

The Transformative Power of Youth Grants: Sparks and Ripples of Change Affecting Marginalized Youth and their Communities

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Abstract

This study, based on research into a youth empowerment initiative in Canada, examines the transformational power of youth grants for marginalized youth and their communities. The positive changes on individual youth included increase confidence and skills, as well as strengthened social interactions between youth, and involved adults and

organizations. To leverage grant impact, we identify the critical role of creating accountability at multiple levels, promoting sharing among grantees, and fostering allies and system thinkers. The evaluation points to the potential of grants for changing community's perception that youth are incapable of fostering community youth development.

In the field of human development, attention is increasingly given to the role cash transfers and grants can play in reducing poverty and boosting the resilience of communities facing adversity (Hanlon and others, 2010). Interestingly, little of the discussion about this simple yet powerful tool has spilled over into either the child rights or community youth development sectors. Many programs for vulnerable youth living in disadvantaged communities still apply a "charity" approach that downplays the active role young people can assume in strengthening their own well-being and the resilience of their communities.

This article examines cash transfers through youth grants as a mechanism for marginalized young people to act upon ideas and issues of importance to them. The study draws on an analysis of YouthScape: a youth empowerment initiative in which almost two hundred youth grants were allocated in four Canadian cities over a three-year period. With increasing interest in youth-granting in North America, this evaluation on the impacts and enabling conditions of the grants advances understanding of cash transfers as an entry point for reconnecting socially excluded young people with key adults, and as a tool for building important life skills and reinforcing aspects of community resilience.

Community Youth Development, Marginalized Youth and Grant Evaluation

To date, significant attention has been placed on the role of formal processes, such as youth councils, in embedding ideas of participation into society. Success has been mitigated however both in terms of broader community impact as well as in reaching out to diverse youth (Percy-Smith and Thomas, 2010). Thus the value of engaging youth in community action project which has shown to strengthen young people's social capital, adult development, organizational functioning and contribute to community change in neighbourhoods (Chawla and Driskell, 2008; Morsillo and Prilleltensky, 2007; Zeldin, 2004).

In giving meaning to youth involvement in community actions, we draw on the community youth development (CYD) perspective which considers the mutuality of youth and community development (Perkins and others, 2003). Consistent with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) socio-ecological model of development, the CYD approach contributes to reorienting the discourse on children's participation from a focus on the individual to a more collective one (Percy-Smith and Thomas, 2010). Strengthening young people's contributions as community members is a way of recognizing both young people's rights and their ability to commit to something larger than themselves, rather than focusing simply on developing life skills and finding voice (Cawley, 2010; O'Neil and Zinga, 2008).

In this study, we examine grants as one way to engage marginalized youth in community-based participation and potentially increase youth and community resilience. Similar to unconditional cash transfers, grants give young people the means to act upon their ideas. While grants can be used to foster individual entrepreneurship, they can also be a means to directly engage youth in community change (Delgado, 2004; Zeldin and

others, 2007). Most instances of youth cash transfers have been in Latin America, especially in Brazil and Mexico (Schwartz and Abreu, 2007). In North America, it is mostly foundations that have piloted this type of intervention (Cawley, 2010).

In analyzing the potential impacts of youth grants on the young people, one must consider that youth's lived experiences differ widely. Youth who are marginalized whether because of poverty, racism, addiction, or lack of a sense of belonging require different types of support than that which may be suitable for 'high-functioning' or privileged youth. An earlier study from YS identified four practices for successfully engaging marginalized youth: investing in relationships, building on strengths, finding a common space, and mutual accountability (Blanchet-Cohen and Salazar, 2010). The quality of human relationships was similarly recognized by Luthar (2006) as a key-mediating element determining the impact of protective factors on risk. One is reminded that "at its core, youth engagement ... is as much about cultural shifts as it is about policy and structural changes" (Bynoe, 2008, p. 28). Change occurs in both tangible and intangible ways, and alterations in relationships, seemingly mundane and insubstantial, contribute to transformation (Westley and others, 2007).

To capture the importance of context and an interest in understanding how theories about youth engagement operate in practice, this study uses realistic evaluation which centers on finding not only what are the outcomes but also how they are produced and what is significant about the varying conditions in which the interventions take place (Pawson and Tilley, 1997). Realistic evaluation's focus on three concepts—mechanisms as what accounts for change, context as the conditions that enable change and outcome patterns as the tangible effects of an intervention—serves for sense-making helping

“pinpoint the configuration of features needed to sustain a programme” (Pawson and Tilley, 2004, p.9). Given the connection between mechanisms and context, this study uses the single term enabling conditions..

A focus on how the interventions work will also serve to shed light on the theory of resiliency including the complex inter-play between internal and external factors of protection and the enabling environment for augmenting resiliency. Ungar (2010) specifies, “Resiliency is the capacity of individuals to access resources that enhance their well-being, and the capacity of their physical and social ecologies to make their resources available in meaningful ways” (p. 6). Conversely, Nussbaum (2011) and Sen (1999) consider that agency requires “both *processes* that allow freedoms of actions and decisions, and the actual *opportunities* that people have, given their personal and social circumstances” (p. 17). In applying a realistic evaluation lens, this study can contribute to learning about the impacts of grants on youth themselves and the other actors in the community, as well as how such transformations occurs.

Methods

Setting

YouthScape (YS) which informed this study was aimed at increasing community resiliency by including young people - particularly marginalized - in the planning and implementing of community development. The lead program donor identified youth grants as a critical intervention mechanism and mandated that 30% of the community funds be allocated to support this activity. The focus on community development was made explicit: “Grantees must be able to demonstrate that they have a project or program

that will effect change in relation to a community issue, a space or an institution.”

Convening organizations in four cities across Canada established a youth granting mechanism that included a youth selection committee, which managed a minimum of two grant cycles.

Granting promotion included actively reaching out to youth. In Calgary, an eye-catching brochure stated in bold: “We are giving away money for you to do what you want to do!” Another local newspaper in Thunder Bay advertised: “You’ve got the IDEA. We’ve got the Ca\$H. Let’s make CHANGE in Thunder Bay.” To intentionally reach out to marginalized youth a focus was placed on selecting neighbourhoods in the city, as well as schools or organizations working with more marginalized populations (e.g., homeless, Aboriginal).

Young people were invited to information sessions and supported in completing an application which a youth committee then reviewed to ensure they met the necessary criteria of being youth-led and having community impact. Awarded grantees signed agreements which outlined spending and reporting requirements. Most grantees received the majority of their grants upfront, with a small amount disbursed upon submission of receipts.

A total of 191 youth grants were allocated, ranging from \$300 to \$15,000 CAD, with over 1000 grantees (given a number of group applicants) ranging in age from 13 to 24. Experiences of ‘marginality’ varied and were often uncovered as youth shared stories about racism, dysfunctional families, teenage pregnancy, difficulties in moving from isolated reserves to the city and painful histories with foster care (Blanchet-Cohen and Salazar, 2010). Grantee projects dealt with a variety of issues. Over half (57%) centred

on four areas creating youth space, art/media, sharing skills, dance/active living while others dealt with a range of broader issues such as the environment, the legal system, and entrepreneurship.

Procedures

Consistent with the realistic evaluation's interest in selecting methods which serve best to demonstrate theory and process (Pawson and Tilley, 1997, chapter 6), several qualitative methods informed the study. The cross-section of methods used to collect data for this research synthesis during and in completing the three years aimed at understanding the impacts and conditions for grant impact (Pawson and Tilley, 1997). Our own involvement in the initiative, with the lead author as the assigned researcher for the initiative, allowed us to play an active role in presenting and seeking ideas on the functioning of the grants.

In addition to bi-annual community reports and monthly national learning calls informing the study, during a YS national gathering, a participatory evaluation activity was held with 42 staff and youth grantees where participants were asked to quantify grant's impact on nine different environments: youth themselves, youth groups, friends, family, organizations, policy, public perceptions, issue/sector and cultural values (see Figure 1). In the last three months of the initiative, twenty-nine interviews were carried out: 17 with youth grantees (between four and six per city), seven with staff supporting the grantees, and five with adult allies. Six focus groups took place with youth grantees and four with youth selection committees. Open-ended questions in interviews and focus groups provided for rich but focused conversation (Kvale, 2008). Youth grantees were

between 14 and 20 years old, with parental consent being obtained for those below the age of 18 following ethical procedures established by the University.

Grant Impacts

Our study suggests that the grants impacted youth in tangible ways and acted as ‘sparks’ at the community level, shedding light on the potential of young people as contributing members of community, with adults and organizations changing their practices to accommodate youth. Consistent with the view that those most impacted will be those directly involved the result of the participatory evaluation activity with youth and adults (see Figure 1) shows the greatest impact of the grants to have been on the grantees themselves, followed by impact on adult attitudes and organizations.

[Insert Figure 1]

Impacts on Youth

Our study points to two types of impacts on youth: (a) increase in confidence and skills and (b) greater understanding of community issues.

Increase in confidence and skills. Being given responsibility to manage grants increased young people’s self-esteem and sense of being capable which allowed them to develop new skills. Mike (age 16, Thunder Bay) explained, “I learned that personally even though we’re young like teenagers, we’re capable of doing stuff like this.” With the grants, they were demonstrating their capacity to implement ideas. “Instead of just complaining about how the world is going downhill —the fact is we are doing this

conference,” stated Ronnie (age 16, Victoria). Sonia (age 16, Halifax) explained, “I’ve learned that I have a lot to offer, and that I was never really paid attention to when I was younger.” Several adults pointed out that young people often gained insight into their ability to make a difference. “[There has been a] huge impact on their way of thinking— [now they see] oh I actually can make a contribution,” said one adult. For Jake (age 17, Thunder Bay) who established a group for young artists, the grant itself was a “reaffirmation that I can do what I love doing for a living” Providing youth with responsibility gave young people confidence.

Depending on the young person’s life history, the impact could be quite profound. For Meagan (age 17, Halifax) who initiated a *Wii are Unique* lunch program to deal with the issue of peer bullying at her school, the impacts were life-altering: “The grant really started to change my life. I did not believe in myself. I was a nobody.” As a person who suffered from depression and low self-esteem, the grant challenged her view of herself. Likewise for Juan (age 15, Halifax), the \$2,000 received to set-up a co-ed hip hop dance group “gave me trust, where nobody had given me trust.” For Alix (age 17, Calgary and living on the streets) creating a video on street-life gave him a voice and made him realize his capacity to follow through on an inspiration. Similarly for Lisa (age 20, Thunder Bay), the grant increased her confidence, giving her the opportunity to take on roles and responsibilities she had never before imagined undertaking: “Well, I was quiet, shy, and not engaged in anything It was a big step for my comfort zone.”

Our findings suggest that for marginalized youth who may not have experienced success in their pasts, building confidence may be a critical pre-requisite to developing new skills or diverting existing one’s to a more a positive purpose. As explained Sarah

(age 23, Saskatoon), “A kid who has sold drugs and been on the streets has communication skills, math skills, negotiation skills.... They are very smart. They are not poor kids. They have an unbelievable knowledge of life.” In this case, the grant becomes an opportunity to divert their skills to a positive use.

Improved social interactions with community. Another impact of the grants was in helping young people understand their own communities. The grants created opportunities for young people to interact with their surroundings on different terms, bridging historical and contextual divides.

A grant in Thunder Bay on redesigning an Aboriginal youth centre helped Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students attending a common high school interact with one another in new ways. A focus group participant explained, “It just brought us all down to the same level... We never really just sat back and just chilled out.” With the grants, both groups gained a new understanding of the racism that prevailed in their city. In a grant report, one participant wrote: “Finally working with these youth opened me up to the reality that some Aboriginal youth have from moving in from reserve communities, and that our city is not always a welcoming place for them due to prejudice.” An adult described how the group helped bridge a deep divide in the community. “[It was the] largest collective of diversity of youth...[and we are] working now more on a level playing field ... Great model to see Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal come together.”

In Rivière-des-Prairies, a grant helped improve youth-police relations by organizing Haitian youth and police to play basketball games together. These fun activities helped police and young people change their perception of each other; the

grants provided an opportunity for new kinds of interactions, leading youth and police to better understand each other. Yvonne (age 16, Halifax) explained that creating a space for people to talk about issues of isolation, bullying and discrimination made her peers more aware of the impact of their actions. “I said -- well how does it feel when you are called ‘fag’— They agreed to never say those words again.” Also in Halifax, Rhonda (age 15) reported on the experience of painting a mural in memory of her murdered friend and how the activity helped heal her community. She wrote: “I enjoyed seeing everyone getting along, no fussing, and no fighting...The community came together painting their names and messages.”

Impacts on community

The biggest impact of the grants was in creating (a) ‘sparks’ by showing the potential of youth and (b) ‘ripples’ by nudging the system to make accommodations to support youth’s role as contributing members.

Creating sparks. In general, the grants broadly impacted the communities by shedding light on the positive role of young people. The grants acted in many ways as sparks, which “speaks to the fact that this was the first time youth were actually given money and how that created purposeful energy,” explained an adult from Victoria who introduced that descriptive term. A similar idea was reflected in participatory evaluation activities where grants were described by one program participant as “big fish” which created “splashes” regardless of grant size.

In many cases, seeing young people as contributors to community was an important shift from previous stereotypes. A staff member explained how the “mentality of Thunder Bay in respect to work with youth is that they are there to help carry out things already pre-determined and having that flipped has been quite the challenge.” A community report from Halifax stated: “The small grants represent a formal mechanism that also demonstrates a commitment not only to the belief in the capacity of youth, but also in the formal acknowledgement that their time and energy are valuable and should be compensated.”

Indeed, money played a major role. An adult from Halifax explained, “The money created good power. It empowered them...the money required planning and it gave them more incentive to plan more fully.” Giving youth the responsibility to manage funds sent a message to the outside community: “It is like people don’t trust youth but handing money to youth - especially grants - really says something [like] I trust you are going to do something. [That’s] really amazing.” With the grants, youth showed capacity to take on responsibility, which impacted their perception of themselves, and changed the community’s perspective. “With YouthScape, they are the accountable person, so that alone builds self- esteem,” said one adult while another stated, “It enabled them to get credibility and recognition from their community.”

Interestingly, young people’s ideas for the activities were not necessarily unusual. An adult from Halifax pointed out that often what “comes to young people’s minds is what they have already seen; youth don’t always have new ideas.” Funders and others involved in setting up the program perhaps showed a certain disappointment around this lack of innovation. A staff member expressed the experience metaphorically: “We

ordered a Cadillac but we got a rusty '87 Toyota." Thus, the greatest impact of the grants was showing young people's potential as actors of a collective. Certainly, the grants made youth engagement real, giving meaning to abstract concepts, and allowing for learning and change. A young person explained, "Youth engagement terminology stuff -- no one gets it. You have to experience it to fully understand what it means."

Generating Ripples. Besides showing the potential of youth, the grants created ripples among adults and indeed, some organizations in contact with the grants changed practices to support youth engagement. The image of ripples captured how a small idea could lead to broader changes, similar to the "waves" created when a pebble is thrown into water.

The grants nudged adults and organizations to adopt more collaborative ways of working with youth. Adults on the granting committee reflected on their role: "Instead of overseeing and watching I was being more there and allowing youth to take charge." The different terms of the relationships opened new horizons for both youth and adults. Adult artists working with street-youth in Calgary learned to be open to other perspectives: "I have a better understanding of youth, but it also was an inspiration for myself." In Thunder Bay an adult changed his organization's granting procedures after working with the selection committee. He stated: "It has left an indelible mark on the Community Foundation in Thunder Bay. We will continue youth-led granting.... We will do more youth-paced granting." Grants brought tangible changes in programming such as the allocation of space for young people to carry out activities.

For many organizations, this was the first time they had given money directly to youth. As a result, several adjustments were required. For instance, setting up bank

accounts without parents co-signing was an issue that had to be dealt with. Organizations delivering the grants also had to become more risk-tolerant. Some were initially concerned that the youth would not be able to spend their money wisely - a reminder that trusting youth, especially marginalized, was out of the ordinary. Some questioned the funder on accountability requirements. A staff member from a community reported, “No one ran out with the money (or) went out buying crack as everyone feared.” A board member explained, “Our policies have had a focus on being risk-averse... We realize the need to loosen up... We are changing so that our policies can make it possible to involve kids.”

Rippling out in some cases was contagious; success of a grant inspired other undertakings. For instance, Sam (age 13, Halifax) purchased musical instruments with his grant to create a weekly drop-in program for young teens at his local Boys and Girls Club. Sam developed confidence and organizational skills, his parents were proud, and his peers thrilled to be able to jam together in their own space and on their own terms on a weekly basis. The success of the ‘Rock Club’ encouraged a neighbouring Boys and Girls Club to do the same. Similarly, in Thunder Bay, the grants brought attention to the need for a youth council, and in Montreal, a grantee offering snow plowing services to the elderly led to the establishment of a cost-recovery cooperative service for young people providing other services to the community. The impacts of these grants would not have happened without several enabling conditions.

Enabling Conditions

Our study points to three conditions which helped leverage grant impacts: (a) creating accountability at multiple levels; (b) promoting sharing among grantees; and (c) fostering allies and systems thinkers.

Creating accountability at multiple levels. One key element in supporting youth was to establish accountability mechanisms at multiple levels. These included providing relevant guidelines on the rights and responsibilities of youth and the organizations during each stage of the granting process: application, development and reporting. Given the absence of prior experience in youth granting, there was considerable trial-and-error, with program guidelines being updated and modified with each round of grantees. Over time, the application phase included clear selection criteria and expectations on reporting and financing, and each youth was walked through the guidelines. An adult from Thunder Bay explained: “[They] may be gung-ho about the project but yes, there is a reporting process, receipts, etcetera. You have to learn to track all that. We are asking them to take on a large adult activity.” With respect to taking on an adult role, the request to keep track of receipts was a challenge for several grantees, particularly for youth struggling to meet their basic needs. Organizations had to develop youth-friendly reporting guidelines that explained clearly and simply the procedures, and then make time to explain the requirements to youth.

Besides the guidelines and sessions to explain reporting responsibilities, perhaps the greatest call for accountability came from peers. Interviews with youth revealed that peers had higher expectations of the grantees than adults. Some communities chose to only support applications from groups of grantees as opposed to individual grantees, realizing peers were more effective in monitoring and carrying out the action plans.

There were only two instances in which the grantee disappeared with money. In one case, Henry, a street-involved youth, received an installment to set up a bike borrowing program for homeless youth. Soon after, however, he called to say that his bike, the trailer and all of the tools had been stolen. He was given funds to re-purchase the equipment. However, he disappeared shortly afterward, without leaving any contact information. The community report made the following reflection: “We struggle sometimes with the question of whether it’s reasonable to expect that these young people, whose lives are fairly chaotic and unstable, be able to focus on projects and carry through on their commitments. However, the engagement process has the potential to build skills and confidence – so it has a part to play in helping these young people to creating pathways to stability and re-integration.” The experience raised the importance of providing for accountability at different stages, with the organizations and people most closely related to these young people’s lives. It also suggested that working with marginalized youth would require putting in place adequate supports and structures.

Promoting sharing and learning. Intentional opportunities were created for grantees to share stories. These had a contagion effect, contributing to ripples into the community. One mechanism was the organization of learning forums for grantees to present their projects and network. Heidi (age 18, Thunder Bay) described the impact of the forum: “Through YouthScape we have automatically been connected with these other kids who were excited and who were interested and motivated and doing all these cool things...You feel encouraged.” Another explained: “[It is] quite important to be intentional in bringing grantees together. It is very powerful to see others.” To encourage

sharing, Halifax created a Facebook page for grantees to share experiences and stories. Through social networking, the grants did not remain stand-alone pieces.

Part of the sharing process included learning to effectively tell the story of the grant in a way that could inspire and capture others' imaginations. In each community, the youth behind a few of the most successful grant projects shared their stories of how young people transformed a concern and an idea into action, resulting in tangible changes. Through simplification, an emphasis on the sequencing, and a few anecdotes, these stories helped to inspire other young people and adults. Repeating their stories made their projects more impactful.

Also significant was allowing sharing among supportive adults and organizations. Parallel to the youth process, opportunities were created to reflect on learning and challenges. In creating a community of practice, adults felt less lonely and encouraged to take on perceived risks.

Fostering allies and system thinkers. Finally, the involvement of adults and organizations in supporting the youth grantees was critical in determining the grant impact. In general, we found that it was not just being an adult that mattered; it was about being an ally and a system thinker. As an ally, adults had to learn to provide encouragement and to be careful not to take over. An adult from Halifax stated, "Really, as an adult ally, it is just biting your tongue, and taking a step back and letting the grantee do it at their own pace. [You can] give them some questions to think about process but do not try and lead them."

As a system thinker, adults had a role to play in helping grantees expand their ideas. Often young people would be limited to what they were familiar with; but adults

could help young people imagine possibilities, including how their ideas could impact different environments. One adult ally explained. “You want to encourage crazy ideas because so many good ideas come from that.” In Thunder Bay, an Aboriginal youth applied for a grant to design a comic book on the challenge of transitioning from an Aboriginal reserve to city life. Seeing the value of the contribution, a well-networked adult arranged for the dissemination of the comic book in individual homes and businesses across an Aboriginal territory. In Victoria, adults helped make connections with the police and local health authorities to widely distribute the grantee’s youth-friendly illustrated pocket-size map showing youth their legal rights and responsibilities associated with different decisions. Their assistance helped validate the project.

Finding adults with the capacity to be system thinkers, and to present this notion in ways that could be grasped by young people was however challenging. One staff member reported on her frustrations: “There were some opportunities to go further, but those opportunities got missed because so many could not understand what system thinking meant.” Realizing that it was a foreign approach for many adults, several organizations developed training sessions for adult allies, which included guidelines on how to treat young people respectfully, share decision-making power and provide an environment where the youth feel valued and listened to. The training materials included case study examples and suggested practical tools and appropriate language for communicating effectively, building trust and sharing decision-making with young people living with risk. To illustrate how one small idea could lead to broader systemic changes and to help youth think beyond themselves, adults worked with visual images illustrating the rippling out with overlaid concentric circles also.

Discussion

This study speaks to the potential of grants for fostering community youth development, with youth grants impacting most directly young people, and the adults and organization directly involved. Consistent with the community youth development framework (Perkins and others, 2003), the grants gave young people an opportunity to interact positively with peers, adults and organizations bringing about changes in each environment. In being given the responsibility to carry out a project, youth gained confidence which allowed them to develop skills and a deeper understanding of themselves in relation to their communities. Adults had to critically reflect on their ways of working with youth, shifting behaviours to make themselves partners, not authorities, and encouraging youth to connect to larger possibilities. Organizations realized that they were often neither adapted to nor supportive of youth. Individual youth positive change, the “sparks,” interacting with community change, the “rippling out”, captures how the grants helped make connections more broadly with the community. Specifically, relationships between young people and adults in their environments became more positive, dynamic and interactional.

The grants strengthened young people’s resilience by increasing their capacity to interact with their environments. Grants gave young people the power to make requests, question conventional practices and realize their ideas. The impacts were particularly transformational for marginalized youth, with the grants giving them a sense of accomplishment that improved their perception of themselves, and subsequently built their skills and their adaptive capacity.

The study points to the grants as a whole having a compounding effect that was impactful. As discussed by Morsillo and Prilleltensky (2007), young people's individual actions may not be on their own transformative; however, significance often comes from showing the collective potential of youth as being capable of pursuing their ideas to serve themselves and others. We were reminded about the nature of innovation which may be more ordinary than anticipated and often involves less tangible aspects such as changes in how young people and adults perceive one another, the role of trust, and the centrality of positive relationships (Zeldin and others, 2007). The changes in views and practices contributed to the cultural shift within organizations, offering a glimpse of what was possible when young people are supported as active members of community.

Implementing the grants was not a simple process however. The realistic evaluation served to highlight how both capacity for process and opportunity were critical in leveraging the grant impacts (Nussbaum, 2011; Sen, 1999). To take initiative and to organize young people required support; there needed to be intentionality for grants to ripple out beyond individual youth (Percy-Smith and Thomas, 2010). As presented, several conditions were key for grants to become a mechanism for young people to contribute to community decisions. These findings are critical to consider in replicating the positive outcomes of grants (Pawson and Tilley, 1997).

More broadly, the study raises the question of the potential that cash transfers may hold as an effective medium of intervention for marginalized youth. This study shows that in Canada the field of youth grants offers important social policy implications for agencies serving at-risk youth. Conventional wisdom has portrayed these young people as incapable of managing the responsibility of financial interventions addressing risk

reduction in their lives and that of their peers. Giving cash to young people living with adversity challenges these social stereotypes and may lead to a deeper reflection on the success of interventions seeking social change, supporting youth and fostering community resilience, civic engagement and broad-based social and economic empowerment and protection.

It also highlights the importance of addressing power differences as a critical mediating factor in building trust among youth at risk and adult service providers. Finally, it points to the importance of an enabling environment for marginalized youth for whom basic needs such as housing, food security and opportunities for livelihoods must be met as a precursor to youth community engagement and broader social change. This is particularly important in considering the importance of basic life securities for young people transitioning from childhood in the care of family to the independence of adulthood.

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