

# Community Building Chronicles

*Building Strong Communities for  
Children, Youth and Families*



## In this Issue:

With generous funding from the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, the Coalition of Community Foundations for Youth (CCFY) supported community foundations' efforts to promote Youth Civic Engagement (YCE) in 2000-2004. This initiative took the form of multi-year demonstration grants and site visits for a dozen community foundations and conferences as well as informational materials and post-conference mini-grants for the broader field. This issue of *Community Building Chronicles* highlights experiences and lessons learned from community foundations working to promote youth voice.

## Why Youth Civic Engagement

Through youth philanthropy, youth on boards, youth commissions, youth organizing and advocacy, young people are increasingly being heard on important issues affecting their communities and lives. Community

foundations have been an important part of this national Youth Civic Engagement (YCE) movement.

YCE is a natural extension of community foundations' long-standing commitment to *youth development*, *community development* and *community building*. Community foundations care about kids, care about communities, and care about bringing new voices to the table. The new century has seen an explosion in community foundation commitment to YCE.

Many entered through youth development priorities. YCE provides safe places, especially for older youth, to develop new skills, expand networks, connect to community, develop identity, explore career and

other interests, and enjoy the rewards of contributing to society.

YCE is more than an investment in young people and their futures. Research tells us that nonprofits and adult allies also benefit when youth are engaged:

that nonprofits enjoy increased clarity in their missions, more responsive programming, increased diversity, and increased credibility in the community and with funders. Further, adults who share decision-making with youth are more energized and committed to their organizations, feel more connected to the community, and improve their perceptions of young people and their skills working with youth.<sup>1</sup>

Community foundations can be strategic points of entry locally for creating opportunities, supports for and a climate conducive to youth civic engagement. Community foundations can:

- Engage young people in their own program development and



<sup>1</sup>Shepherd Zeldin, et al., *Youth In Decision-Making, A Study on the Impacts of Youth on Adults and Organizations* (Chevy Chase, MD: Innovation Center for Community and Youth Development, National 4-H Council, 2000).

## What YCE Looks Like

### YCE principles:<sup>1</sup>

- Young people are producers
- Young people's intelligence, talents, experiences and energy deserve respect
- Public work and skill building link together
- Young people participate in governance
- Young people and adults develop committed, reciprocal relationships
- Cooperative action is valued
- Young people's public work is visible
- Young people's efforts connect with the large civic challenges and questions of meaning in our time
- Youth work contributes to community and institutional change

### YCE models include:

- Youth on boards and committees
- Youth organizing
- Youth mapping and research
- Youth grantmaking
- Municipal youth commissions and councils
- Youth media
- Youth court
- Youth-led public policy analysis and advocacy

### Within community foundations and other organizations, young people:

- Serve on boards and grantmaking committees
- Perform research and project planning
- Conduct training
- Facilitate meetings
- Perform outreach to communities and young people
- Interview youth-related job candidates
- Evaluate and assess programs
- Represent the organization at public meetings
- Fundraise
- Generate enthusiasm and excitement

<sup>1</sup> "Principles of Vital Practice for Youth and Civic Development," Wingspread Journal, Vol. 18, Issue 4, Autumn 1996, p. 5.

governing bodies and advocate for youth engagement in other community initiatives.

- Host or make grants to support YCE programs and infrastructure (e.g., training).
- Adopt grantmaking criteria that encourage youth voice in nonprofit organizations.
- Acquaint donors with the benefits of youth engagement.
- Publicize YCE activities and accomplishments.

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## Capacity Issues

### Infrastructure for Successful YCE Programs

Whether a community foundation is starting an in-house youth civic engagement project, making grants to support YCE programs, or encouraging YCE opportunities in the community, here are lessons learned from CCFY's Youth Civic Engagement Initiative for starting successful programs.

- Perhaps the most important ingredient is attitude. A host organization needs to believe in the value of youth in decision-making and be willing to provide the resources, make accommodations (e.g., meeting times), and exercise its influence to facilitate successful programs.
- Young people need to be involved in shaping YCE programs. The involvement of young people in program development, staff recruitment and selection, planning, training, evaluation and leadership adds credibility, responsiveness and authenticity and models YCE behavior in the community.
- Investment in training for adults and young people is essential. Both adults and youth need to be equipped with the skills and approaches needed for successful YCE. Without the benefit of training, even well-intentioned adults can easily de-rail YCE because "business as usual" often does not accommodate young people's developmental or practical needs. The best training is led by adults and youth together.
- Adequate staff support for young people must be in place. Good youth development demands sufficient staffing to support young people's civic engagement. Staff needs to recruit, train, orient, coach, encourage and handle logistics. This is in addition to program coordination and implementation duties.
- Engaged young people make great ambassadors. The best publicity for YCE is the young people themselves.

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## Youth on Community Foundation Boards: Lessons from Ann Arbor

Since the founding of the Ann Arbor Area Community Foundation Youth Council (YAC) in 1990, the Board of Trustees and YAC members maintained steady dialogue on issues of concern to youth and the community. When Michigan law was changed in 1999 permitting youth to serve on nonprofit governing boards (due in no small measure to the efforts of YACers around the state), the community foundation dedicated a seat on its board to a YAC member. One of the first YAC members to join the board, Sara Ableson, and Program Director

Martha L. Bloom shared their experiences with community foundations in a topical conference call hosted by CCFY and facilitated by Karen Young, co-director of Youth on Board.

Adding a young person to the board built on a nearly a decade of trust and strong working relationships between the trustees and YAC, whose members frequent

board meetings. The Youth Council had been part of strategic planning and led an initiative that was one of the largest grants ever made by the community foundation. “The YAC knew we were taken seriously,” according to Ms. Ableson. “The board learned a lot about how youth can contribute by watching the Youth Council,” observed Ms. Bloom.

While good will and appreciation were in place, adult and youth board members knew they would have to invest in making this new level of youth-adult partnership a success.

Youth trustees meet one on one with the board leadership and benefit from group training and notebooks provided for all new board members. A mentoring or “buddy” system was initiated for youth trustees and has

since been adopted for all incoming trustees.

At Ms. Ableson’s suggestion, the board adopted a youth-in-training shadow who attends meetings for the year before his or her board appointment.

Five young people have served one term each as full voting members of AAACF’s board. Because of the board’s respect for the YAC, voting privileges and access to information have never been an issue. “Youth Council members have brought grantmaking and programmatic expertise. They can grasp financial business. They are great resources in development and marketing,” according to Ms. Bloom.

As AAACF has demonstrated, preparation for youth board membership takes more than training young people about board procedures. “Relationships are key,” according to Ms. Young. “To get past token youth membership, boards need to acknowledge stereotypes and age dynamics. Engage people in their concerns, verbalize fears, *talk about it.*”

Ms. Young observed that while many organizations and community foundations start with an emphasis on youth membership on governing boards, sometimes it is best to start with youth engagement on committees and in projects. This is also a valuable alternative in states where youth board membership is prohibited.

To learn more about AAACF’s Youth Council, visit <http://www.aaacf.org/youthcouncil.asp>.

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### *New Fund Awards \$685,000 for YCE in Philadelphia*

In its first round of grants from the Fund for Children, in July 2004, The Philadelphia Foundation awarded 14 Strategic Investments in Youth grants, totaling \$685,550, to community nonprofits that engage youth in organizational decision-making.

“A critical goal of the Fund for Children is to develop strategies that create change,

make a difference, and work for the common good with young people who have a voice, choice, and decision-making power in the programs that impact their daily lives,” according to Foundation President R. Andrew Swinney.

“There is evidence from efforts across the country that youth, when asked and when given the skills and tools

with which to respond, will welcome the opportunity to participate in decisions that affect them, their peers and their community,” said Swinney.

The Fund also awarded 11 mini-grants totaling \$59,500 to neighborhood-based programs for children and youth. The Fund for Children was established to

## Sarasota STAR

In one of the largest, most successful youth on boards programs in the US, 75 young people in Sarasota County, FL, are members of public commissions and nonprofit boards and committees.

Students Taking Active Roles in Sarasota County, or the STAR Program, was designed to “reconnect youth to their community” through youth civic engagement. High school students participating in STAR learn about the county, the importance of citizen participation, and leadership skills needed to serve in decision-making positions in the community.

Young people serve on boards and commissions as wide-ranging as the Community Foundation of



Sarasota STAR students lead training for adult partners from county government who will support students serving on their boards.

Sarasota County’s Grants Committee, the county’s Bicycle/Pedestrian Advisory Board, and the city police chief’s advisory board.

With leadership from a county commissioner, STAR was launched in 2000 with grants from

the Coalition of Community Foundations for Youth, the community foundation and Sarasota County.

One of the ingredients of STAR’s success is its investment in training and continuing support for participants – adults and youth. Youth complete a 60 hour training program that focuses on building skills and preparing youth with the knowledge needed to serve in decision-making positions on county or city

advisory boards, nonprofit boards of directors, or through STAR’s community initiatives focused on law enforcement and education.

A key element is the involvement of adults who serve as advisors to the students during their placements. Each agency or organization must designate one person to serve as the “adult advisor” who provides encouragement, support and technical assistance for the young people.

Adult advisors receive six to eight hours of training on topics such as youth development, utilizing youth as a resource, challenging cultural assumptions, and methods for developing positive youth-adult partnerships. Other members of the board are encouraged to attend a two-hour workshop that explains the program and ways to successfully involve a young person on a board.

According to Wendy Hopkins, the community foundation’s Vice President of Programs, “Regardless of the initial reaction of adults asked to work in partnership with youth, we have found that adults who have participated in the training have increased their level of comfort, make better partners for youth and serve as strong advocates for involving youth as decision makers in other areas of the community.”

Training is provided by the project’s home, Community Youth Development Project, a partnership of adults and youth working to provide positive opportunities for young people.

To date, 48 organizations or public commissions have completed requirements to host a youth on their boards. Seventy adults have completed advisor training.

Retention among participating youth is high. Ninety percent of eligible students have remained in the program. Another indicator of success – 100% of the youth who completed training registered to vote when eligible.

STAR is also engaging a broader universe of middle and high school youth through Speak Out Forums and ongoing youth advisory boards, including STAR in Law Enforcement and STAR in Education. Peer surveys by and recommendations from STAR in Law Enforcement led to tougher policies regarding teen drinking as well as production of a handbook for youth about local laws – both designed to encourage youth to recognize the consequences of their actions.

The newly-established VOICES Project offers 8th grade students the chance to become civically engaged through peer surveys. Teen researchers develop recommendations based on the research and present their findings about needs and issues affecting youth to community leaders, such as the school board.

To learn more, visit the Community Youth Development Project at [www.cydonline.com/aboutUs/star.cfm](http://www.cydonline.com/aboutUs/star.cfm).

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receive contributions from the City of Philadelphia in association with the Eagles and Phillies sports teams’ leases for new stadiums. Each team will contribute \$1 million per year for the next 30 years for the Fund. To learn more, visit <http://www.philafound.org/FundForChildren.html>

## For More Information

The organizations listed offer information, training, publications and technical assistance on a range of YCE topics. Visit their websites to view online resources and learn more about how each can help your community. All are experienced working with community foundations or have presented at CCFY-sponsored conferences and site visits. For hot links to these organizations' websites, view this newsletter online at [www.ccfy.org/newsletter/index.htm](http://www.ccfy.org/newsletter/index.htm).

### Academy for Educational Development, Center for Youth Development and Policy Research

The Center works with communities to create and strengthen infrastructures that support positive development for all youth through education, research and technical assistance. In addition to expertise on youth development and out of school time policy and practice, it offers extensive resources on youth mapping, including a website devoted to the topic.

[www.aed.org/CentersandExperts/acentyouth.cfm](http://www.aed.org/CentersandExperts/acentyouth.cfm)  
[www.communityyouthmapping.org/Youth](http://www.communityyouthmapping.org/Youth)

### Alternatives, Inc.

In addition to supporting ground-breaking youth civic engagement in Hampton, VA, Alternatives, Inc. offers technical assistance and training on youth engagement theory and practice for communities around the country.

[www.altinc.org](http://www.altinc.org)

### Center for Youth as Resources

CYAR is an umbrella organization for more than 80 Youth as Resources youth philanthropy programs across the nation. Website contains valuable information about YAR in service learning, in public housing and in juvenile justice.

[www.cyar.org](http://www.cyar.org)

### Coalition of Community Foundations for Youth

*Best Practices in Youth Philanthropy* provides a youth civic engagement framework for developing and implementing a youth grantmaking program. View the publication online. See pages 37-42 for information about and links to valuable resources on youth philanthropy and youth engagement.

[www.ccfy.org](http://www.ccfy.org)

### Community Partnerships with Youth, Inc.

Offers training and technical assistance on youth philanthropy, youth in governance and youth-adult

partnerships. National curricula for youth philanthropy and youth in governance are available. *The Word for Me is Philanthropy* is a new curriculum and workbook for ages 7-11.

[www.cpyinc.org](http://www.cpyinc.org)

### Forum for Youth Investment - Impact Strategies

FYI publications and technical assistance offer a "big picture" approach to youth development planning, research, advocacy and policy development. The Community and Youth Development series of publications, which are available online, represent seminal work advancing the understanding of youth and community development.

[www.forumforyouthinvestment.org](http://www.forumforyouthinvestment.org)

### Funders' Collaborative on Youth Organizing

Available online are concise monographs that explore the origins, development, concepts, principles and practices of youth organizing and its nexus with youth development. An annotated bibliography and briefing papers along with references to other resources are also available.

[www.fcyo.org](http://www.fcyo.org)

### John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities

This partnership between Stanford University and communities to build new practices for youth development and learning offers online a handbook from the Youth Engaged in Leadership and Learning (YELL) youth-led research project as well as other papers.

[gardnercenter.stanford.edu](http://gardnercenter.stanford.edu)

### Innovation Center for Community and Youth Development

Formerly part of the National 4-H, the Innovation Center offers training and technical assistance as well as tool kits, research reports, curricula, and planning and evaluation tools to support youth in decision-making.

[www.theinnovationcenter.org](http://www.theinnovationcenter.org)

### LISTEN, Inc.

Local Initiative Support Training and Education Network is a national capacity-building organization whose mission is to develop youth leadership and strengthen the social capital of urban youth, ages 14-29, through civic engagement, community organizing and problem solving.

[www.lisn.org](http://www.lisn.org)



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### **Michigan Community Foundations' Youth Project (Council of Michigan Foundations)**

Website shares tools, best practices, research findings, forms and tips gleaned from more than a decade of youth grantmaking experience in Michigan. Michigan hosts an annual summer leadership conference for youth grantmakers.

[www.youthgrantmakers.org](http://www.youthgrantmakers.org)

### **National League of Cities, Institute for Youth, Education and Families**

Through its Youth Participation program, NLC works with municipal government and local communities to promote youth engagement. Its action kit, *Promoting Youth Participation*, which is available online, offers information about establishing a youth council, planning through Community YouthMapping, hosting a youth summit, and promoting youth service.

[www.nlc.org/nlc\\_org/site/programs/institute\\_for\\_youth\\_education\\_and\\_families/index.cfm](http://www.nlc.org/nlc_org/site/programs/institute_for_youth_education_and_families/index.cfm)

### **Youth on Board**

Website describes workshops and consultative services available as well as publications for planning and implementing youth in decision-making and youth-adult partnerships. A 14-point organizational assessment checklist is available online.

[www.youthonboard.org](http://www.youthonboard.org)

### **Youth Leadership Institute**

YLI is a community-based organization that supports social change-oriented youth philanthropy programs in the Bay Area and elsewhere in California. YLI offers training and technical assistance in youth development, youth engagement and youth philanthropy and a number of manuals drawn from its work with youth in California.

In addition, *Changing the Face of Giving: An Assessment of Youth Philanthropy*, a publication commissioned by the Irvine Foundation, can be viewed and downloaded online.

[www.yli.org](http://www.yli.org)