

National Information Center
for Service Learning
1954 Buford Ave, Room R290
St. Paul, MN 55108-6197

Youth At Risk

YOUTH AT RISK

Part III of a Special Twelve-Month Series

During the next 10 months YPI will continue to publish in this special section a wide variety of articles that address youth at risk issues from a youth development point of view. We will feature work that is occurring nationally among the major youth development organizations, and will publish articles that suggest new opportunities for local collaboration.

Reciprocity: A Major Paradigm Shift

By John A. Calhoun
National Crime Prevention Council

It is not news to the youth-serving community that something new is afoot regarding how we think about and work with youth.

Well known is the stir on the national level: President Bush's YES initiative; numerous pieces of congressional legislation whose proposals range from school-based programs through conservation and urban corps to mandated national service. Locally, projects of various sorts are springing up in schools, youth-serving agencies and in other organizations whose functions impinge on youth.

Not so well known—or fully understood—is a key notion that could well be lost amid the legitimate clamor and enthusiasm for the concept, namely, that youth service is not simply a program. It is infinitely more powerful, for it is also a perspective. And its implications are dual: first, that we view youth in a new and fresh way, as a potential resource and not just as a tangle of pathology to be sorted out; and second, that all agencies which work with youth can become involved. Additional resources are helpful but not in all cases are they necessary. Most agencies working with young people can shift policy and practice to embrace a youth-as-resources dimension. Thus, it is both a program and a perspective.

Our methods of identifying and diagnosing the pathologies of youth are finely honed; good thing, for many adolescents need the best in services. However, our tools for eliciting and channeling strengths and talents are either blunt or non-existent. A change in perspective will help create better tools. And for those adolescents who do not need services, won't we dignify them by asking for something in return?

We should challenge our teenagers, make them feel a part of their communities and channel their energies toward positive ends. Given the opportunity for responsible,

useful involvement and the chance to contribute, the great majority will acquire a stake in their communities that will help them mature into successful adults. What's needed is a message to all kids that they are responsible and essential members of society.



After a period of planning with Habitat for Humanity, young members of church groups in Evansville, Florida erected three homes in a four-day period. The houses will be given to low-income families.

This id works with aren't; with the average headed for

The co valuable as volunteers themselves designing p evaluating]

The ap aimed at ev program, ne anything of done that ne

Perhaps has engaged already in t

"I've help them go sho the first tim 16, probatic

The soc of this sort. but they're c and later. A of family ar place in the

The par competitive city children field trips.

This idea—utilizing youth as community resources—works with those who are in trouble as well as those who aren't; with loners as well as kids who socialize well; with the average or below-average as well as those who are headed for college.

The concept is more than community service. As valuable as that is, it treats the young as little more than volunteers whose roles are pre-defined. The young people themselves should be involved in determining need, designing projects and programs, executing plans and evaluating projects.

The approach works in part precisely because it is aimed at everybody. It is not a delinquency prevention program, not a structured membership, and not labeled as anything other than young people getting important things done that need doing. It is not the last step before prison.

Perhaps precisely because it is not perjorative, the idea has engaged and transformed some young people who are already in trouble or headed that way. An example:

"I've helped clean up the yards of my seniors. I help them go shopping. I even read to them. Do you know, it's the first time in my life I've ever been thanked?" —Earl, 16, probationer, Indianapolis.

The social dynamics of our time require an approach of this sort. Youth mature physically earlier and earlier, but they're denied social and economic maturity until later and later. Although they seek to grow beyond the confines of family and close friends, teenagers have been refused a place in the community, a sense that they have a legitimate

role and stake in the larger social framework. The trend has been exacerbated by a variety of forces: increased demographic mobility, anonymous neighborhoods, a dramatic increase in single-parent and two-earner families.

Even when young people are forced by circumstances to cope with heavy adult burdens, we perceive them as abnormal, somehow robbed of a "happy childhood." We fail to recognize their ability to become responsible members of the community and see them instead as an aberration.

As society is not structured, no social mechanism works for the positive, non-traumatic integration of young people into the adult world. Few help them achieve a civic—as opposed to personal—maturity, a realization that they benefit from, and in turn can benefit, the community.

These ideas are manifested concretely in a program designed by National Crime Prevention Council and funded by the Lilly Endowment, whose project officers, Joan Lipsitz and Willis Bright, have had a major hand in helping to guide the project, a two and one-half year effort in the Indiana cities of Evansville, Ft. Wayne, and Indianapolis.

Initial results in all three Indiana cities are striking. Young people are gaining enthusiastic backing from adults who were at best mildly supportive. More than 1,500 teens and pre-teens have completed more than 150 projects that have enhanced their schools and communities. Projects have arisen from community board-approved grants ranging from \$500-\$2,000 range. All involve teens in responsible roles as program developers as well as project



The participants in the "Summer Fun Friends" program of Brightwood, Indiana play a parachute game, which is a non-competitive activity requiring teamwork and cooperation. The program is run by teen supervisors, aged 13 to 18, for inner-city children, aged 4 to 12. Most of the activities occur in this empty lot, although the teens and kids do occasionally go on field trips.

Youth At Risk

participants.

Diversity in kids abounds. The mix includes teen mothers putting on plays for elementary school students about what it means to be a teen mother, juvenile delinquents, scouts, church groups, school groups, 4-H members, and dropouts. The projects, too, are diverse: outings for children in battered women's shelters; companion service for the elderly; cleanups of entire neighborhoods; construction of housing for low-income families; mentoring of kids in foster care; youth proving dramatically that they can participate in all of the difficult social issues confronting the adult society—literacy, housing, teen pregnancy, AIDS, etc.

And who benefits? Parks, which get facelifts and new facilities, the criminal justice system, the elderly, children, pre-teens, housing authorities, and more. Best of all, young people, as our research is showing, develop a stronger sense of self-esteem, worth, a more positive perception of their role in community, an increased sense of their own abilities to tackle some of society's most vexing issues, and a growing sense of their own potency as leaders.

In carrying out these projects, these young people learn a great deal. They learn about themselves, about their community, about potential careers, about relationships, about citizenship at its most basic.

Emerging Trends

Youth as Resources is being evaluated by universities in each of the three sites. They are looking at the effect of Youth as Resources from three angles—on participating youth, on the host agencies, and on the beneficiaries of youth service.

While the data is both young—not definitively interpreted—and incomplete, hints of exciting if not profound changes are identifiable. Youth tended to feel

more confident and competent, more needed, and they have discovered their leadership qualities; direct interaction with beneficiaries is critical (i.e., it is not enough simply to make toys for retarded children, but make the toys and deliver them, experiencing the reaction of the benefiting children); tangible rewards such as pizza, trips and T-shirts are not that important, whereas teamwork, and a sense of accomplishing an important mission are; results cut across social, economic, race and status lines, from the delinquent to the college-bound; intensity and duration of projects stand as critical variables (more work done over a longer period of time produces greater change in youth and the host agency).

Host agencies were not merely passive conduits for the program. They too were affected: some continued the program after the expenditure of Lilly monies; some put teens on their board of directors; some hired staff to work on similar types of programs. And almost all beneficiaries from battered women to the elderly expressed deep appreciation for (and in some cases a dramatically altered attitude toward) the work teens had done.

At-Risk Kids; Risky Projects

If these preliminary findings stand up over time (the final report is due in March, 1990), the implications for youth-serving agencies are significant. First of all, it means that all organizations with minor shifts and policy in practice can participate from the traditional to the new. The list of participating agencies is long and varied including such organizations as: youth shelters; churches; probation; elementary, middle, and high schools; Boys and Girls Clubs; Urban League; museums; employment/training centers; Big Brothers/Big Sisters; Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts; community choirs; Catholic Youth Organizations; social services; Visiting Nurses; 4-H; Red Cross; and mental health centers.

The National Crime Prevention Council

The National Crime Prevention Council (NCPC) is a private nonprofit tax-exempt organization whose mission is to enable people to prevent crime and to build safer, more caring communities. NCPC provides a wide array of services and programs to a diverse constituency ranging from youth-serving agencies and schools to corporations, law enforcement and neighborhood groups.

NCPC coordinates the National Citizens' Crime Prevention Campaign which features McGruff, the Crime Dog, and the "Take a Bite Out of Crime" slogan in its public education

efforts. In less than 10 years, the McGruff campaign has become one of the most successful among the 30-plus coordinated by the Advertising Council, Inc. McGruff is recognized by 99 percent of children, 94 percent of teens, and three of four adults. His crime prevention messages receive donated airtime and print space worth \$50 million yearly, reaching millions of Americans.

Over the past nine years, the Crime Prevention Coalition, which NCPC staffs, has grown to include 128 national constituency groups, federal agencies and state crime

prevention programs and associations that aid local initiatives across the nation. These range from the Boys Club to the National Sheriffs' Association, from Crime Stoppers to the PTA. The Coalition annually honors outstanding efforts in crime prevention by individuals and organizations.

NCPC has developed and published a wide variety of materials to help start and sustain crime prevention programs. Millions of copies have been distributed to citizens, block watch groups, clubs, school children and employees by NCPC, local crime prevention practitioners, citizen leaders and employees. In 1988, NCPC's six-page

This would seem to imply that "traditional agencies" serving youth can expand their mission from basic services to youth to partnering with youth to help address any issue about which society is concerned (e.g., child abuse, teen pregnancy, literacy, housing, etc.); and that for agencies who are looking for ways to expand their missions (and/or the types of youth served) Youth as Resources provides a marvelous vehicle.

This also means that agencies which tend to serve youth who are not in trouble can without a great deal of difficulty reach out to at-risk kids, serving them in programs such as this.

Program and Perspective

Youth as Resources is a view, an outlook, an ethos in which other programs can participate. It must not be seen simply as a grantmaking mechanism or a program. It concerns the ways in which those who work with youth—in a community service organization, a school group, a social work agency or anywhere else—perceive them.

Youth as Resources programs and similar projects run counter to current notions. The deficit model sees young people as objects, not subjects; as in need of fixing, not capable of giving. While we must heal those who are wounded, we must realize that all want to give and need to give—even the wounded. Although some youth specialists have bucked the tide to take a positive view, the substantial majority have focused on programs directed at and for youth, not with and by them.

Our policies for youth are invariably framed in terms of assistance or control. We believe strongly that such policies both narrow our thinking about the potential of these youth and narrows the size of the constituency of those concerned about them.

The new policy formulation would need assistance with obligation (reciprocity), thereby broadening the



John Calhoun

As Executive Director of the National Crime Prevention Council (NCPC), Mr. Calhoun manages the full range of NCPC activities which extend from public service advertising through publication of material, training and technical assistance, the Computerized Information and Distribution Centers, Coalition management, fund development and oversight of demonstration programs.

Mr. Calhoun came to Washington, D.C. as a presidential appointee to serve in the Department of Health and Human Services as the commissioner of the Administration for Children, Youth and Families and chief of the Children's Bureau which included such programs and Head Start, Child Abuse and Neglect, Child Welfare and Runaway Youth.

Mr. Calhoun holds a B.A. from Brown University, a Masters of Divinity from the Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and a Masters of Public Administration (honors—Littauer Fellow) from Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government.

public's vision of youth's potential and enlarging the constituency of those advocating for their welfare.

Giving young people, including those on society's edge, a stake in their communities can turn the "youth problem" on its head. The ultimate goal: to change the way in which our country regards and uses the skills of its youth, so that young people are not viewed primarily as service objects but as service actors with significant roles to play.

newsletter, CATALYST, was mailed to over 21,000 readers.

NCPC operates the most comprehensive database of crime prevention activities in the United States. Information staff respond to approximately 1,000 requests for information and materials per month. By assisting law enforcement agencies, corporate executives, citizens' groups and public officials with free customized information, and through referrals to over 5,200 programs, NCPC points the way for sharing and strengthening crime prevention networks.

The trainers for NCPC's highly rated workshops are local crime prevention practitioners. In 1988, 500

crime prevention specialists and community organizers were trained. They in turn will train many others in a variety of crime prevention topics. In addition, NCPC's other staff regularly provide requested training and technical assistance.

NCPC has generated a rich array of youth-led action programs. Since 1985, NCPC's Teens, Crime and the Community Initiative has reached over 80,000 students in more than 20 major cities with its interactive curriculum combining facts about crime and its prevention with community service. The three-city Youth As Resources project has funded over 140 projects designed and run primarily by youth, which address

a wide range of social issues—from drug abuse prevention to homelessness, from delinquency prevention to illiteracy and teen pregnancy prevention.

NCPC helps to expand effective crime prevention efforts through a variety of demonstration programs. The Community Response to Drug Abuse Program enables local groups in eight core city areas to create, test and implement effective strategies to reduce drug abuse, crime, and fear in the community. The three-city Congregations, Parenting and Prevention of Delinquency Project links trained volunteer mentors with fragile families to form a network of support for parents and children.

Editors' Letter

A Different Perspective on Youth

One theme consistently winds its way through the articles presented in this issue. It is based on the question of perspective.

Many governmental offices, social service agencies, philanthropic organizations, and members of the general public perceive troubled and impoverished youth as objects to be dealt with, not as people who need to be appreciated and included. What is at stake in challenging this perspective is the self-esteem of the people whom these programs purportedly intend to help. If people are constantly being asked to beg for what they need, and then to be grateful for the aid they receive, these *recipients* will ultimately resent their benefactors. However, if programs are devised which help to enhance their self-esteem, perhaps these *participants* will continue to contribute to the community which has helped them to help themselves.

One of the ethical underpinnings of our society is that one should "do unto others as you would have them do unto you." In considering this biblical notion, self-esteem is a vital component: What do you "do unto you"? Do you "do" crack? Or do you work at a job and volunteer in your neighborhood?

By convincing people of their own self-worth, especially during the crucial childhood and adolescent period, perhaps we can encourage them to treat others well. If people feel good about themselves, hopefully they will express these positive feelings in a well-adjusted outlook, and by participating in their community in a productive way. On the other hand, if people lack self-esteem, they may strike out at others

as easy targets for their pent-up frustrations. They may also take their negative feelings out on themselves, by demonstrating a lack of respect for their bodies through drugs, prostitution, and other irresponsible sexual behavior. Or these insecure people may seek assurance in a problematic way, by becoming drug "kingpins," or mothers at an early age.

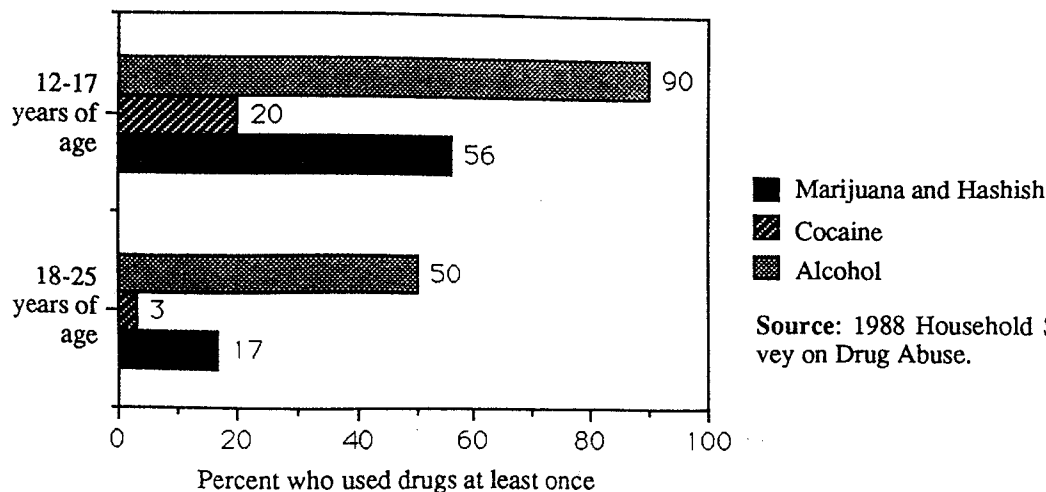
To counteract the pressures of quick money and easy pleasures that are so pervasive in some American neighborhoods, other opportunities have to be provided. The community, and specific, comprehensive programs within it, should create a welcoming atmosphere which encourages youth to develop their skills, their minds, and ultimately their selves. By engaging young people in an activity, by providing a positive outlet for their energies and talents, by giving them a sense of belonging—whether in school, a volunteer organization, or in another group—these communities can help them to feel more confident and more physically and emotionally secure. Through this constructive approach, communities will be making a solid investment. They will be helping to develop self-confident people who will be capable of more than taking; by learning how to participate, they will be able to give.

The Editors

Corrections:

The following chart appeared on page 8 of the September/October issue of *Youth Policy*...

Population Estimates of Drug Use in 1986



Youth

Reciprocal
John
vention C
young peo
as delinqu
argues, ar
whole.....

Feat

Notes To
Doro
communit
goals of ou
delinquent

"Who Pa Issue

The a
by examin
proposals t
Americans

Poverty P

Lea-A
Youth Poli
national w
been succe
more powe

High

Child Wel
Today
At a r

The ch