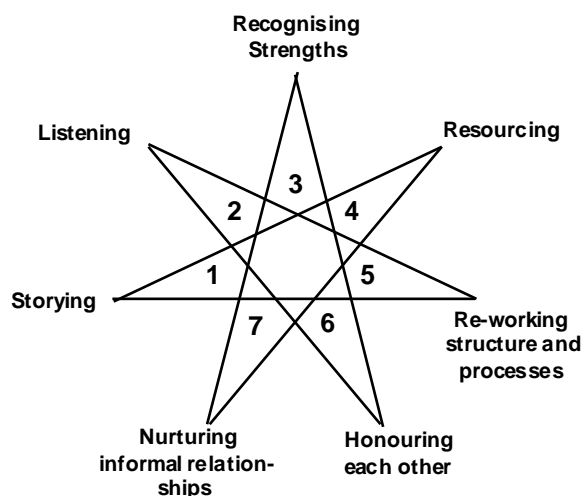
their communities. For example, the theme of needing to understand 'meaning' or 'purpose' recurs in educational literature (Massey, 1994; Fitzclarence, 1996) and youth literatures (Noble *et al.*, 1999; Buchanan, 1993; Wierenga, 1999). The idea of 'control' links to other evidence bases (locus of control and efficacy, eg see Rotter, 1966) and research into youth agency. Likewise 'connectedness' is also part of a fast-growing evidence base related to wellbeing (VicHealth, 1999), and the growing literature about social capital (eg Mitchell, 2000; Loong, 2002). In determining the ability of young people to grow into healthy and happy adults, the thinking of researchers in adolescent health and welfare across the world is converging around a recognition of the centrality of control and connectedness (Mitchell, 2000). It also relates strongly to discussion about youth participation, citizenship and empowerment, and could provide a context for exploring the dynamics of youth activism and voice.

Reflecting on the seven pointers for practice

The three circles (meaning, control, and connectedness) highlight great aims, but what do they mean in practice? Thankfully, in all their lived experience from different settings, the young people's stories also gave some clear pointers towards grounding them. These are the seven pointers for practice. If the three circles highlight the highest aims, then the seven pointers are the objectives.

This scheme highlights, in a practical way, what works for these young people in decision-making roles. In doing so, it highlights some of what it will take to further build capacity in young people and their communities to this end, and this will be explored further in the reflective tool and toolkit.

Figure 6: Seven pointers for practice



These seven pointers are dynamic. They are connected to each other and linked up, like the seven-pointed star in Figure 6. The young people's stories indicate that getting *any* of these points right actually releases flows of energy for the other tasks. Getting any badly wrong also absorbs a lot of energy.

In groups, the energy tends to bounce around rather than being a neat linear process, and the points are all connected. Reworking structure and process involves listening; honouring each other needs recognition of strengths.

Hearing these stories from young people's own lived experience is really important. Coming from our own experiences, the rest of us will be 'tuned in' to only hearing certain things. As both writers and people on the ground, it is also important to understand our own preconceptions and to listen beyond them - so we can learn something new. This is hard to do. Because of this, it is important to name where we are coming from and to be honest about it. The research team worked on doing this, and it seemed that each of us did learn something new (see Appendix C). The biggest surprise in conducting this research is how rich this story is.

Through this research I learned that it has been too easy to come to this topic with some reasonably thin (but important) stories about power sharing when there is so much else that is vital to this story. Adult writers can tend to tell a very one-dimensional story about power and control in youth participation. Granted, these are often accurate stories about things that are happening, but they are not the only stories. The young people interviewed also talked about a relational dimension to what was working.

Above all, these young people's stories reveal two things. First, despite a growing political emphasis on 'youth development', this is an area where almost *all* of us are beginners. If we take issues of youth participation seriously, all of us will need to be challenged, and all of us will find that we need to grow. Secondly, working well alongside young people in decision-making is not just about the mechanics of power sharing; it is also about meaningful projects and ongoing relationships.

Thankfully, the young people who were interviewed have provided rich descriptions about some of the ways in which this can happen.

Discussion: Towards Better Practice

Dealing honestly with issues of youth participation is hard. One of the main problems is that, when ideals are too high, nothing is do-able. As the wise adage goes: 'perfection is the enemy of good'. The important thing is to start somewhere, with an openness to learning within the process. Rather than talking of 'best' practice, the three circles schema becomes a useful tool for exploring the notion of 'better' practice.

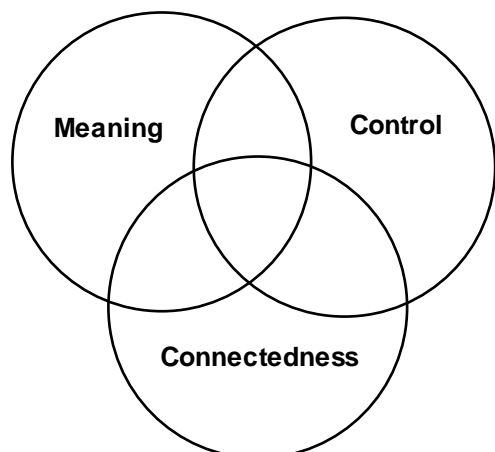
In this section of the report, the three circles scheme, based upon the young people's stories of what works for them, is used to help us to recognise, affirm, and strengthen good practice. It is also a useful tool for diagnosis, showing us points of strength and weakness in our own practice. This tool can push us onwards in our thinking, towards better practice.

However, we also need to go beyond this and think about realities, not just the *whys* and *whats* and the *what's wrong*, but also the practicalities and *hows*. Thankfully, through their stories and the seven pointers for practice, the young people have given us some tools for this. The links between their stories and what we can do, are emphasised in this section of the report.

Better practice

Best practice - the ideal state - would involve a project doing all three things well:

- Projects are meaningful for young people;
- Young people have or share control over what happens;
- The projects and the young people are connected into wider community resources and relationships.



The reality is that good practice is hard, and that few projects attain a balance of all three factors. It is hard enough even to do two of these things well. Certain settings might never allow groups to do all three properly. Be encouraged. Interviews with young people showed that even where all three factors are not in balance, good things are still happening. Most of the stories of the young interview respondents were actually spoken from this space! One example of this is how the trickiest things - the treacherous mechanics of control and power sharing - are actually buffered or enabled by strong relationships to others and to the mission or task at hand. However, in recognising this reality, it is still important to understand and minimise the gaps in our practice.

The gaps

Whilst reviewing the large numbers of projects online we noticed that projects were likely to be strong on two fronts, but rarely on the third:

Anna said:

It's like swiss cheese ... Full of holes.

Anna noted that the missing element is likely to be *control*. She suggested:

The basics are about not doing it *for* young people, but doing it *with* them. Letting them decide what *it* is. Funding, support, training, space. Space being a physical thing and a metaphorical thing - space to think and decide their own directions.

However, the element that is most likely to be missing in the current climate is *meaning*. Youth participation is now politically correct and this holds its own dangers, particularly around the push towards participation for participation's sake. This is also 'window dressing'. Participation can also be used as a mechanism for social control (keeping young people gainfully occupied and out of trouble). Better practice is about meaningful engagement: recognising young people as co-creators of their communities. On a recent visit to Australia, Karen Pittman, a strong ambassador of the 'youth development' approach, urged Australia not to follow the same path as the USA. She urged Australia not to make the same mistakes that the USA had made with regard to policy definitions and the *confining* of youth participation to *programs*. Rather youth participation should be made a more widely embraced pathway and approach, which was

purposeful and useful in settings where young people live (ACYS, 2002). Also there are strong critiques emerging from the USA about the ways in which many youth participation and youth development projects plug young people into opportunities to serve, but not opportunities to shape their societies (Cowan, 1997). The notion of *service learning* stems from an uncritical and static concept of community.

Meanwhile, in other activities, the element of *connectedness* is missing. A lot is happening in the area of youth activism. Young people's concerns and

group actions often involve critiques of political decisions (eg on refugees, racism, uranium mining). These 'projects' are not neatly linked into the way communities tell stories about themselves (ie through mass media) and are often misunderstood. As such, these groups often bypass community legitimacy or community support. Because these are not politically sanctioned or controlled examples of young people in decision-making, the young people involved are likely to be portrayed as professional protester, hooligans, uninformed or dangerous.

A Reflective Tool: Good Practice and Things to Guard Against

So to recap:

- a) *Good practice is hard;*
- b) *Most projects are only good at two of the three elements;*
- c) *Good things seem to happen anyway.*

Recognising these things calls forth a measure of graciousness, and a measure of generosity in the way we 'story' the issues. To work alongside young people in decision-making roles often requires going against the cultural and political flows, and that takes an enormous amount of energy and good-will. However this kind of work also calls forth a measure of vigilance. The reflective tool highlights that while we function in the real world where ideals are not often reached, there are things that can be guarded against in our practice. Figure 7 isolates the key areas to watch.

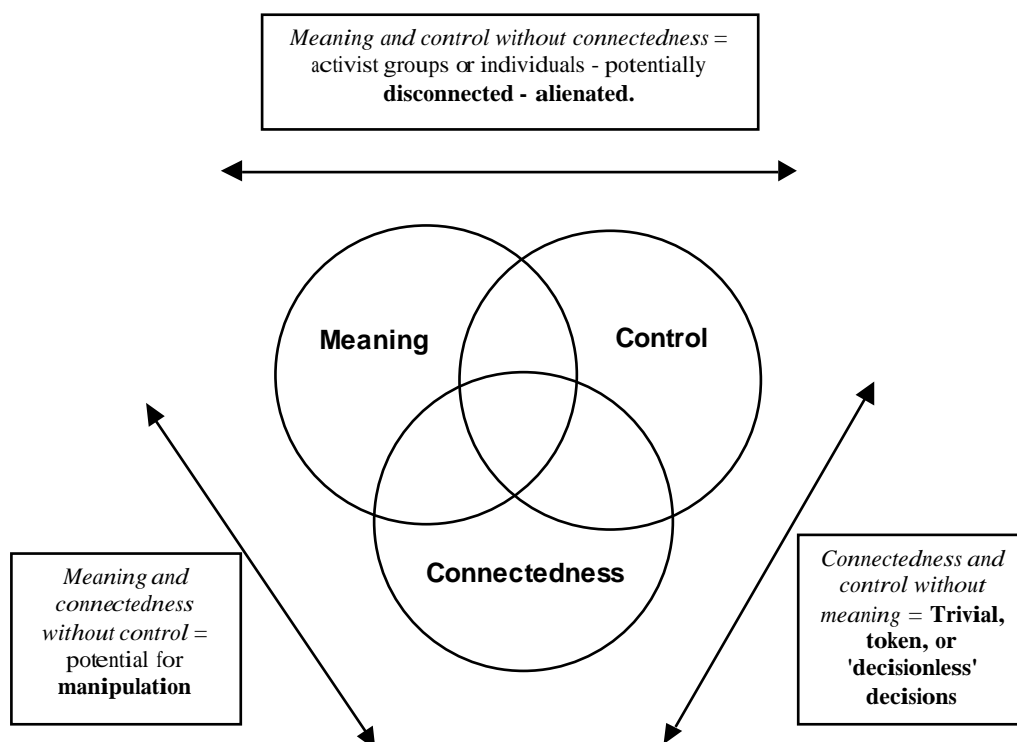
Groups might use this diagram to critically explore the questions: Where are we strongest? Where are we weakest?

As shown in Figure 7, the absence of any one dimension means that something is in need of attention. If a project is lacking the dimension of *meaning*, it will be likely to involve the trivial and the token, pure service projects that give little back to young people, or projects that support other people's political agendas or political correctness, but not necessarily young people's interests.

If a project is low on the element of young people's *control*, it will be important to build in ways to guard against manipulation and being involved in public puppetry.

If a project is missing wider social *connectedness* (eg young people's own activism about a particular cause) it is important to guard against alienation and burnout. It highlights the need for these young people and their action to be linked into wider communities and their resources.

Figure 7: *Some key areas to watch - a reflective and diagnostic tool*



Even better practice

The push towards even better practice is to 'recognise your strengths and then add one'. This is a call to reflective practice: to do it, to do it well and then to reflect upon what might be changed to do it better next time; to honestly and openly name what the project is doing well and then explore ways of better incorporating the third element into practice. This will probably involve a significant rethink. It will also involve embracing a risk. The 'costs' of this may prove too high:

- If a project is strong on connectedness and control and not so strong on meaning, better practice would involve asking questions about how young people might be better supported to engage in the issues that are meaningful to them, and that they are passionate about, and that are vital in their own stories. The 'catch' is that this may also involve being critical of what is happening.
- If a project is strong on meaning and connectedness but not so strong on control, better practice would involve looking hard at what we might do next time to increase the young people's control of the project, to have them shaping directions from start to the finish, to better resource them and to hand over a little more power. (empowerment).

- If a project is strong on meaning and control but not as strong on wider social connectedness (eg young people's activism around a particular cause), better practice involves other people being prepared to actually stand alongside them. Supporting this kind of action might involve becoming a conduit between these young people and wider relationships and resources. It will also potentially involve being misunderstood yourself. Possible key roles include being a translator: both a listener and a teller of alternative stories, sharing stories about the legitimacy of young people's involvement in this kind of un-solicited decision-making. (advocacy).

Pointers to better practice

As stated before, if the three key elements are the aims, then the seven pointers are the practical ways ahead. For each of the three key elements (meaning, control and connectedness) there are pointers for better practice. This is a good thing! Figure 8 shows how this works.

If **meaning is the missing element**, the three *practical pointers* that need attention are pointers 1, 2 and 3: storying, listening, and recognising strengths and capacities.

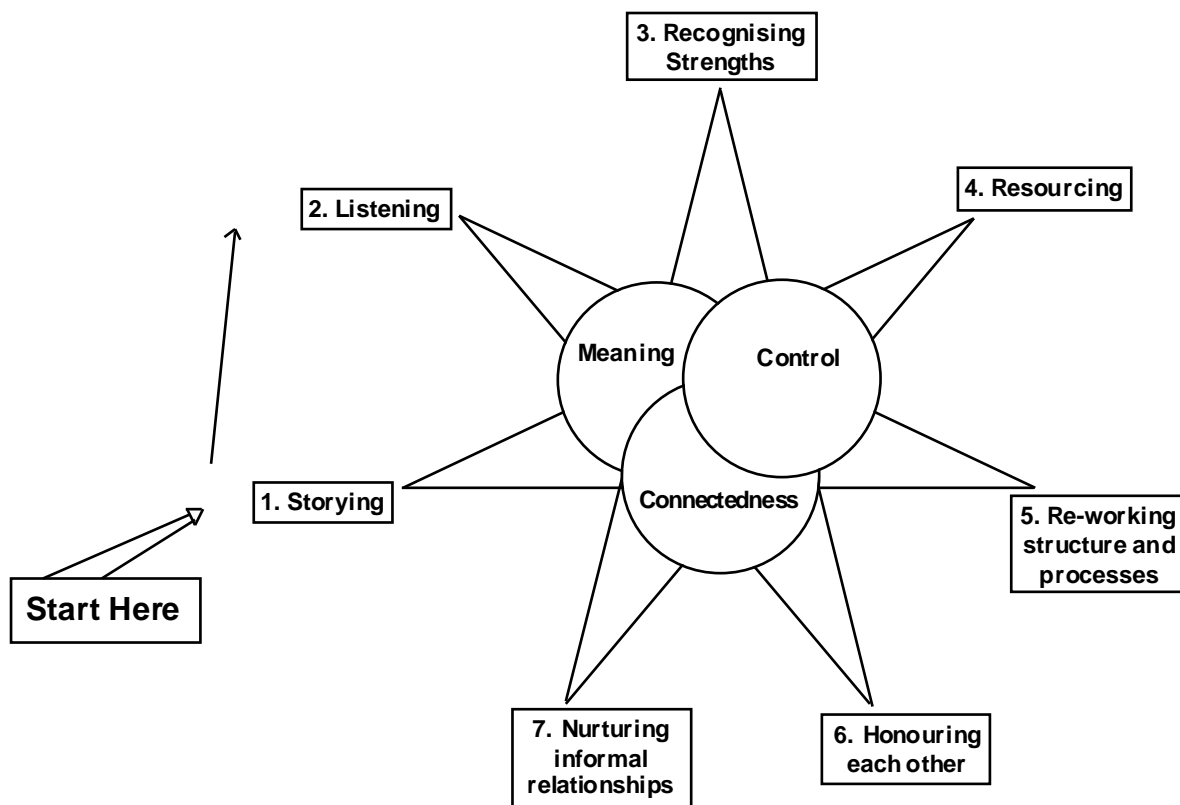


Figure 8: Young people in decision-making: capacity building in young people and their communities

If young people's **control of the project is the issue**, then the three related *practical pointers* of recognising capacities, resourcing, and reworking structure and process (pointers 3, 4 and 5) will be vital.

If **connectedness is the missing element**, the two *practical pointers* around honouring each other through structured relationships of care, and nurturing informal relationships and networks (pointers 6 and 7) become really important.

Capacity building: What it might look like at different levels

These young people's stories speak about the idea of building capacity, and point to three major areas where energy can be invested:

- in capacity to understand what is going on and relate it to stories of meaning and purpose (storytelling, listening and recognising capacities);

- in capacity to have mastery or take some control (skills, resources processes, structures);
- in capacity for connectedness (trust relationships, flows of resources).

Further, it is important to remember that capacity building for young people in decision-making happens at individual, group and community levels.

So even as the first dot-point above is about a young person's ability to understand, it is also about:

- a group's shared ability to understand what is going on in this issue, project or task and relate it to stories of meaning and purpose;
- a community's capacity to view what is happening and to do the same.

Table 1 shows the things that are involved at each level. This is about a shared agenda. What can we do? What are we doing here to build capacity?

Table 1: Capacity building at three levels: a strange symmetry

	Individual level	Group level	Community level
meaning	Understanding what is going on: what am I doing? Why is it important? This involves making spaces for listening and telling the stories eg a regular, honest conversation with young person	Groups seeing purpose that is important to them, and valuable in the larger world as well. This involves making spaces for listening and telling the stories eg intentional 'storying' group time	Communities seeing and learning to support groups of young people doing valuable things. This involves making spaces for listening and telling the stories eg public forums, media
control	Recognising capacities and strengths in self and others Appropriate resources Skills for decision-making Structures that <i>enable</i> Processes in place for working together well	Recognising capacities and strengths within group Appropriate resources Skills for working together and group decision-making (eg conflict resolution) Structures that <i>enable</i> . Processes in place for working together well Conflict resolution Awareness that power is not a zero-sum game (young people gain and others might gain also)	Recognising different capacities and strengths in communities Appropriate resources Skills for working together and shared decision-making Structures that <i>enable</i> . Processes in place for working together well Conflict resolution Awareness that power is not a zero-sum game (young people gain and others might gain also)
connectedness	Trust relationships with self and others Resource flows through individual networks: mentors, buddies, peers	Trust relationships Resource flows eg intra and inter-group bonding activities, mentoring, peer support, rites of passage	Trust relationships Resource flows eg wider community links, gathering spaces and events, access, mentoring, peer support, rites of passage

Reflective Tools

Here are some of the key questions emerging from the research with young people, which groups and organisations may need to explore together. The organisations that are working best alongside young people in decision-making roles are involved in constant reflection. This is not about going through checklists once as if to 'set and forget'. Like all relationships that matter, it is about an ongoing process of questioning. In some cases, the answers will be clear. In other cases, it may not be so much about defining the answers as about living the 'questions' ie about naming and committing to an engagement with the more difficult questions together and in an ongoing way.

Figure 7 (page 41), which looks at strengths and weaknesses in relation to the key elements, is one reflective tool that groups might use to explore their own better practice. Figure 8 (page 42) indicates which pointers need attention and will help to focus groups towards these. Meanwhile, Table 2 (on the next page) could be used on its own to focus some key questions for any group that wants to explore these issues further. Each of the pointers will also be unpacked a little further in the toolkit section of the report.

Reflective practice: a case study

Christine Rowell is the CEO of CanTeen. She was the only 'older' person actually interviewed (rather than just consulted) in this research. Having heard from young people, we were curious about what it would actually take for adult staff members to work well alongside a young board of directors. Christine explains that CanTeen was always run by young people, for young people. In some ways this might have been easier in the early days when the organisation was living hand-to-mouth. There are certain newer challenges now that it runs as a business, with money. "It's not the easiest way to run this business; it's the only way." You need to equip the young people with the same skills as you would expect from any board of directors. The Mac (see the description in the CanTeen story later) is a training ground for a Board of Directors.

Christine says that her work takes "belief in young people". When asked about the difference between belief and idealism she shares her philosophy: "Nobody's perfect every day all the time. So working with young people means placing on them no more expectations than you do upon yourself."

I talked to her about the twin curses of the popular stories: young people can do nothing, and

'young people can do everything'. To this Christine responded, "Young people can do as much as adults can do, and also as little."

"Working well with young people in this setting takes self-examination or reflection. Speaking to them as colleagues means asking yourself 'Would I say this to a 53 year old chairman of the board?' I have discovered the need to be careful not to be easier on them than I should be on a colleague, but I also have had to be careful not to be harder. It forces confrontation of issues - complexity, power, accountability. Do I have the authority to say that? Often humanity shows itself and there is need to apologise. That goes both ways.

"The other thing that it takes is patience, because working with young people inevitably things take longer. We cannot assume that they have years of background knowledge on the topics we cover, and things will need to be explained and explored together.

"In return they teach a lot. They have given me no shortage of experiences, and no shortage of new perspectives. It's a remarkable job. We ask a lot of them, but we have no reason to think that they cannot deliver."

Reflective Tools At-a-Glance:
Some Key Questions for Groups to Think About Their Practices

	Meaning	Control	Connectedness
Storying	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are we about? • Why? • Is it important? • Where did we come from? • Where are we going? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who really knows what is going on? • Who gets to have a say? • How often? • Who gets to tell the world about it? • How do people's voices get heard? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How are these people's stories being reflected in our vision? • What can they teach the rest of us? • Do we share stories and interests?
Listening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What has brought you here? • What are your concerns? • What excites you about the things we might do? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is it that you need in order to engage in this task? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What things would make you feel like an effective, useful and valued member of this group?
Affirming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What can I / we learn from you? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some of the things you do well... 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can we honour that?
Resourcing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What sort of background understandings do people need to engage well in this task? • To feel useful and valuable? • Who might be able to share that? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What sort of skills might people need in order to engage in this task? • What sort of practical resources? • What sort of background needs might have to be met for people to get here? • To be comfortable here? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What sort of background needs might have to be met for people to be comfortable here? • What might the rest of us offer? • What other sources could we draw on?
Creatively re-working process and structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can people do things in ways that are meaningful for them? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do people have enough space to find their own way of doing this? • Do people have enough support to learn from how others have done this? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who are the advocates in the group who might explain what is going on?
Honouring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which changes and events are important in us as a group? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can people shape way we celebrate these moments? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who should hear about it?
Bonding and Linking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you love doing? • What are the connections between your story and my story? • Who might we share our story with? • What other groups share these concerns? • These passions? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What will give the less dominant members of the group or community a chance to contribute in their way? • Are there other like-minded groups with whom we could be sharing resources? • Are there other groups that might share their resources with us? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What might we gainfully do together? • What non-task activities might our people be able to participate in together? • How might we get to know and trust each other?

Reflective Practice: This project and writer as a case study

To be strong in all three elements of better practice - meaning, control, and connectedness - is hard. This project is one example. It is strong on two fronts: meaning and connectedness. It is clearly meaningful for those interviewed:

'I am very interested in your project and I would love to help in any way that I can.' (email from Philip)

'I have a strong interest in current affairs and young people and am keen to make sure the voices of my generation are heard!' (email from Ruvani)

and those involved in doing the research:

'This research has given me an opportunity to clarify my feelings on issues involving youth and leadership. Whilst I have much formal leadership training, this was a chance to combine the theory with real life experiences to improve my understanding of the dynamics that occur. Thanks for the opportunity.' (Jessie, editorial)

The project is also strongly connected to community and the sector (through The Foundation for Young Australians and Australian Youth Research Centre and their respective networks). However in relation to the element of control, we are only half way there. Yes, young people have been involved:

*'Receiving an email inviting youth to participate in a study on the role of youth in leadership and decision-making was rather refreshing. Whilst much has been written on the role of youth in these processes, I've been told that few of these papers were written by youth. As a forty-something aged writer for **The Age** told me, 'I've written articles about youth arguing that I shouldn't be writing about them. That's their job.'* (Jessie, editorial)

However I have kept the editorial control close to me, the key writer, and commissioned young people to complete negotiated tasks. This reflects the realities of funding and timelines, and also the tyranny of distance. It is also indicative of social realities - the way the world is - with funding and infrastructure and skill base for research lying mostly in the hands of adults. However, the research findings also push me towards considering better practice - and leave me wanting to better equip and enable young people as researchers of their own issues.

Using the reflective tool has alerted me to the fact that of the three danger areas highlighted, this research is most open to manipulation: using young people's words to serve my own agendas or twisting them to say things that they didn't say. This realisation means that I need to, at bare minimum, see that they have the chance to edit the final draft.

Framework for Thinking Further

The framework introduced earlier is based upon the stories of the young people who were interviewed, and this might help groups to explore their own issues of young people and decision-making.

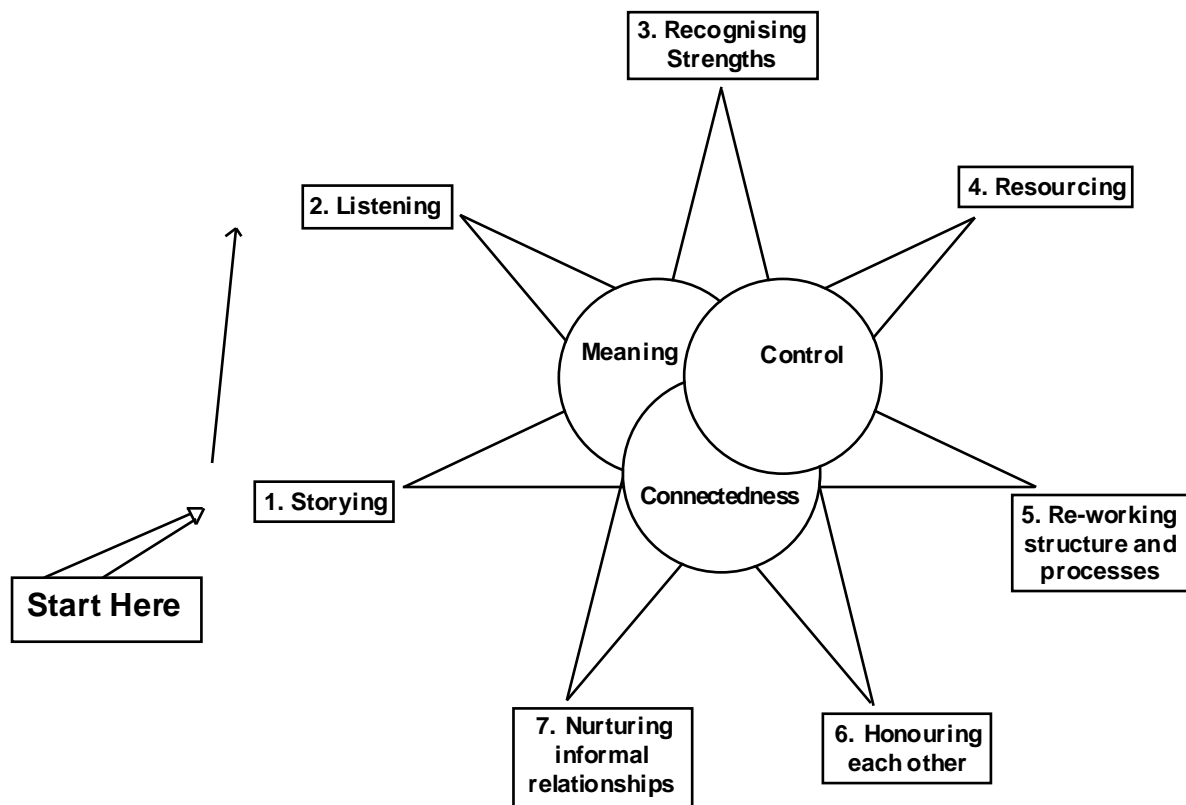


Figure 9: Young people in decision-making: framework for capacity building in young people and their communities

This conceptual framework can be used to explore the issues surrounding young people in decision-making in relation to a particular group or organisation. It can equally be used to explore issues of young people as active agents: decision makers within their own lives and within their communities.

It represents a holistic approach to young people in decision-making, and explores what it takes to build capacity in young people and their communities around decision-making. The inner three circles represent the three key elements of better practice. The outer ring of this framework highlights the seven practical pointers. Groups might follow the star around in a cycle of 'action research' into their own practices. This is about combining action and learning in a systematic way.

Below is a summary of what the seven points on the star are about. Like all real human processes they overlap and flow into each other.

1. *Storytelling: Talking Things Through*
 - Our mission or vision about what we are doing and why?
 - Where we are coming from and where we are going?
 - What's changed?
2. *Listening and Being Heard*
 - Do we know the hopes and dreams (and stories) of the young people involved?
 - To what extent do they shape our stories?
3. *Discovering and Affirming Strengths (Capacities)*
 - What do different people bring to this arrangement?
 - What are young people's skills and talents?

-
4. *Resourcing and Equipping People*
 - Practical resources required
 - Ideas that are essential
 - Practices that are useful
 - Training needed
 - Resource people available
 5. *Refining Structure and Processes*
 - How can young people shape decisions here?
 - How can young people make their voices heard?
 6. *Honouring Each Other Through Formal Relationships*
 - Recruitment, membership and representation
 - Rites of passage
 - Job descriptions
 - Mentors and buddies
 - Succession and keeping expertise
 7. *Nurturing Informal Relationships*
 - Bonding activities
 - Networks

Practical applications of this summary will be unpacked further in the next section of the report: the toolkit.

Just as these seven pointers for practice can be applied to the work of organisations and groups, they can serve as indicators of meaning, control and connectedness for young people in everyday life.

How to use this framework as a resource

One of the hard things about being involved in decision-making and working with young people in decision-making roles, is that there are so many things to attend to. This framework is based upon what young people spoke about in their interviews. It is designed to help groups and organisations address those areas in a user-friendly form. It is one way of making sense of it all!

This framework might prove useful in the following ways:

- *Engaging in good practice.* The final section of this report is a toolkit that is based upon the framework, for those who would like to work alongside young people in decision-making processes. Groups might like to follow the circle around in a continuous 'action research' cycle. Alternatively, groups might use the diagnostic tools on pages 41-43 to see which areas of their practice are strongest and weakest, and which pointers need more attention.
- *Understanding better practice.* Within this framework, with a little more work, the specific things that the interviewed young people mentioned in their stories could be further unpacked into 'process measures' or grounded indicators of good processes.

- *Evaluation of projects, ideas and action plans.* Within spheres of enabling and capacity building, there is now a trend away from a reliance on evaluation of 'outcomes', and a movement towards indicators of good process. For examples of this, see VicHealth's Mental Health Promotion Plan (VicHealth, 1999), material emerging from the community arts movement (eg Marsden and Thiele, 2003) or the 'Enabling State' literature (eg Wierenga *et al*, 2002). This is at least partly because the most valuable outcomes (eg social capital, lives changed, self confidence) are, in fact, the hardest to measure. The outcomes also tend to be revealed over time in lives and relationships rather than being linked to or aligned with funding timetables. If we know what better practice looks like and can list its essential elements, then enabling or philanthropic bodies can target support and/or funding towards these projects. The framework has the potential to be a useful evaluation tool. This version simply represents a starting point. Over time, within the model, and as the evidence base from projects and other research builds, the indicators would need to be added to and refined.

- *Evidence gathering.* By defining areas of focus, here is a mechanism for continuing to gather and organise an evidence base around young people in decision-making: why it is important and what it does, as well as information about better practice: what works and what gets in the way.

- *Evaluation and critical analysis of current practices.* This could also be a useful conceptual tool for making sense of social processes and structures that surround young people and decision-making (how young people become excluded and included). So, for example, on a small scale, it could be useful for analysing why local projects work or fail. On a medium scale, it could be used to critically analyse public policy with a view to maximizing opportunities for young people's decision-making roles in their communities. On a still larger scale, it might prove useful in exploring trends and social movements - even global ones - eg about what has been happening to cause young people in so many countries to protest around the gatherings of the World Economic Forum.

Toolkit

The following pages lead us around the seven pointers, focusing in turn on: storying, listening, recognising strengths, creatively re-working structures and processes, resourcing, honouring each other, and nurturing informal relationships. For each of the seven pointers, there is an explanation, a rationale, some tools, and a story of how other groups are doing it.

1. Storying

Storying is the act of telling, re-telling or revising a story. This is a collaborative process (Wierenga, 2002). Rather than being seen as completed products, stories can be most usefully understood as works in progress.

Storying is a process of looking at past, present, future and identity. This is useful for individuals as well as for groups and organisations. In a world that is changing fast, communities could be doing a little more of this too!

a) Rationale

In this research, the young people talked about the importance of finding meaning in the task, and how that was echoed in their own levels of commitment. They talked about the importance of doing this meaning-making activity together. In this research, young people also said that one reason they were not able to contribute was a lack of understanding of what was happening. Several suggested that the reason groups fall apart was a lack of shared vision about what they were doing and how they might do it. This kind of activity - storying vision, mission, and core purpose - can be a formal or informal process (or, even better, both!). It can fall in the realm of 'important' rather than 'urgent' business, so it can be too easily overlooked.

Beyond this research, the evidence base says:

- One reason for worker burnout is the loss of stories (this includes adults and youthworkers too);
- A significant issue in community breakdown is the loss of shared stories;
- The practice of storying can be about restoration of hope (Wierenga, 2002);
- The richer and more collaborative this storytelling effort, the more the vision will be widely owned. More people will be engaged in collective action (Commonwealth of Australia, 1994)

Telling stories about one's own experiences is the first step towards collective consciousness and group action (Commonwealth of Australia, 1994: 22).

b) Tools

These questions should provide good starting points. Spend at least one session asking and discussing:

1. What are we doing? What do we want to do? Why? (For organisations, this is essentially a question about vision, purpose or a mission statement. This may be a good time to revisit these things.)
2. Where are we coming from and where are we going? (history and future)
3. What has changed?
4. What are the understandings that shape our work? Why do they matter?

c) How other groups are doing it

Here are two groups that have carried out this 'storying' process very powerfully. Details presented here are sparse in order to encourage you to go to their web-pages and see for yourself.

Storying our Mission: Create Foundation/Millennium Kids

Create Foundation: 'A foundation of opportunities with and for young people in care.'

'CREATE is for children and young people in care... by children and young people in care.'

Our Mission: 'To ensure that children and young people in care are afforded the same life opportunities as all young Australians.'

Go to: http://www.create.org.au/create_world/ctw_html/about.html and see 'Our Credo'

Millennium Kids: 'Young people encouraging others to be active and aware in their environment.'

'It is a non-profit, non-government organisation. It is run by young people and was established in response to their demand for a greater say about their environment and their world.'

'Our aim is to develop local, regional and international partnerships which empower young people to explore, identify and address environmental issues through information exchange, membership networks, and on-the-ground action and development of youth leadership skills.'

Go to: <http://www.millenniumkids.com.au/>

2. Listening

When we truly listen, we ask these questions:

- Do we know the hopes and dreams (and stories) of the young people involved?
- To what extent do we allow these to shape the way we tell *our* stories?

These questions relate to groups and organisations and also to communities more generally.

a) *Rationale*

In this research, many of the stories of the young people reveal that listening to young people is still outside the culture of organisations.

Groups need to hear the stories and views of young people in order to support them in decision-making, and in order to improve their own work.

Beyond this research, the evidence base says:

- Young people only engage where issues are relevant;
- Issues are only relevant when they relate to young people's own stories of where they are going and what they are doing;
- Many of the things communities offer do not become accessible to young people because they do not seem to relate to young people's own stories of who they are and where they are going;
- The degree of recognisable overlap in an organisation's stories of what it is about, and young people's own stories will be the degree to which young people will actually engage (Wierenga, 2001 and 2002);
- It takes a bit of effort to discover the links between young people's own stories and the bigger stories of what communities and organisations are doing. This involves both listening and sharing the storytelling (Stokes *et al*, 2003).

b) *Tools*

Rather than having one lonely youth representative on an adult committee, consider going to where young people are to canvass opinions. Research with young people is one good idea. Consider a focus group (group interview) with young people to explore an issue together. You will need:

- five open-ended questions about the topic;
- a small group of young people who are comfortable together;
- a scribe and a facilitator;
- a comfortable space;

- written consent to do research (with minors, parental consent is essential);
- food.

However, good, honest human exchange is another idea and it involves less red tape. You will need:

- At least one young person;
- Time;
- Capacity to listen;
- An inquiring mind.

Set up at least one session where you listen to the voices of young people, or support young people to conduct interviews with other young people without adult intervention.

c) *How other groups are doing it*

Finding a Voice: Using action research to connect with young people

Andy Simpson - University of Birmingham, UK

'If we genuinely seek to involve young people when discussing youth strategies and policy initiatives to engage them, then we might start by listening. Action research can be an effective way of doing this.

'This paper reflects the journey of a group of young action researchers. They worked together over twelve months, researching youth participation and decision-making. In March 2003 they told their stories to an audience of researchers, policy makers and practitioners at a conference on action research by young people. Their conference gave a clearer understanding of ways in which the expressed needs and aspirations of young people across Birmingham can be heard and valued.

'Although young people are often one of the key 'priorities' of the UK government's regeneration and social inclusion initiatives, they are traditionally excluded from engaging in these programs in any meaningful way. This paper emerges from 'action research' with a 'bottom up' approach, entitled Birmingham Youth Engagement in Action Research on Decision-making. The project has recruited and trained eighteen young people to undertake research amongst their peer groups.' (Simpson, 2003)

3. Recognising strengths

a) *Rationale*

In this study, the young people particularly valued creative partnerships (with adults) that acknowledge and draw upon their strengths.

Beyond this research, the evidence base reveals that by involving each other, there can be benefits to all concerned. Among other things, Kirby and Bryson report:

- Increased dialogue and improved relations between adults and young people;
- Improved relations between young people;
- Improved links between organisations and the wider community. Those who worked well in partnerships with young people also worked well with others. This last point may hold the key to many new things.

b) *Tools*

Conduct an audit of the strengths and abilities of the young people in the group or organisation.

These questions should provide a start:

- What are our strengths?
- What strengths do we need to develop?
- Who has strengths that we might draw upon or learn from?

c) *How other groups are doing it*

Case studies of creative partnerships that draw upon younger people's strengths are:

- The Foundation for Young Australians' **Youth Grant-Maker Program**;
- Bond University's **Scholarship Program**.

The Foundation for Young Australians Youth Grant-Maker Program

The Foundation for Young Australians' *Youth Grant-Makers* are responsible for allocating funding to projects from all over Australia that apply for support for their work with young people. Over the last eighteen months, these committees have been radically re-shaped to involve young people.

Rebecca is the Youth Deputy Chairperson of the NSW Grants Committee. The new committee now comprises seven young people and a small number of 'Crusties' (older committee members). She explained that people were a little curious at first about how this group would work together. "Perhaps the Crusties were even more apprehensive than we were."

At the time of our interview, the board had completed one round of grant-making. I asked, "Is it a good idea, working together like this?"

"Great idea!" she said. "Each brought a different perspective to the committee and saw things that the others didn't. There were instances when we had to defer: because of their experience in business, and things like that; because they could see that some projects would never work. But there were also instances where they had to defer: we could see that other projects wouldn't work; other young people wouldn't go for it. It was important to learn to listen to each other on these terms."

She explained that training and preparation for the task were a significant part of this smooth operation. "We all spent five days in training and knew what was coming." Another factor was the assumptions of the group. "We know we are all still learning."

Bond University: Scholarship Program

Sometimes young people can represent and advocate things better to other young people than professionals can.

Ruvani is part of a scholarship program for Bond University run almost entirely by the students. Essentially the peers choose the new students who will receive the next year's scholarships, and come and be part of the student body. She says, "They place enough trust in the students to organise and facilitate the process: coordinating visits, interviews, and decisions. It is a big thing. The scholarships are very generous - they ultimately change people's lives - so you are playing with people's futures. The staff have realised that there's no-one better to tell prospective students about the university than the students themselves." This is about both selling the good points and discussing the issues.

"The idea of moving away from home and coming up here - a middle aged man can't really help explain the realities of that situation to a high school graduand, or offer the support that will be needed. But those of us who are here actually become their family. The result is a very significant, close-knit network of friends - a support during uni life and beyond. They have become my second family. And because the group's members are from everywhere, they also return to everywhere - so now we have networks all over Australia."

4. Resourcing

a) *Rationale*

In this research, the young people highlighted the importance of having what it takes (including skills) to get the job done, and the devastating defeat experienced when young people are committed to a task but resourcing and skill development are not there to back them up.

b) *Tools*

Although the youth sector is familiar with the story that 'we need to be better resourced', do we ever do a systematic stock-take of the resources that we have or need?

Resources come in different forms. Spend at least one session identifying needs. Being strategic, list the resources that need to be put in place in order to:

- do the job;
- build the group;
- enable young people to participate;
- share the task.

A checklist of different types of resources:

- Practical resources;
- Central ideas - does everybody have the background on these? (eg history, the story of what we're trying to do and why);
- Practices that are helpful - does everybody know how to do this?
- Training - what sort is required?
- People - what kind of resource people are needed?

c) *How other groups are doing it*

Case study: Two-way Training and the South Australian YACs

Ben Kilsby, 21, is member of the Executive Committee of the Youth Affairs Council of South Australia (YACSA), and convenor of YPAG, YACSA's youth representative committee. In his interview he explains that a two-way training approach, that teaches young people to work with councils and councils to work with young people, is beginning to develop through the Youth Advisory Committees in South Australia.

"Too often we are training young people to work in the adult world, and this approach is about training councillors how to work with young people," says Ben.

Ben explains that the initiative does not usually come from councils, but from the youth bodies. What is needed is a good advocate within councils to make sure that it happens. However, contact staff within councils are starting to understand and relay this message. Within the YAC sector, there is scope for the development of such 'best practice' because of dedicated staff, supported networks, statewide gatherings and on-line forums, where ideas can be shared and developed. Some councils are responding well, and Ben forecasts that this will continue to be a growth area.

Contact: Ben Kilsby (0411) 403 114
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For YAC forum information see:

<http://www.maze.sa.gov.au>

5. Being creative with structures and processes

How can young people shape decisions here? How can young people make their voices heard?

a) Rationale

In this research, the young people made special note of the importance of having a sense of control, of being heard, and of being able to achieve things. This sense of voice and control can so easily be enabled or disabled simply by the way that groups and organisations go about their business. For example, one of the most crippling things they pointed to was not hearing anything back after they had put in effort.

c) How other groups are doing it

This points to the need to be intentional about creating 'enabling' structures and processes.

b) Tools

To evaluate a group or organisation's current structures and processes, with a view to identifying what needs to change, see the set of indicators and checklist tool in Appendix D (page 78). To use these tools, individuals can rate the organisation on each area of its work on a scale of 0 to 4. You can use these scores to compare and discuss your perceptions of the organisation, and to plan action and changes that are needed to improve the participation of young people. (Source: Holdsworth, 2003; after de Kort, 2000.)

Case study: CanTeen - Intentionally changing structures and processes

CanTeen is an organisation for young people (12-24 years) living with cancer. This includes siblings, offspring, as well as those who have cancer themselves. Its aims (mission) are to support, develop and empower. CanTeen involves young people throughout the whole of the organisation, from the everyday work of the organisation to the Board of Directors. There is a lot of emphasis on young people's ownership of the organisation. For example only members vote at the AGM and a 75% majority is required to pass a decision.

The organisation is growing: five years ago there were 800-1000 members while now there are 1600-1700 members. This has meant an on-going need to review structures and processes to make sure that they are enabling of the participation of all.

The organisation has faced many issues involved with having young people on boards.

- If a board is too large, it can be inefficient, particularly with this structure.
- Smaller numbers are critical but this makes it so much more important to get the right people there (who are capable). Quite often the challenge is about the right people being elected.
- Target younger members so that they can mature within the role.
- Rolling membership of council (there is never an entirely new board).
- Often there is a tendency to go for the people who are most popular or 'out there'. Some may be keen and excited for other reasons: in the past people have found themselves there because 'someone needed to do it'. With the glory of the role, this can be the driving force especially for young people. Those who might be elected are the articulate ones who can always say the right things. So this involves training and educating the membership on the role - perhaps it is not what they thought. The process becomes a good opportunity for self-awareness. Together, through training, CanTeen have been looking at 'reflective practicioning'. "What decisions have I/we made? Was this a good outcome? If so, why?"

What had been missed and needed was a forum for training and understanding. This is a space where people can become much more confident, in a less challenging environment. This new forum (the Members Advisory Council - MAC) is larger and not as publicly glorified as the president of a division. It has a filtering role.

The MAC works closely with the Board of Directors and generally meets the day before each Board meeting (on the Saturday, with the Board meeting on the Sunday), although the Board meets six times a year and the MAC only five. The MAC is run purely by members with the national president facilitating the day and the CEO participating in only a little of the day and some of the preparation. Often a guest will come and facilitate a specific skill training session around things to do with being on a board but also including meeting procedures, leadership and public speaking at formal functions. This provides not only an opportunity for the organisation to strengthen its members' involvement on the Board, but also allows for more rapid, focused and broader involvement of members in growth and change. The MAC is able to devote time to discussion that could never happen before in a committee meeting but also to do this with representation and input from all of CanTeen.

Presidents and the MAC have a large role in finding their own replacements and looking at which members would enjoy, be good at, or could gain a lot from being involved at this level.

What has changed since the introduction of the MAC? The board is more efficient: less bogged down in issues of management. Members' roles have really developed, which in turn has made the associates more productive as they try and keep up. There is a lot more opportunity for clarity of roles. MACs have given a lot more opportunity for developing skills, and provided a visible pathway where people realise 'I can do this'. Before this, people could get elected straight to the Board. Now there are more steps involved and these are more focusing and challenging.

6. Honouring each other

Some key areas of formal relationship in group structures and processes that have been prominent in this research include:

- Recruitment, representation and membership;
- Clarity of roles and responsibilities (eg job descriptions);
- Rites of passage;
- Mentoring and buddying;
- Leaving and succession.

Each of these points is about connectedness: young people's sense of being part of something bigger. However each is also about facilitating or enabling young people's own contribution to the whole. A rationale for each of these points is explored below, as well as some tools and ideas from the work of other groups.

6.1 Recruitment and representation

a) *Rationale*

This is probably the most contentious issue surrounding youth participation. In this research, the young people have highlighted that it is also vitally important for them. Those who are most in need of representation are often the least represented on boards and committees.

b) *Tools*

Respondents had useful suggestions for tools in three areas:

Avoiding tokenism

'My response is that for a steering committee you need to choose and nominate the right people. It's a personal thing. I don't like to single each sector out - one of each sector: that's tokenistic. We try to get someone because of what they will bring to the group.' (Ben)

See also Appendix E: How to find the right young people?

Involving those who are not 'committee' people

'Young people don't have to be attending board meetings; they can be working through technology, radio, writing or focus groups.' (Adam)

'It was a recommendation to the National Youth Roundtable that representation be achieved through dance, drama and music.' (Ben)

The challenge is then to forge the links between these more accessible domains and the decision-making processes. Here it is useful to have a model of different layers of involvement, and channels for communication between these.

Consultation

'It's important when you are a youth rep to also have access to a wider youth body that you can consult.' (Adam)

'Those who are given representative positions need to consult widely.' (Adrian)

Respondents felt that, if they were selected as representatives, consultation needed to be structured into their job descriptions.

Take a session to discuss this: How can your group put these three ideas into practice?

6.2 Job descriptions

a) *Rationale*

In interviews, respondents highlighted the lack of clarity about what they were meant to be doing in their role. Sometimes this made them confused.

b) *Tools*

Alongside the young people with whom you work, brainstorm each person's understanding of their role. Some of the different understandings may be surprising. Over time, try to create one paragraph that sums up responsibilities, accountabilities, and support. Let everyone know this, and make space for extra edits.

A useful extra step may be to create a document that defines the project's duration, and outlines key tasks for that time.

c) *How other groups are doing it*

Case study: RUMad

Impressive job descriptions and process guides

RUMad supports school-based action projects to promote social justice through social change. This includes student-run philanthropic bodies set up within schools, so that students can support social projects that they care about. (Education Foundation, 2002)

The funding body has an impressive collection of resources on-line, including a manual of what happens when, who does it, who is responsible for what, and how.

See: <http://www.rumad.org.au/>

6.3 Rites of passage

In this research, the young people's stories talked of the ways that organisations recognised young people who become leaders. These were powerful experiences that commemorated a change of status.

'The [interview and training] process that we went through created a sense of something exciting, something that not just anyone could get into.' (Adam)

'The underlying belief of the program was that, to be an effective leader, you must have a clear understanding of yourself. Many of the activities were meant to 'break you' physically, emotionally and spiritually so that you could see how you would react under pressure... I am not a sporty person and so to go abseiling, caving and hiking

was a real challenge and so it was the best emotion to be pushed to the limit and survive... The camp pushed me to my limit and took me well outside of my comfort zone. It was so hard and stressful at the time, but afterwards, for some strange reason, I got a feeling of great satisfaction.' (Gabrielle)

a) Rationale

The young people's stories illustrate the importance of attending to the events and milestones that are sometimes so obvious that they get completely overlooked.

b) Tools

Work through this checklist in a brainstorming session. For each point, ask the question: How might we do this well?

- Welcoming new members;
- Celebrating milestones in group life (which ones matter to us? Projects completed? New beginnings?);
- Celebrating milestones in individual lives (eg, birthdays, graduations);
- Acknowledging new skills learned;
- Honouring those who are leaving.

c) How other groups are doing it

The most traditional youth organisations (scouts, guides etc) provide role models and a simple formula that has worked for them for decades: badges, certificates, initiations, ceremonies. Are there other (context sensitive) ways of acknowledging significant changes that fit with your group?

6.4 Mentors

The young people in this research wanted to give out 'bouquets' for this one. Every individual could point to at least one significant mentor who had had a huge influence on the way that things had turned out for them.

a) Rationale

Mentors are the best-kept secret weapons. In their own stories of progress, or 'how I got here', respondents repeatedly singled out mentors and buddy systems as being the most helpful. These may have been formal relationships (structured as part of an organisation) or informal (intentional but unstructured).

Equally significantly, the young people who had experienced one or more barriers to their participation and who were then asked about what had helped them to overcome these barriers, also consistently singled out the role of mentors.

b) Tools

Here is one definition of a mentor and that person's role. It has emerged from other recent research with young people and may prove useful in this instance:

Mentors translate or re-translate reality, bringing new stories, languages and meanings. Significant characteristics of the relationships include trust, mutual respect and two-way flows of communication. The most effective mentors are those who know richly the respondent's own universe of meaning. They are fluent in the young person's stories, schema (concepts), theories, themes, passions and convictions, in their languages of words and other symbols. The relationships involve mutual opportunities for translating the world, and pointing out why new things could be possible or 'relevant'. (Wierenga, 2002)

A question for young people (of all ages!) to discuss: How would you describe the qualities of the mentors who most shaped your life? From those learnings, what might you put into practice for other young people now?

b) How other groups are doing it

As well as a role in smoothing and facilitating group process, this may provide one way for experienced young people to give something back to younger participants on boards and committees.

Case study: Sydney Water Board A good process bouquet

Adrian tells: "The Sydney Water Board looked at how to better protect the environment. I was a youth representative. I was only 15. We went to look at the projects that we made decisions about, and went on tours of the company facilities so that we had an overview of what we were doing. In terms of giving something back, I had a mentor. My mentor was very experienced and I was able to get lots of advice. The time we spent together was not so much about the project but about the things I was interested in. Career-wise, it opened up my mind. I learned so much."

6.5 Succession:

a) *Rationale*

Young people and children are in a unique position. Every few years their most expert members and representatives become too old and are disqualified from membership. Every group is likely to be faced at some time with the following questions:

- When does a young person cease to be young?
- How long is a term of office?
- How do we handle 'succession'?
- When they get older are there ways for them to stay connected and share their wisdom?

b) *Tools*

Ask the questions above.

Write the answers down and review your responses regularly.

Have a quiet conversation with those who are leaving about what it means to them. Explore with them if they would like a break or would like to continue sharing their accumulated wisdom with younger members in some other role.

c) *How other groups are thinking about it*

This is how one group has been thinking about *succession* issues. These are early days for the idea; these are plans rather than practice.

Case Study: Duke of Edinburgh Award *Succession and mentoring: keeping them close*

The Duke of Edinburgh's Award is an international leadership in action program, available to all young people aged between 14 and 25 years. Nationally, there are currently around 30,000 young people involved (Duke of Edinburgh, 2002). The Award consists of **three levels**, each demanding a different amount of effort and commitment: bronze - for those 14 years and over; silver - for those 15 years and over; gold - for those 16 years and over. At the successful completion of each level, participants receive a certificate and badge that are recognised in over 70 countries around the world, as recognition for their efforts. For each of these levels, participants are required to undertake one activity in each of the following categories: service, skill, physical recreation, expedition, and residential project (gold only). In Victoria, this is now a recognised part of the secondary college program. (This material comes from the organisation's web-page at: <http://www.dukeofed.org.au>).

Peter Lamb (20) is a Victorian State Board member of the Duke of Edinburgh Award program. Peter explained: "The Duke of Edinburgh is a generalised award - anyone can do it. It teaches people to set and achieve goals. This is a vehicle to achieve skills, and also an end in itself."

Our interview focused on some new developments within the Duke of Edinburgh Award, surrounding plans for *an integrated mentoring scheme* and a *Certificate in Mentoring*. Peter talked of recognising the vital role of mentoring in his own development, and in the development of others. Organisations often recognise the wider significance of 'mentoring' but there are no mechanisms to teach people how to do these things. He explained that, earlier this year, the Board adopted a roadmap of mentoring, and decided, in principle, to create a *mentor network*. In our interview, we talked about the shape that this might take.

Peter said: "This is about 'life-mentoring'. We are seeking to structure an active community from those who have already gone though, and benefited from, the award." He explained that, as young people finished, they tended to disappear, and that a huge wealth of knowledge and skill - an entire resource base - went with them. Meanwhile, 'Friends of the Award' has demonstrated that people will stick with an organisation if given an infrastructure that works for them.

With voluntary organisations, responsibility is so often given to young people before they are prepared. Often young people are given responsibilities that they are not capable of executing, which can be destructive, demoralising, and confusing for those involved (he is speaking from personal experience here).

He said, "We particularly need to allow opportunities to involve young people aged 20 to 30 years. By this stage they tend to have drifted off. People do need a break. Many get lost in Year 12 with a million things to focus on - including leaving home. The significant message that we need to promote is that this is OK: 'the award is a family and you can always come back to us'. If you want to take a break, do so. People might do 4 or 5 years' work and travel ... then they are ready. They come with increased skills and life-experience."

"The other group that we need to work well with are those who are busy having their families between 30 and 40. These are people who may contribute to the organisation, not as mentors, but as a resource network to be called on from time to time - with either money or expertise. People will give money, but only to those that they know. The thing that is likely to scare people off volunteering is the demand that it will place on energies at a busy time of life. This calls for a change of culture: seeking to establish a 'work-life' balance. These people do have energy but we need to focus it so that it is useful energy."

The plan is to offer an integrated ***Certificate in Mentoring***. "We need to develop a coherent training pattern with its own system of volunteer recognition - to give them soft skills, skills in business: mentoring skills; leadership and decision-making; event coordination; time-management; advanced people management skills. This is where we start giving back to them. We can buy this training in from the leadership. What I want to offer mentors is one module every six months etc - no more - for example, while they do uni."

"Each person mentors five young people doing the award. Those who deliver results consistently will move up the hierarchical structure, becoming a mentor to five mentors. Each person will mentor the ones below. At the same time, they will help us by sustaining the loop. If we recruit 100 and 20 stay, perhaps 10 will stay long term. At every level I hope to offer something different."

Peter is the architect of the scheme which is currently in formation. He explained further: "What scares people off volunteering is the idea that it's a boundless commitment. So what we're asking from our mentors is one hour per month, and one big fundraising function per year. In the one hour, they are to ring the five young people who they mentor, and ask how they are doing. The fundraising function will also be a network-growing event. So, in this way, we are asking a little from a lot rather than a lot from a few."

As well as being a system of support and personal development for young people, Peter sees this kind of thinking as vital to an organisation. "Large number of charities rationalise and merge. We can no longer be dependent on government

grants. It is about good use of a community support base. This is about playing to people's strengths and creating leverage from resources. There is a phenomenal amount of skills and resources in the networks."

Peter sees the wider community as growing further apart and that the network will "pull people back together". "We are looking for a form of integration, so that it becomes a part of people's lives to give something back to the community. The flip-side is that they are given back something tangible, and a lot faster than in business."

Peter explains: "This is about teaching young people skills of today." This may well be a strategic solution for busy lives in the 2000s. Where many group programs are time-invasive (group based), and also not pro-active in terms of developing members' skills, this one is non-invasive (not group based, and it happens in an individual's own time) but pro-active.

This system also requires incremental and controlled growth. Peter says: "It would be counter-productive to grow too big too fast with no structure. We do need to drive it like a business. We need to start with six regional mentors who would need to be exceptional people. I believe we are looking for MBA people - with 'soft skills'. We are a business - we are in the business of developing youth. This is also about succession planning - if we train now, by the time we move on, others will have the skills to run the organisation because they have been working systematically with each of our senior people."

"There is no reason that this *Certificate in Mentoring* shouldn't be a shared thing. For example, perhaps eventually we, the Scout movement and Rotary could run a scheme together."

7. Nurturing informal relationships

a) *Rationale*

In this research, young people noted that an important part of what works for young people in decision-making are the informal connections to their group.

Beyond this research, the literature says:

- Quality of work and output is a function of the quality of relationships (OECD, 2001);
- Young people only ever access resources through trust relationships. Resources of any kind (practical, ideas, practices) only flow through trust relationships. Those who have fewer trust relationships can access fewer resources (Wierenga, 2002);
- The trust relationships through which resources flow is often called social capital (Putnam, 1995; Putnam, 2001; Cox, 1995);
- There are two types of social capital. Bonding (within groups) and bridging (links outside the group) (Putnam, 2000: 22; Cullen and Whiteford, 2001: 10). Both are important.

b) *Tools*

With your group:

- Spend a session focusing on possible group bonding activities – invite a brainstorm;
- Structure the best six ideas into the year's calendar;
- Spend a session stocktaking the networks and resources that exist between you.

Now while we're on this topic Please go to the next page...

Sharing a New Story:

Networks and Networking

The Australian Youth Research Centre is happy to be a gathering point for your stories about young people in decision-making: what you are doing, what works and what gets in the way. Please only send us your story if you are happy to have it circulated more widely.

A Storytelling Template

(for those who would like to use it)

- What happened?

- Who did it?

- Why and how?

- What did we learn?

Add extra pages as necessary ...

Name: _____
Date: _____

We are happy to have this story shared with other groups.

(Sign and mail to the addresses on the following page.)

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Appendix A

Research participants

Participants were initially contacted through The Foundation for Young Australians' mailing list. All are aged between 15-21 years, and are from every state and territory in Australia. As the list shows, they have diverse and rich experience in leadership and decision making. There was an even spread of females and males involved. The cohort also included several young people who had overcome at least one significant barrier to participation (eg physical or mental health, socio-economic background).

Through conversations in the field, it became clear that there were others who also had an illuminating story to tell. Five of these young people were followed up for interviews, but it was beyond the scope of project to pursue all leads. Within the group interviewed, there were recurring ideas and an early 'saturation' of themes. Between them, the young people involved in this study brought a wide range of experiences to this project:

- Member of the Premier's Youth Advisory Council, which reports directly to the Premier on youth affairs;
- Advisory position to the state Motor Accidents Authority;
- Youth representative to the district Water Authority;
- Youth representative to Youth Road Safety Program 2002/2003;
- Member of the Executive Committee of a state Youth Affairs Council;
- Convenor of the Youth Affairs Council's youth representative committee;
- Many levels of participation from a small local community based operation to large scale national forums;
- Active members on many government and non-government boards and committees;
- Delegate to an inter-generational world conference with political leaders and youth activists from all over the world;
- Involved in a University as a student representative on various University committees;
- A trainee with the Australian Council of Trade Unions;
- Assistant Coordinator for the state Youth Council of St John's Ambulance;
- Cadet Leader at a Band Cadet Division;
- Currently a State Board Member of the Duke of Edinburgh's Program;
- Started a club at a University;
- Peer Support Leader in grade 10; volleyball captain of a team for two years; Senior Prefect; captain of tennis team; volleyball coach for three years; leader for Grade 7 camps; teacher at Sunday School; media officer for the local netball club; assistant secretary for netball club; and a coordinator for leaders of Year 7 camp; winner of the Lions Youth of the Year Award at local and zone level; winner of a leadership award at the VCE Conference; winner of many sporting awards; currently completing the Duke of Edinburgh's Gold Award;
- Associated with the Duke of Edinburgh Award since 1998,
- A member of a youth advisory committee;
- Kayaking instructor;
- State youth roundtable member, and one time facilitator;
- Shire youth council;
- A leader with Guides Australia for many years;
- Youth group leader;
- Members of student representative councils and bodies throughout high school and university;
- Chronic illness peer support group member;
- Youth 'facilitator' of Drug Arm;
- CanTeen National Chairperson;
- Member of Foundation for Young Australians, Strategy in Action Committee;
- Member of Foundation for Young Australians, State Grant-maker Committee.

We have separated the names from the details so that they could tell their stories with impunity. Some people are associated with several of these dot-points; some dot points are shared by several people.

We would like to acknowledge the stories of Ben Kilsby, Philip Jackson, Peter Lam, Prue Addelm, 'Jo', Kylie Wilmot, Gabrielle Trenbath, Olivia Vidakovic, Ruvani Panagoda, Jessie Kelly, Adrian Henry, Jeff Brennan, Anna Wood, Helen Jackson, Scott Dawkins, Belinda Paterson, Callum Smith, Gabrielle Trenbath, Kristiana Kilvert, Jeff Brennan, Adam Smith, and Alison Bagsworth.

Appendix B

Tools and documents developed for this research

The letter sent out to the mailing list:

Hello J

At The Foundation for Young Australians (FYA), we're doing a bit of research over the next few weeks, and we think that some of you might be exactly the 'insiders' that we're looking for.

Basically, we're seeking out young people who are (or have been - even for a short time) leaders or decision-makers within clubs, groups, schools, charities and other organisations, and who would be happy to share stories of their experiences with us in an interview or small group.

The FYA is putting together resources for organisations that would like to think about involving young people in leadership and decision-making (which is important, we think!). So we'd like to hear from you about the ways you have been involved, what works, what definitely doesn't and what gets in the way- especially from those who have some front-line experience.

The person heading up the research is me (Ani), and none of you probably would have met me. I'm into gourmet cooking, running and pottery. I'm also ex-youth worker and now a youth researcher based at the University of Melbourne who is interested in issues like this. My next few weeks will be spent splashing around in this project and learning a lot. Care to join me?

If so, please make contact ASAP.

An interview would take about an hour. A focus group would take about two hours. They would be in or around Melbourne, and would happen between now and the end of the first week in November. If you are further away, we would also love to hear from you.

In addition, we are wondering if there are some of you who would like to check out research from the inside - being a researcher and writer in this project with other young people; maybe you know someone else who you would dearly like to interview as part of this project?

What's in it for you:

- Research experience - for example being interviewed, being in a focus group (group interview) and/or conducting interview (good for the CV);
- A good chance to think about some important issues - unpack your own experiences - either one-on-one or as a group;
- A ready supply of chocolate.

If you are keen, please get back to me on the e-mail over the next few days:

wierenga@unimelb.edu.au

I'll e-mail you back and we'll take it from there.

Speak to you soon,

Ani Wierenga

Young People in Decision Making: More about the Research

The Big Question

What can organisations do to best resource, equip and facilitate young people for decision-making roles?

Ani's Research Aims

To complete this research before 30/11 with:

- a) a good written summary of who is doing what, where, globally in terms of young people and decision making (eg examples of best practice, good theory, good thinking);
- b) some relevant, insightful, and fascinating Australian stories about young people in leadership and decision making roles: what works what gets in the way; best practice, worst practice, the patterns, and stories from the battle-front. (This is mostly where you come in);
- c) a tool, model and checklist, to facilitate good practice, based upon what we have learned from both A and B. FYA plan to share this with other organisations who are seeking to involve young people in leadership and decision making. This, as you can guess, is a direction that they are keen to encourage as they liaise closely with community groups; ie this is going to be useful.

For part A, I've been working through a heap of written material here, but I know that some of you will have picked up other precious resources and written documents in your travels. Are there any you are keen to share? I'm happy to photocopy things and send them back. If you send me your address on the e-mail, I'll get some stamps out to you.

For part B I'll be seeking to interview you all (either myself, or via one of your colleagues) within the next couple of weeks (see e-mail). Also, if you would like to write a short story about your own experiences, and what these have taught you or what this might teach others, that would be brilliant. Just send them in!

Part C will grow from what you teach us. It will be complete by the end of November (OK- so I'm not doing much else until then!).

All submissions and interviewees can have names changed, if you request it, in order to protect individuals and organisations. On the other hand, we might want to give an honorary mention to groups that are doing things particularly well, so let's negotiate this as we talk.

Young People in Decision Making: Preparation for Interviews and Starting Questions

If you've got a story (or 3) to tell, this list of starting questions (below) might be a good way in. Feel free to be creative and don't be locked in by the format; it is just a starting point.

If you have time to explore this and email it back before your interview:

- it might help you to name some of the relevant issues before we start asking you deep questions about them out of the blue;
- it will help us to go deeper in the interview – to 'mine' more of your insights, because a lot of the basic stuff will be already in front of us;
- and if you want to 'flag' certain issues as important, we will pick up on these in interviews.

This 'preparation' bit is for those who have time. A couple have indicated that they have exams at the moment, so please don't stress.

- Can you name the leadership or decision-making role(s) where you feel that you have been most effective?
- How did you know that/what made you feel like/you were being effective?
- What does an experience like this do for you (eg what it taught you, how it grew you)?
- For the organisation?
- For the community?
- What are the things that led to this leadership experience? (formal processes or informal processes - perhaps make a flow-diagram?) eg friendship > joined as junior > etc
- Did the organisation intend to have young people in leadership and decision making? If so, how had they structured this process, and what was most helpful to you?
- Least helpful to you?
- Are there other stories (like these) that you could tell about your worst experience of a leadership or decision making role?
- Can you tell us about any other experiences in leadership and decision-making (eg short list or dotpoint)

Thank you. Looking forward to unpacking this some more with you!

Ani

Young people in decision making: Notes for interviewers

Thanks for doing this. Please keep track of any expenses (phone, petrol, stationary, etc) and I'll gladly reimburse you from project funds.

Researcher Preparation

- I'll supply a couple of contacts. These people have connected with this research in the same way that you did: through the FYA mailout. You can tee up interview time - these are a bunch of people who have already proved that they function well through email. When setting up, allow an hour on the phone or up to 90 minutes face-to-face.
- Big notepad and pen essential.
- When teeing up an interview time, suggest that the respondent might like to look through the 'preparation and starting questions' that were attached to my initial group email. Perhaps they could think into them and scribble a few notes. If they think that they might write something and email it through to you prior to the interview, you could exchange email addresses. They probably won't do this but a couple have! (Can I also have a copy of any data that they send you?) If they do, you can pursue what they've written further by asking them questions about it, or we could work up some new questions together. But mostly they won't write. People do seem to be really happy to read the questions and think into them - and that's proved really helpful in interviews because they come with an idea of what they want to share.
- Questions (below) can happen in any order: these are just areas to cover before they finish telling their story. In all my years of interviewing I've found that it is better to flow with the conversation - following all the leads that they give you (much greater depth), rather than hemming their replies into the written format.
- Some respondents will be talking about their own experiences of leadership and decision making, while others may be talking more about involving other young people. It is worth establishing the focus at the beginning of the interview, by getting a brief overview of where they've been. Some will talk about specific experiences and others will be able to talk about some of the patterns that they see.
- If respondents are able to share experiences of young people or themselves in leadership roles that are policy, community-based or philanthropic organisations - ie not all youth-

based or about simply youth leading youth - it would be good if you can focus in there. This is an area in which the FYA have shown a particular interest - and there is already a lot more written about young people in leadership roles in youth organisations.

- If you run out of time or if the conversation takes on its own life and some questions just don't fit, go with it. The aim is to collect rich data, great stories, great examples, excellent quotes, inspiring ideas... not thin data about lots of things.
- Check the last page of this document on 'writing up your notes' and this will help you to sort ideas while you are interviewing and taking notes.

Opening the interview: Introduction and aims

1. Introduce yourself and find out who they are.
2. **Aims.** Through these interviews:
 - We want to hear what organisations are doing and what organisations can do, to encourage and facilitate young people in decision making;
 - We hope to unearth both some stories (grounded examples) and some patterns (or principles) of 'what works' and 'what gets in the way' (ie best practice or worst practice in terms of encouraging and facilitating young people in leadership and decision making);
 - Explain that we are particularly interested in what organisations are doing well and badly, and what we can learn from this. Their own stories of where they have been effective leaders will give us a lot of pointers towards good process.
3. Explain that the interview format is flexible and that they may have particular stories that they feel it is important to tell.

Questions

1. Mapping what we need to talk about:
 - Can you explain briefly about your experiences in leadership and decision-making (eg short list or dot-point): 'Where have you been and how did you get there?';
 - Alternative question - how did you get here? (kind of flow-chart?)
 - In light of the research goals, are there particular things that you want to share in this interview?

-
2. Best and worst practice:
- Can you name the leadership or decision-making role(s) where you feel that you have been most effective?
 - How did you know that/what led you feel like/you were being effective?
 - What does an experience like this do for you (eg what it taught you, how it grew you)?
 - For the organisation?
 - For the community?
 - How did you arrive at this leadership experience? (formal processes or informal processes)
 - Did the organisation intend to have young people in leadership or decision making? If so, how had they structured this process, and what was most helpful to you?
 - Least helpful to you?
 - Are there other stories (like these) that you could tell about your worst experience of a leadership or decision-making role?
 - Advice for this organisation and other organisations based upon this experience?
 - How would you structure
3. Topics to unpack or a Checklist (if they haven't already been drawn into conversation):
- Stories of most helpful or least helpful examples of:
- Recruitment;
 - Job description;
 - Kind of training or apprenticeship for the task;
 - Optimal adult-youth arrangements and understandings;
 - Hand-over;
 - Mentors;
 - Time serving in role;
 - Optimal support in role, and what it looks like (eg briefing, debriefing);
 - Leaving or exit process.
- Thank the respondent and tell them what has been particularly helpful in this interview;
 - Check which organisations are to be named, which are to remain un-named, and whether they want their own name used or a pseudonym;
 - Ani hasn't forgotten about the chocolate; she just got snowed under by enthusiastic respondents.

Writing up your notes:

- You can do these as stories;
- Use as many quotes as you like;
- Or you can do them as principles (eg organisations need to think about... for example...);
- Work to the four headings, but if you want to add an extra heading, feel welcome:
 1. The things that lead young people into leadership and decision making roles (brief stories, flowcharts, patterns);
 2. The things that facilitate, help or equip young people in these roles. Are there things that organisations are doing that really worked in this case (stories)?;
 3. The things that get in the way;
 4. Room for improvement, stories, learnings, advice about ways ahead?

A final question for you:

Can you share some reflections about being involved in this research?

Closing the interview

- Briefly run over your notes and explain the main things that you believe the respondent has taught you (they will probably tell you more at this point!);

Research Assistant Job Description: Young People in Decision Making

Employer: Australian Youth Research Centre

Employee: Anna Wood

Task 1

The research assistant shall liaise with the researcher in the collecting and preliminary evaluation of relevant materials.

The literature and internet search will be pertaining to:

- The involvement of young people in decision making;
- The extent of involvement of young people in leadership and decision making in community, political and philanthropic organisations;
- Working models: where it's working and what it looks like.

Focusing on what has been happening with young people in decision making in Australia, ie who is involving young people, and where and how, to do what.

1. Government and policy

Nationally (eg round tables, advisory groups)

States (reference groups, round tables, peak bodies)

Local government (eg YACs)

2. Philanthropic Trusts

3. Community groups

4. Any recurring:

- issues,
- struggles,
- stunning solutions, and
- great models?

Outcomes:

- 1 pile of paper
- 1 summary

Task 2: (negotiated later)

Explore the following topics:

- What is happening overseas?
- If you were to name 'best practice' in what you see, what would it be and why?

Outcomes:

- 1 pile of paper
- 1 summary

Appendix C

Being involved in this research: younger researchers' reflections

It has been mostly a 30-something-year-old voice that you have heard throughout this document. These are the unedited reflections from the rest of the research team: Anna, Gabrielle, Jessie, and Olivia.

Anna's reflections

Hi folks, my name is Anna Wood. I have had an active interest in the thing we call 'youth participation' for a number of years now, so jumped at the opportunity to be a part of this research.

I have been involved in youth participation since I became a 'youth'. I have been involved in several programs involving young people's participation so was able to look at the questions and literature wearing a few different hats. I'm currently studying Social Work at University and look forward to applying what I have learnt to all my future endeavours. The following are my observations of being part of the research and of the literature I read.

My involvement in this research has been two-fold. First the process of being on the other side of the fence as an interviewee. My own time constraints demonstrated how involving young people requires a large degree of flexibility and understanding. Not only when you meet with them but understanding that they (we I should say) have to balance commitments in our lives too. Sure, we don't have to juggle business meetings or picking the kids up from school but we do have essays to worry about, classes to attend, our own families and the inherent problems that arise from those, and who knows what else, that we have to contend with. Secondly, I have gained some practical and applied experience in research. This demonstrated to me what is expected of a researcher, the demands put upon these professionals by timelines and due dates, as well as the struggle associated with balancing several projects simultaneously. They teach us a bit about research at Uni but conveniently neglect to mention the pressures that are a part of it.

When reading the material I had gathered, there were several things that struck me as being absent or overlooked in a lot of the articles. The first problem I saw was that the language of the material isn't young people friendly. Whilst I realise that the target audience is largely professional people, I think that it would be beneficial to have the language friendlier. This would enable young people who are involved in professional environments to examine and be aware of the expectations placed on them by the organisation.

I also noticed that the majority of the articles either ignore or gloss over the fact that there are problems and issues to be addressed when involving young people in programs and initiatives. If Youth Participation is to be taken seriously and be seriously undertaken, there needs to be more honest disclosure of the hurdles that can be involved.

Another omission that caught my attention was that there were few articles that had young people as authors. The young people who were involved were obviously unsupported and unfunded, as their final products were not something that I could see professionals (or myself) taking seriously. Whilst I understand that it is a fairly big undertaking to write such material, if written in conjunction with a professional 'expert' it would be possible to write an inclusive document. The final product, I believe, would be more young person friendly and would have greater validity when talking of why young people want to be involved, what problems young people face when they are involved, how best to structure involvement, how to communicate effectively, how to maintain enthusiasm and so on. Obviously it should be recognised within the document that, although there are inherent benefits to having young people involved in writing about participation, the young people who are authors of the document are not speaking for all young people, but are basing their information on their own observations, experiences and understandings.

I was excited when I read an article that contained a critique of the word 'youth'. For a long time I have, like a number of people I know, been of the opinion that the word itself should be stricken from the English language. Why my beef? The word brings with it all sorts of negative associations. It turns young people into a whole separate category of beings: they aren't human, they aren't simply people who haven't been around for a half century or so, they certainly aren't members of the community, but have to be separated into their own category, the dreaded 'youth'. The word brings with it the assumption that all young people are a part of categories or victims of the same issues - 'youth crime', 'youth unemployment' or 'youth drunkenness' - by tacking the word 'youth' onto something, it must be negative (YACWA Bulletin, Issue 4, September 2002). These are just a few of my problems with the word, but I'm sure I'm preaching to the converted and you have your own sets of reasons.

It occurred to me that the term 'youth' is used widely due to its convenience; after all, it is a whole two syllables shorter than saying 'young people'. So, if I go on a campaign to end laziness, the rest will follow? Ah, the unrealistic dreams of 'youth'.

I noticed that a lot of government initiatives across the globe were done for young people. This continues to amaze me, as it defeats the purpose and spirit of young people participating if they are not free to design their own structures and coordinate their own initiatives.

I would like to thank Ani Wierenga emphatically for the opportunity to be a part of the research, for trusting enough to give young people the chance to participate in something we are so passionate about, and giving us the opportunity to have our two cents.

Gabrielle's afterthoughts

What struck me about the interviews with Alison and Helen is that most young people contribute a great deal to the community without recognition and they have a good relationship with those in authority as long as there is some give and take on both sides. It taught me that young people are keen to get involved but require some of encouragement and support to get started. Once they do, young people make a positive contribution to Australian society. It has also taught me that the people who are involved need some kind of support structure, which could be a combination of mentoring and informal encouragement as well as more structured activities that allow them to become more effective in their work.

My question is how to match up young people with community activities and opportunities to make a positive change. At the moment, opportunities such as DrugArm are not very well publicised and people only find out about them through friends or through contact (eg Schoolies week) with the organisation. It is not even events such as Schoolies week, but it is the whole idea of trying to change society and the world that is hidden. As a result, volunteering does not become very mainstream and that could be why there are a lot of disempowered groups in society because people don't have access to opportunities that help to develop skills to speak out. Maybe it is a cultural issue, where those who usually volunteer are white, middle-class and educated. On the other hand, maybe not. I think that those who volunteer represent a variety of socio-economic groups but the reasons for being involved are different.

Both Helen and Alison, without realising it, talked about their situation in a way that represented other young people. It was obvious that being involved in the community came naturally to both of them and it could be because of background they were able to contribute.

It would be so good to try and develop strategies to ensure that all people get a chance to be empowered and able to have an impact on society. The next team to do this project should go down to the parks, train stations and fast food outlet to ask any kid that looks bored and lost what is going on in their lives. Maybe that is a wrong way to look at things: if you have leaders you also need followers. It would be good to see how the young people in leadership positions could include other young (and older) people better in their activities and how those in decision-making roles could represent people better on local and national committees. So, instead of focusing on those who are in leadership and decision making positions, focus on those who are not and see how we can do thing better.

Jessie's editorial

Kristiana's experiences illustrate some key points concerning the creation of productive groups involving youth leadership. As illustrated through her stories, some of the most important characteristics of a successful relationship include:

- **Respect**

Respect is the glue that keeps the group together despite their differences. Whilst parties within the group may disagree over personal matters or otherwise, respect allows for the parties to acknowledge the underlying value of other parties within group. This lays the foundation for effective communication as parties are prepared to listen, as members recognise the value of what each member has to say. Respect was the basis for the relationship between Kristiana and the girls in her group, allowing her to gain their trust.

Kristiana's experiences in the school fencing team demonstrate how a lack of respect can result in disunity within the group. When the school disrespected her ideas and enthusiasm, she became frustrated with them. Many in her situation would have quit the team, although she did not. How can any group progress if the members are not prepared to listen?

- **Trust**

Trust may be a by-product of respect and is directly linked to the productivity of the group. More importantly, all parties involved must trust each other for a group to function properly. If one or more members are consistently wary of the other members, then those members will be reluctant to be forthcoming with ideas that they may have. Furthermore, the time they spend covering themselves, is time that could be spent on the project at hand. If the girls at the YMCA camp had not trusted Kristiana, they would not have respected or supported her. They may not have told her their ideas or shared their thoughts. Time that could have been spent completing challenges may have been spent on whingeing and complaining about her. They probably would have been disrespectful and hard to deal with as she imagined they would be.

As was reported, this was not the case. The creation of a trusting community facilitated a mechanism for communication and learning. Similarly, in my lab, the trusting environment facilitates efficiency and productivity. To trust the people who represent you is to free you mind of worry, enabling you to concentrate on the task at hand.

- **Support**

Support is the commitment to assist and encourage other members, and is critical for the long-term survival of the group. Support may come from

members within the group and external parties who are not directly group members. Supporting someone is not having all the answers to their challenges, but being prepared to explore the challenges together with them to find the best possible solution. Through the support at the YMCA camp, everyone involved developed as a person, which is surely the best possible solution.

Kristiana realised the value of support when she was leader of the fencing team. She acknowledged the need for assistance and sought to introduce new members (the parents) into the team who could fulfil the role of supporters. This is not to say that only certain members of the group may support other members, only that some members may specialise in this role.

- **Understanding**

Understanding occurs when the unit is working well together. It allows members to recognise the special talents that each member brings to the group and use these talents to maximise the group's potential. Furthermore, it acknowledges the weaknesses of and the differences between members within the group and of the group as a whole, so that those issues can be worked around.

This occurs in my lab, where we recognise the skills of our qualified physicians, who can communicate more effectively with other physicians in the hospital than we can. In turn, the physicians recognise our scientific knowledge of the field in which we work. The skills of one member compensates for the weaknesses of another. Through group communication, we maximise our effectiveness as a laboratory in the clinical field and as researchers in the scientific field.

These characteristics are inter-connected: the presence of one such characteristic will give rise to the others. Each characteristic is equally as important as another, so a group should not aim to develop one particular characteristic over another. However, where a new group is being formed, respect is an easy characteristic to start with. (This is not to say that respect must come first, only one option.) If each party agrees to respect the integrity and individuality of the other parties, as well as to acknowledge that the group has a common goal to which all are committed, then this is a fundamental step to a successful relationship. Part of the commitment to the group should be to support all parties concerned. This commitment to a common goal provides a platform for trust and understanding to grow.

My thoughts on being involved in the research

Receiving an email inviting youth to participate in a study on the role of youth in leadership and decision making was rather refreshing. Whilst much has been written on the role of youth in these processes, I've been told that few of these papers were written by

youth. As a forty-something aged writer for **The Age** told me, 'I've written articles about youth arguing that I shouldn't be writing about them. That's their job.'

I think that many youth would be happy to be involved in leadership and decision-making on some scale, but the perception of how they will be received is a major turnoff. Having an unpleasant experience with leadership may delay a person's inclination to try again, especially if they see their age as being one of the predisposing factors to that experience. For others, it is the damage to their self-confidence that results in a reluctance to be involved. Even knowing someone who has had problems in a leadership role can discourage people from trying it themselves.

Perceptions are the biggest enemy of everyone involved in youth leadership and decision-making issues: not only the perceptions of how young people think they will be received, as mentioned above, but also of other people who may believe that youth are selfish and unreliable. Whilst there may have been an element of truth in the experiences from which these perceptions were drawn, many of the difficulties have arisen through misunderstandings between the two parties. Therefore, any plan to conquer the barrier between youth and older generations must have two key elements.

First, there must be acknowledgment by both parties that attitudes towards each other exist. To deny this is to deny that any problem exists. Secondly, there must be a commitment to look beyond these attitudes and keep an open mind. A conscious effort must be made to ensure that challenges faced are blamed on these stereotypes, whether consciously or unconsciously. This leads into respect, because it is about acknowledging a person as an individual, rather than by their stereotype.

This research has given me an opportunity to clarify my feelings on issues involving youth and leadership. Whilst I have much formal leadership training, this was a chance to combine the theory with real life experiences to improve my understanding of the dynamics that occur. Thanks for the opportunity.

Olivia: My reflections about being involved in this project

When I read the email that Ani first sent out about this project, I thought that this project could be something that I would like to participate in. I was right. Initially, I was actually inquiring about being an interviewee but didn't have much time on my hands because of university exams. But luckily, I had the chance to participate as a researcher and writer in the end, which has proved to be an inspiring and fun experience.

I have enjoyed researching and writing and I have learned some new things and ways of looking at things. I also really enjoyed talking to one of the interviewees: Prue. She is a remarkable person with great potential to be anything she wants to be. We talked for about 30 seconds on the phone and then we talked as if we knew each other and as if we were good friends. We got on so well and from what I understand, that is just how she is with people. She has great social skills and talking to her encouraged me to be a better person. It also showed me there still are some really good people out there who really care about others and who are willing to put their time in to help make a difference to everybody, regardless of their economic or social standing.

As I interviewed, stories reminded me of when I was in leadership positions, in particular, when I was a Prefect at high school. That was the best time of my life and the most rewarding experience. I think schools need Prefects to help represent the students and the teachers. Without this form of youth leadership and liaison, I don't think the students would respect the system as much.

This research has made me realise that there are organisations out there that are trying to help the youth become leaders, as the youth of today are the leaders of tomorrow. These times see us with limited prospects for youth who have had no work experience. Many employers will not even employ inexperienced waitresses and other sectors that don't really require that much knowledge. So with this, comes more dependency on the government for money to live, and also, with that, a discouragement for youth that they don't have the power to change things. However, programs like this help to stop this. It helps make youth realise that there is a big world of opportunity out there for everyone if they lash out of their comfort zones and try new things. Well done and thank you for letting me be a part of this!

Appendix D Indicators

The following is a set of indicators that can be used to gauge how well an organisation involves young people in its processes. To use these tools, sit down separately and rate your organisation for each area, on the scale of 0 to 4. Using these scores, the following chart

will help to evaluate your organisation's current structures and processes, and enable you to compare different people's perceptions, with a view to identifying aspects that might need to change.

(Source: Holdsworth, 2003; after de Kort, 2000.)

A SET OF INDICATORS FOR YOUTH PARTICIPATION

A. Analysing needs and setting objectives

- 0 Adults design and execute the project and might inform young people as the target group
- 1 Young people are consulted in the early stages but ignored later
- 2 Young people are consulted and involved in the execution of the project, but the objectives are set by adults
- 3 Young people are consulted, define the objectives of the project and execute it together with adults
- 4 Young people plan and execute the project and can choose to involve adults

B. Information and communication

- 0 Young people are not informed or consulted
- 1 Information is easily accessible and youth-friendly (one-way information)
- 2 Regular consultative meetings are organised (two-way information)
- 3 Meaningful exchanges occur between young people and adults (collaboration)
- 4 Young people inform each other and possibly adults

C. Decision-making

- 0 Young people are not consulted
- 1 Young people are consulted but not taken seriously
- 2 The views of youth are listened to and acted upon on a regular basis
- 3 Shared decision-making and action occurs and feedback from young people is sought
- 4 Young people have power over the allocation of resources and the direction of the project, but can seek the assistance of adults

D. Administration

- 0 No young administrator
- 1 Young people occasionally help by doing menial tasks on a voluntary basis
- 2 Young people are structurally involved in administrative activities ranging from bookkeeping and typing to conducting research and collecting data
- 3 Young people play an integral part in the day-to-day running of the project
- 4 Administration is effectively controlled by young people, possibly aided by adults

E. Design and implementation of activities

- 0 Designed and run by adults
- 1 Young people are consulted in the design
- 2 Young people partly design and run some of the activities
- 3 Young people design and run activities in cooperation with adults
- 4 Young people design and run all activities, possibly aided by adults

F. Advocacy

1. No involvement of young people
2. Young people are present at public campaigns, but are not involved as organisers
3. Young people are encouraged to provide input on running a campaign
4. Young people take a significant role in forming organisations or unions or participating in public rallies and campaign or contributing to policy papers and public debates
5. Young people handle advocacy issues, possibly aided by adults

G. Service, support and education personnel

- 0 Support is provided only by adults
- 1 Young people are consulted on support-, service- and education-related issues
- 2 Young people are occasionally consulted or made counsellors or educators of other young people
- 3 Young people from the target group are trained to become counsellors or educators of other young people and work alongside adult counsellors or educators
- 4 Young people are the only counsellors or educators available to the target group, possibly trained or assisted by adults

H. Employees

- 0 No young employees
- 1 Young people are employed in jobs not related to project objectives
- 2 Some young people are employed as experts in a peer-related project
- 3 Young people are employed as experts and may be managers
- 4 The project is effectively managed by young professionals

I. Monitoring and evaluation (m&e)

- 0 Undertaken by adults only
- 1 Young people are involved in m&e
- 2 Young people are involved in m&e and its outcomes
- 3 Young people design m&e tools and work with adults
- 4 Young people initiate, design, execute and report on projects, possibly aided by adult experts one-to-one.

Youth Participation Indicators: Assessment sheet

<i>Indicator</i>	<i>Youth score</i>	<i>Adult score</i>	<i>Comments</i>	<i>Proposed action</i>
A. Analysing needs and setting objectives				
B. Information and communication				
C. Decision-making				
D. Administration				
E. Design and implementation of activities				
F. Advocacy				
G. Service, support and education personnel				
H. Employees				
I. Monitoring and evaluation				

Total Score Level Assessment

0-7	0	Project is completely adult driven.
8-15	1	Project is adult driven, but young people are informed and possibly consulted at crucial stages and on important aspects of it. Young people do not have a real voice.
16-23	2	Young people are significantly involved in the project and are likely to develop a sense of ownership.
24-30	3	Young people are involved at all stages and in all aspects of the project and have a strong sense of ownership. A meaningful partnership with adults is achieved.
31-36	4	Young people initiate and are in charge at all crucial stages and of all important aspects of the project. Adults play a minor role, if any.

Appendix E

Extra toolkit resources

How to find the right young people?

Anna writes: So, if you went looking for these young people, where would you go? The following are some suggestions. We're not going to try and give you a complete list, as programs and organisations change, and your needs will be different to someone else's, but here is a start ...

Ani writes: The South Australian Government is alone at this point in having a youth register where both interested young people and interested organisations can sign on and be matched. Some other states only have a register for young people to sign up and, to our knowledge this week, no one else is offering that service to groups ... it is a growth edge, so watch this space. Below are the state contacts so people can get an update on what's happening in their own state. In reality though, it may be a case of tapping into local networks, so we have finally listed a few ideas about that.

- The ACT Department of Education, Youth and Family Services (<http://www.decs.act.gov.au/index.htm>) has a site called *Pogo* that is more centred around young people and has some good information on it. If you look in their 'Be Heard' section, it has some good link pages:
<http://www.pogo.act.gov.au/>
- The NSW Office for Children and Young People has a range of sites covering a variety of issues from health to money to law. There is nothing specific regarding participation but, depending on what you're after, there should be something there for you:
<http://youth.nsw.gov.au/info/ocyp/ocyp1.html>
- The Northern Territory Office of Youth Affairs:
<http://www.nt.gov.au/dcm/images/oia.shtml>
has a site specifically aimed at young people, which has information about all the initiatives they've got going, as well as a links page that could be useful.
- The Queensland Office of Youth Affairs has lots of information on their site:
<http://www.youth.qld.gov.au/>
as well as a site specifically for young people:
<http://www.generate.qld.gov.au/>
Again, this is a good way of seeing what they have going on.
- The South Australian Government has an initiative unique among the states called a **Youth Register**. The young person or organisation fills out an application form and then they are matched so that the young person has the option of being involved in a program that suits their requirements and visa versa.
The address is a bit messy but if you go to:
<http://www.youth.sa.gov.au/youth>
then hit the 'Programs' link on the side, then 'Youth Register', it'll get you there.
They also have other interesting bits and pieces that might be worth a look.
- The Tasmanian Government's Office of Youth Affairs has a website at:
<http://www.youthaffairs.tas.gov.au/>
If you go to their 'Linkzone' and look at their participation section, it has a decent list of programs and organisations that young people might be a part of (as well as some other bits and pieces).
- The Victorian Office for Youth:
<http://www.youth.vic.gov.au/youth/>
has various programs and committees running so if you look through their site, there are some interesting bits there.
- The Western Australian Government's Office for Children and Young People's Policy has lots of good links on their site also. They have a reference group composed of young people who they have easy access to:
<http://www.youthaffairs.wa.gov.au/>

Other bits

Anna writes: The Federal Government has a website that has lots of links to what they are up to. You might see something on there that grabs your attention:

<http://www.youth.gov.au/links/links.htm>

Most states have a Youth Affairs Council of some sort; they are peak bodies so have a lot of connections to organisations and networks within the sector:

Youth Affairs Network of Tasmania:

<http://www.ynot.org.au>

Youth Action and Policy Association (NSW):

<http://www.yapa.org.au>

Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia:

<http://www.yacwa.org.au>

Youth Affairs Council of South Australia:

<http://www.yacsa.com.au>

Youth Coalition of the ACT:

<http://www.youthcoalition.net/>

Youth Affairs Council of Victoria:

<http://www.yacvic.org.au>

As has been made clear throughout this report, The Foundation for Young Australians has contact with community-minded young people also. For all their details (so you can see if they are appropriate for what your needs might be) see:

<http://www.youngaustralians.org/>

At a local level, you can find young people who are already involved in programs by contacting organisations in your community:

- Your local government or municipality: do they have a youth worker or community development officer?
- The Neighbourhood House or Learning Centre;
- The Local Learning and Employment Network (LLEN);
- Local schools and School Councils, and school newsletters.

If you really want young people involved, you need to have a really good idea about why, about why **they** are going to want to be involved, and about what the young people you are looking for might be doing now. Then call the organisations that you think they might already be involved in. If they can't help you, they'll probably be able to point you to someone else who can.



ABOUT THE FOUNDATION FOR YOUNG AUSTRALIANS

The Foundation for Young Australians is a dynamic not-for-profit organisation, committed to creating exciting opportunities and outcomes for Australia's young people. Our **Vision** is to create positive opportunities and outcomes for Australia's young people, by leading the development of innovative strategies that enable them to reach their potential and participate fully in society.

Our **approach** is that of a venture philanthropist, whereby we provide seed funding for innovative initiatives; we proactively seek co-funding to support ideas; and we help grant recipients build their organisational capacity for long-term sustainability.

We aim to maximize our impact by focusing our support in key areas:

- Supporting young people between the ages of 12 and 25;
- Creating opportunities for young people to pursue their passions, take action on issues that are of importance to them and participate fully in their community;
- Enabling opportunities that result in meaningful change for young people and assist them to achieve their full potential.

In 2002, we managed a portfolio of grants in excess of \$6 million to support young people.

Note:

More information about The Foundation, including our values and core principles, is on www.youngaustralians.org



Australian Youth Research Centre

The Australian Youth Research Centre is located within the Faculty of Education at The University of Melbourne. It was established in 1988 in response to a recognised need by the youth affairs sector for relevant and up to date research on the issues facing young people today.

The aims of the AYRC are to:

- identify local, national and international research issues relevant to young people;
- conduct appropriate, relevant, and useful research that addresses these issues;
- promote research agendas and policies which contribute to an understanding of the full range of life patterns of young people, and which support young people's capacity to exercise increased control over their lives;
- promote and encourage awareness of youth issues amongst research students and within departments and research centres of the University;
- facilitate communication between educators, researchers, policy makers and people working in the youth sector;
- facilitate national links and collaborative research on youth issues across different sectors, including education, health, youth work and juvenile justice;
- strengthen international research links and scholarship in the area of youth policy.

Australian Youth Research Centre Activities

The AYRC has particular expertise in research on education, transition pathways, social justice, gender equity and employment issues as they affect young people.

The main AYRC activities are:

- undertaking research and publishing the outcomes in a manner accessible to policy makers and the youth sector;
- providing information and policy advice to governments and other organisations;
- assisting and encouraging individuals or groups who work with young people.

AYRC activities involve:

- undertaking small projects for groups lacking the capacity or opportunity to do so themselves;
- providing a base for post-graduate students wishing to undertake Masters or PhD research on topics related to young people and the youth sector;
- enabling academics to participate in established AYRC projects, and/or undertake their own research on youth related issues;
- maintaining a youth sector resource library;
- publishing series of Working Papers and Research Reports;
- conducting public seminars and conferences on a variety of issues relevant to those working in the youth sector.