

## YOUTH DEVELOPMENT IS TRIGGERED WHEN YOUNG PEOPLE FULLY PARTICIPATE

*This principle acknowledges the importance of providing opportunities for young people to increase their control of what happens to them and around them, through participation and engagement*

### WHAT IS PARTICIPATION?

*“Participation is... the process of sharing decisions which affect ones’ life and the life of the community in which one lives. It is the means by which a democracy is built and... against which democracies should be measured. Participation is a fundamental right of citizenship” (Hart, 1992: 4).*

### WHY YOUTH PARTICIPATION?

The Youth Development Strategy Aotearoa recognises that participation is an important factor in healthy youth development. It is therefore a priority for communities to facilitate *meaningful* youth participation. This involves enabling young people to make a real difference by creating opportunities for decision-making that encourage young people to feel connected and play a valued and authoritative role in this process (Oliver, Collins, Burns and Nicholas, 2006).

Meaningful participation can be promoted in many areas of a young person's life, including social, political and educational contexts. It can also be nurtured within the family, establishing the young person as a valued and respected member of the family/whanau. All of these environments afford important opportunities for young people to develop new skills and explore their opinions. At Youthline, young people are encouraged to get involved in a wide variety of activities, events and developmental

programmes. Engaging through participation creates quality relationships and fosters connections. The strengths-based approach Youthline adopts enables the young person to enhance protective factors in their lives and build resilience, while understanding and managing risks.

### FUNDAMENTALS OF PARTICIPATION

- Ensure that young people are valued by acknowledging their importance to our communities and affirm their contribution through reciprocal exchange (not necessarily money - although it could be appropriate at times).
- Respect young people and their views – they will sense tokenism or exploitation. Give them the time they need and deserve.
- Understand that the views and experiences of a small group of young people do not usually represent those of all young people.
- Provide relevant training for the task and clearly identify development opportunities and pathways. Often young people need to be mentored and their skills developed in order to participate fully.
- Accommodating practical aspects such as transport needs and providing food at meetings is essential for young people to participate.
- Take care with scheduling. Young people may have trouble negotiating time off with their workplace or school. Sometimes communicating directly with work,

school and parents/guardians will increase participation.

- Having several youth members will increase their individual participation and enrich their experience and contributions.
- Being young is not enough; choose the young people for their skills not their youth.
- Give them tasks that are achievable and meaningful.

## **BENEFITS OF YOUTH PARTICIPATION**

The encouragement and facilitation of youth participation benefits the personal growth and development of young people. Participation can add value to many aspects of a young person's life (e.g. school, community, wider society).

Including youth in participation activities can have many positive outcomes.

**Pragmatic** – projects and organisations involved in youth work need young people to participate to ensure their work remains relevant and appropriate and may enable access to new youth networks.

**Educational** – young people benefit through participation from taking on leadership roles and developing their skills and capabilities.

**Human Rights** – Young people have the right to be involved in decisions that affect them.

(United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Articles 12 and 13)

**Democratic** – truly democratic societies can only be developed through full and meaningful participation of all members of society. The participation of young people creates a “broader base of citizen involvement... and more inclusive communities” (Ministry of Youth Development, 2009).

The latter two points particularly emphasise Principle 1 of the YDSA: *‘Youth development is shaped by the bigger picture.’* Young people's lives are directly influenced and shaped by their values and belief systems. It is the

fundamental right of young people to be actively involved in the ‘big picture’ as they perceive this and meaningful participation enables this to happen.

Meaningful youth participation strengthens a young person's;

- sense of contributing something of value to society
- feelings of connectedness to others and to society
- belief that they have choices about their future
- positive feelings and being comfortable with their own identity

Meaningful participation can also,

- provide opportunities to enhance protective factors which will foster resiliency (Oliver et al, 2006).
- bring fresh perspectives to the challenges young people face.
- create new ideas and angles which genuinely represent the perspectives of young people.
- allow young people to meet other young people.
- create new opportunities and skills for young people to develop themselves further.
- make young people more likely to accept the programme's services and message when they are central to the processes involved.
- increase self-esteem and confidence, motivation to pursue new goals and provide opportunities for personal advancement, employment and educational opportunities.

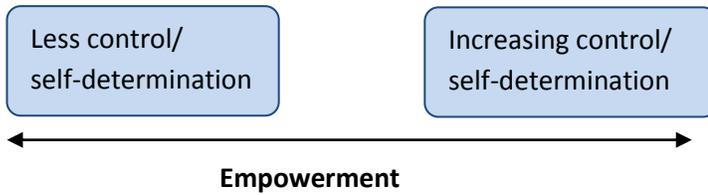
### **YDSA: PRINCIPLE 2**

*“Healthy youth development depends on young people having positive connections with others in society”*

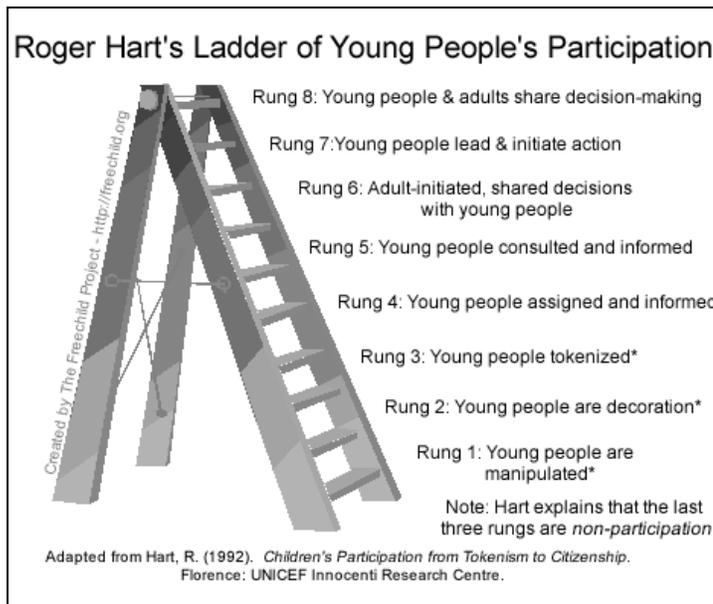
Positive connections between young people and the wider community should be encouraged, fostered and harnessed to inform practice within organisations.

## MODELS OF PARTICIPATION

A range of models have been proposed to understand how participation and empowerment occur. Most are expressed as a continuum:



For young people, the most well-known model of participation is Hart (1992). Other similar models include Westhorp (1987), Sheir (2001) and Rocha (1997).



Youthline strives to achieve the highest levels of youth participation (the top rungs of Hart's ladder). We aim to include participatory processes in any research we complete.

### *Westhorp's Continuum of Youth Involvement (1987)*

Westhorp conceptualised youth participation as existing on a continuum from 'Ad Hoc Input' to 'Integrated Participation'.

Youthline is committed to providing young people with roles, responsibilities and authority within the decision

making processes in all aspects of the organisation so that full integration of participation is achieved.

### Principles to guide youth participation (UN, 1999)

1. Definition of benefits to Youth
2. Democracy
3. Development of youth
4. Education
5. Enabling environment
6. Enjoyment
7. Informed Choice
8. Real Power

## BARRIERS TO YOUTH PARTICIPATION

Common challenges to youth participation that still need to be overcome are detailed below (Ministry of Youth Development, 2009):

- Failing to recognize youth as a distinct developmental period.
- Defining youth as a homogenous group.
- Differences in power between adults and youth that prevent quality partnerships.
- Little attention is given in academic literature to evidence supporting the inclusion of youth.
- Limited organisational opportunities for young people to participate with existing avenues which are often not designed for youth.
- Not knowing how to involve or discuss issues with young people.
- A widespread and 'false' belief that young people are incapable of contributing to public debate.
- Lack of transparency and interpretation and co-option of young people's 'voice' – ventriloquism
- Complicated and unnecessary processes required in order to include youth in adult activities.
- Underestimating the time and preparation needed before young people can be fully included.

Each of these barriers represents a threat to healthy youth development and can be counteracted with a few simple and careful approaches by organizations and facilitators:

- Acknowledge that young people might be new to the environment in which they are participating and that flexibility and patience is needed to allow them to learn.
- Ensure participating young people know that their ideas are heard and valued.
- Create a guide for new participants to take home and review including how to achieve set tasks in order to complete the job properly and safely, technical terms, acronyms, and jargon of the group/workplace/organisation.
- Help young people with career-planning and identifying opportunities for advancement in the workplace/organisation.
- Create challenging work with attainable goals and measurable results.
- Help ensure good communication between all members of the group, especially among the youth in the group.
- Ensure all young people who participate are aware of appropriate communication methods, channels, and tools for addressing problems, obstacles, and concerns.

**Hart R.** (1992). *Children’s participation from tokenism to citizenship*. Florence: UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre.

**Howard, S.M.** (1994). *Parent involvement in the introduction of Human Relationships Education in Queensland state primary schools*. U.p. M.Phil. thesis, Griffith University.

**Lardner, Clare,** (2001), *Youth Participation — A new model*:  
[www.lardner.demon.co.uk](http://www.lardner.demon.co.uk).

**Oliver KG, Collin P, Burns J, Nicholas J.** (2006) *Building resilience in young people through meaningful participation*. Aust E J Adv Ment Health [Internet] 2006; 5. <http://www.auseinet.com/journal/vol5iss1/oliver.pdf> (accessed March 2011).

**Shier, H.,** (2001), *Pathways to Participation: Openings, Opportunities and Obligations*, Children and Society Volume 15 (2001) pp107-111.

**Treseder, P.,** (1997), *Empowering children and young people*, training manual, Save the Children Fund, London. *Youth Participation Manual*. (1999). United Nations. Economic and Social commission for Asia and the Pacific. New York.

### THE EXCHANGE

**Meaningful Participation  
 And  
 Youth Development  
 And  
 Positive Opportunities  
 =  
 BEST OUTCOMES FOR EVERYONE**

### RESOURCES AND TOOLKITS

**The Ministry of Youth Development (2008):** A guide for local government: An introduction to youth participation

**The Ministry of Youth Development.** (2009). “Keepin’ it Real”: A resource for involving young people.

**The Ministry of Youth Development:** Youth development participation guide.

**UNICEF/Commonwealth Youth Programme Participation Toolkits** (2006) Books One - Four

**NSW commission for children and young people:** (2011) *TAKING PARTicipation seriously*

### REFERENCES AND INFORMATION

**Arnstein, Sherry,** (1969), *A Ladder of Participation*, Journal of American Institute of Planners 35, 1969, pp. 216-224.

**Hart, Roger,** (1997), *The theory and practice of involving young citizens in community development and environmental care*, Earthscan.

**Ministry of Social Development and Ministry of Affairs:**

(2002) Increasing the Participation of Children, Young People and Young Adults in Decision Making; A Literature Review.

**Ministry of Youth Development** (2007). Youth Development Strategy Aotearoa: Action for Child and Youth development. Wellington: MYA.

Youthline believes in the young people of Aotearoa, and the principles of youth development and youth participation. It is important that we set the standard for other organisations and demonstrate that youth involvement not only works but offers a massive benefit to organisations, the young people involved and the wider community.