

COMMUNITY-YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

Community development is facilitated by the ability of local people to mobilize resources to address local needs. Youth are in a position to be among the stable and long term contributors that help guide this process. Youth represent a vast and often untapped resource for immediate and long-term community development efforts (Barnett and Brennan 2006: 2).

Many rural youth struggle to decide whether to stay or leave their communities. Desires to remain tend to be related to family and community ties. However, there is a common perception that if youth leave their communities, their futures might be more promising (Bajema, Miller, and Williams 2002; Hektner 1995; Johnson, Elder, and Stern 2005).

Rural communities across the nation are therefore experiencing a “youth exodus” or, as referred to in the vernacular, a “brain drain.” Rural youth are leaving their home communities once they reach adulthood and many are not returning (Johnson et al 2005). As rural communities age and populations continue to be “hollowed out”, there appears to be no present workforce or leadership pool ready to promote the continual development of the community (Carr and Kefalas 2009).

To accentuate this issue, rural areas face unique challenges including poverty, less diverse economies and labor markets, poor civic infrastructures, and limited educational and career opportunities (Hektner 1995). With no ready population present to address these challenges, community leaders, practitioners, and policy makers are looking to solve this dilemma. The Community Youth Development Program is one potential solution to the “brain drain” being experienced in rural America.



PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The overall purpose of the Community Youth Development Program is to educate youth on the functioning and operations of rural communities as well as engaging youth with the intent of inspiring youth to remain in or return to rural America.

This goal will be accomplished through the following:

- Demonstration of opportunities in the community for work and careers, for leadership, and for filling gaps and needs within the community.
- Engaging youth in community development - projects, volunteering, policy development, and decision making among businesses, institutions, industries, and organizations.
- Forming partnerships between youth and adult leaders.
- Building connections between youth and the community, individuals, and organizations.
- Developing and utilizing:
 - Leadership skills
 - Interpersonal, social, and communication skills
 - Job-related skills
 - Problem-solving skills
 - Civic-engagement skills
 - Decision-making skills
- Fostering citizenship among youth in rural communities
- Creating a culture of participation
- Promoting a sense of belonging, mastery, generosity, and independence in youth participants
- Encouraging communities to rethink their investment in local youth
- Nurturing sustainable community development through youth involvement and investment

There are two components involved in Community Youth Development Program: 1) a Supervisor Orientation and a Youth Camp both to be held in the community, and 2) a Community Internship.

SUPERVISOR ORIENTATION

A half-day training for adults participating in the program will also be provided in the community. As research and practice have demonstrated (Gambone 2004; Perkins et al. 2001; Zeldin, Petrokubi, and MacNeil 2008), successful youth leadership and community involvement programs require well-trained staffs who are willing to devote their time and resources.

EDUCATOR ACTIVITIES/YOUTH CAMP

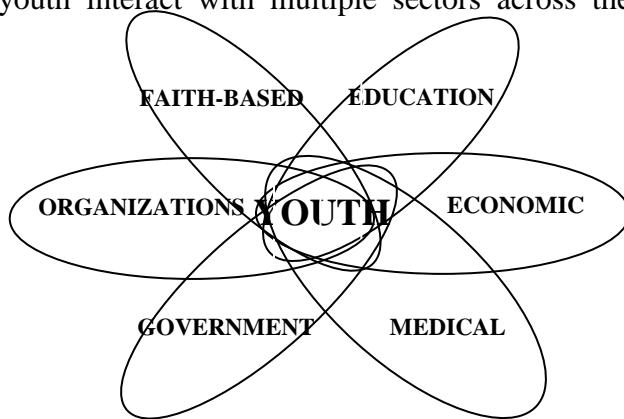
The purpose of the in-school activities and camp is to introduce the youth to relevant concepts and the organizational structures and operations of rural communities and governments. The camp will be held over two days. The first day will take place in a central location with all of the C-YDP youth and the second day will occur in the youth's respective community.

COMMUNITY INTERNSHIP

The goal is to develop a population-specific program curriculum and to develop, close, stable, mentoring relationships with youth throughout their leadership and organizing skill training and activism work. Through the youth camp and adult training, assessments will be completed to gauge strengths and weaknesses and to tailor each internship to the specific community and individual youth. Specific activities will vary between communities. The skills and learning objectives gained through the adult training will inform involvement in any activities and interactions within the communities.

The Community Youth Development Program “involves creating opportunities for young people to connect to others, develop skills, and utilize those skills to contribute to their communities” (Perkins et al. 2001: 46-47).

The Community Youth Development Program is comprehensive and inclusive. Applied education is encouraged to occur *throughout* the community—not just in specific projects or in limited areas—as youth interact with multiple sectors across the community (Perkins et al. 2001).



BENEFITS

There is an “interdependent relationship between positive and healthy youth outcomes and positive and healthy communities” (Perkins et al. 2001: 43).

The Community Youth Development Program intends to engage “youth as partners in the development of external assets and in the development of opportunities for skill and competency development” (Perkins et al. 2001: 46).

With the included training activities and through the community internship youth will establish and build successful relationships with engaged adults. These relationships have the potential to provide social capital for the involved youth. The investment in the youth by the community not only promotes youth development, but also promotes community development and “ensures the continuation of a healthy civil society” (Jarrett, Sullivan, and Watkins 2005: 42). Well-functioning communities have strong networks of trust; these trust networks will be strengthened through youth-adult interaction within the program. Lastly, a new generation of youth will be integrated into rural and community civic life (Jarrett et al. 2005).