



MODULE 1

Young people as agents of social change in your organisation

This module is for EDs, board members staff, managers, adult volunteers, young volunteers and anyone who is involved in (the coordination of) implementing a YCA in the organisation.

Introduction

IPPF recognises the importance of engaging young people in life-changing projects. We believe in young people as agents for social change both inside and outside the Federation. To ensure young people can be agents of social change in your own organisation, equal partnerships between young people and adults must underpin any form of systematic youth participation. So, before embarking on our journey of youth participation and achieving a successful YCA in your organisation, we recommend that you explore how you view young people's agency and the dynamics that will challenge and promote equal partnership between adults and young people in the organisation.

Elements of the module include:

1. Young people as agents of change
2. Youth-adult partnership
3. Inter-generational power dynamics
4. How to create equal partnerships
5. The dos and don'ts of youth-adult partnerships

1. Young people as agents for change



IPPF believes in a rights-based approach to young people's sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). A rights-based approach means that young people in your organisation, whether they are clients or volunteers, know their rights and feel that their rights are taken seriously. For your programmes to be effective, they must be grounded in the local context, give relevant information and services and promote critical thinking and self-determination. A rights-based approach also encourages tolerance and solidarity with those whose rights are violated. The IPPF rights-based approach also encourages acceptance as far more meaningful than tolerance

2. Youth-adult partnership

We believe in a 'partnership' approach between young people and adults that recognises young people's potential to influence their surroundings.

- Equal partnership between adults and young people has benefits for individual young people as well as their communities and broader society. The young people involved can benefit from the position they hold, the training and support they receive and the support and feedback they get in making decisions and organising activities. A youth-adult partnership offers them the opportunity to learn collaborative and problem-solving skills, to express their needs and concerns, to become aware of differences in attitudes and lifestyles, and to promote acceptance and respect.
- Young people in the Region are not a single homogenous group. There is a huge diversity of cultural and religious beliefs and practices in local communities throughout the region. These elements will influence how adults and young people interact with adults and each other. It also has an impact on how confident young people are to be able to talk openly about sex and sexuality and to make autonomous decisions about their emotional and sexual lives.

Important Elements of Effective Youth-Adult Partnerships

It can be challenging to build effective, sustainable, genuinely collaborative youth-adult partnerships. Successful partnerships have some important elements in common.

Effective partnerships:

- **establish clear goals for the partnership.** Both the young people and the adults must understand what their roles and responsibilities will be to help achieve the goals.
- **involve sharing power to make decisions.** If young people have no power to make decisions, their participation is not one of partnership.
- **succeed in getting the highest levels of the organisation** to commit fully to youth participation in the organisation's work.
- **ensure that each adult and young person enters the partnership** with a clear understanding of everyone's roles and responsibilities.
- **are selective.** Young people vary widely in their development and in their readiness and willingness to assume responsibility. Being clear about the goals of the partnership and the roles that youth will play will help identify young people who are committed, reliable and effective. At the same time, effective partnerships are selective about adult participants. The adults must believe that young people are assets and be willing and able to advocate on behalf of youth when stereotyping or negative assumptions about teens arise.
- **provide capacity building and training.** Effective partnerships don't set young people up for failure by throwing them into situations for which they are not prepared. Young people may need training in communication, leadership, assertiveness skills, interviewing, etc., as well as in specific areas of expertise such as HIV prevention education. The same is true for adults, who, like young people, may also need training in communication, collaborative work, interviewing or working with young people, as well as in specific areas of expertise such as HIV prevention education.
- **understand that different styles of communication** do not imply disrespect, disinterest or different goals and expectations. Youth and adults say that the best way to resolve conflicts that arise out of different communication styles is to ask questions when one does not understand what is being said or why it is being said. Keeping the common goal in mind can also help resolve conflicts arising out of different communication styles.
- **value the participation and contribution of young people.** Effective partnerships maintain high expectations of participating young people and are not afraid of holding them accountable for their responsibilities.
- **value adults' participation and contribution.** Adults can frequently offer the partnership knowledge, experience and access to resources. Effective partnerships guard against discounting potential adult allies, assuming that all adults hold negative stereotypes about young people, or believing that adults will have nothing of value to contribute to a program intended for youth.
- **make room for growth—next steps.** Where can youth and adults go next? For example, peer education programs are often great vehicles for empowering young people and helping them develop important skills. However, these programs seldom include opportunities for advancement or for peer educators to assume more responsibility over time. Effective programs ensure that young people and the adults who work with them have opportunities for advancement. Both youth and adults will have valuable experience and insights to bring to more senior positions in the organisation.
- **respect the fact that young people have other interests and priorities.** Too often, adults will enthusiastically enlist the participation of a particularly effective and articulate young person in an overwhelming number of obligations and commitments. Check in often with the young person to ensure that they are taking on only as much as they can manage without neglecting other important aspects of their lives, such as family, friends, and education. Try to assist young people in recognising when to say no, and support their decisions.

3. Intergenerational power dynamics

Intergenerational power dynamics is a term that describes a wide range of patterns of interaction among individuals from different generations of a family, in a school or in an organisation: for example, between those in older generations, such as parents and grandparents, relatives, teachers, service providers and those in younger generations, such as children and grandchildren, young people, students, clients, workers etc.

Below we list the different elements that influence power dynamics between young and older people

Respect

In most societies, adults expect respect from the younger generation. During the adolescent and early adult years, younger people may not be aware of the respect they have for their elders. They may minimise the relevance of the older generations' perspectives because the younger generation feels more contemporary.

Responsibility

Adult and young people should feel responsible for each other. While adults feel fully responsible for younger children, this shifts as the children grow older. On reaching a certain aged, children are expected to be more responsible and to provide some support to adults. This shift in responsibility impacts on the decisions that young people have to make: what and where they will study, where they will live, how they will earn a living etc. Often young people make extraordinary sacrifices to support older relatives because they feel responsible for providing them with care. Responsibility may be grounded in a feeling of obligation or "pay back" for what the older generation had done for the younger generation previously. Feelings of intergenerational responsibility are translated into action in the case of many families in the EN Region.

Reciprocity

For the majority of a lifespan, intergenerational relationships are characterised by reciprocity. Younger generations support older people, while adults assist younger people. In short, as we grow up, intergenerational relationships generally become more of a two-way street.

Trust

Trust between young people and adults is essential for a YCA. Adults may find it difficult to give young people autonomy as part of their evolving capacity to make their own decisions. It is essential that each MA treat all its members with equal respect and provide equal opportunities. If adults lack trust in young people's abilities, their visions and their willingness to participate, it will have a negative impact on youth participation in the MA.

Willingness to change

Both adults and young people need to be willing to change the way they communicate and work with each other. This can mean that certain adult structures or ways of working can be changed. For example, time and place for board meetings. They are often not very convenient for young people. It doesn't help when adults say, 'we have always done it like this and it has always worked!' The aim should not be to force young people to fit into the organisation, but rather to find ways for both adults and young people to feel that they belong there.



Power dynamics and culture in the organization



Introducing YCA can demand a lot from an organisation, especially in cases where the organisation is well established and/or not used to fostering youth participation or youth-adult partnership.

In such cases, it is helpful to start by assessing the readiness of the organisation to make the changes required. This checklist will help to evaluate how the organization is committed to work in equal partnership with young people and integrate youth participation at all levels of the organization.

Criteria	Yes	No	Comments
1. Is there an explicit commitment from the organisation to strengthen its approach to youth-centeredness?			
2. Is there an explicit commitment from the organisation to promote a culture of team work, democracy and equality between adults and young people?			
3. Is there an explicit commitment from the organisation to invest in the development of its young volunteers?			
4. Have participatory quality assurance activities identified areas of improvement within the Youth Friendly Services			
5. Have quality improvement plans identified that staff members have knowledge/skills gaps (i.e. areas of improvement not only refer to institutional factors such as a lack of policies or infrastructure)?			
6. Does the organization believe in the necessity of working with young people as agents of change?			
7. Is the organisation committed to addressing challenges that prevent equal partnership between young people and adults?			
8. Is the organisation willing to invest time and human resources, to the extent possible, to ensure effective youth participation and YCA?			
9. Does the organisation have the buy-in of senior staff and adults?			
<p><i>Score: If you replied "Yes" to most of questions, then you are ready to implement YCA. If you have scored very few questions with Yes, it may be best to implement the YCA by organising some internal discussions about the willingness within the organisation to work with young people as equal partners. Also see the checklist on page 13 (link). This material may help support such internal discussions.</i></p>			

If the organisation has a hierarchical structure, where only a few people make the decisions, the YCA could be the first step towards changing the organisational culture.

Implications for Practice

Tips for dealing with power dynamics between adults and young people in our MA:



For adults:

Your status (and the way it is perceived) in the clinic or organisation can have a negative influence on interactions with younger people. The young person may feel intimidated or worried that the hierarchical between the two of you could impact your judgement and therefore also your decisions and actions.

Ask yourself the following questions:

- Am I aware of my own power and relationship needs?
- Am I aware of situations where younger people perceive me as intimidating, are fearful that they may be judged, or may not dare to approach me?
- What are my needs in terms of power and control?
- Am I aware of my motivation for seeking an equal partnership with the young person?
- How would I characterise the power dynamic in my interaction with young people? Dominant/aggressive/accommodating/encouraging and empowering/detached?
- Can I identify and practise well balanced power relations with young people?

For adults and young people



Anyone who works with others will know just how sensitive people can be to the way in which we communicate with them and each other. An unhealthy atmosphere can arise in the team when staff members and/or managers only ever consider negatives and address things that go wrong. Young people will leave an organisation if they are unable to access information, receive positive feedback or a kind word or gesture from others.

- Giving positive feedback to each other may sometimes be seen as too “soft”, especially if there is a strict hierarchy in the organisation. Sometimes managers or colleagues are reluctant to give compliments to one staff member, because they are afraid that other colleagues will be jealous.
- Giving positive feedback never has negative effects; it is crucial in any organisation that people feel appreciated and accepted, and feel that they belong.
- Giving positive feedback is something entirely different from flattery. Flattery is not sincere and is given because the “flatterer” is trying to gain something for themselves.
- Giving positive feedback, on the other hand, is focused on the other person. It is rooted in respect and acknowledging the other. You should not be critical if you are not able to give positive feedback.

Tips on giving positive feedback:

- Be authentic when you give feedback. Your feedback should be based on evidence, facts and real-life situations.
- Positive feedback does not need to be complicated. It can be given for small examples of success: always being on time; giving clear/new information in a team meeting etc.
- Try not to exaggerate or go over the top - just keep it simple;
- Remember that positive feedback is never useless; it always has a positive effect.

For young people

The adults in your organisation may seem intimidating because of their higher status, the way they are perceived as an authority figure, expert, provider or facilitator of solutions. It is important that, from the outset, both you and the adults ensure that your relationship is based on equality. If you feel pressurised by an adult staff member or volunteer this can have a negative effect on your work with the organisation. The power relationship should be collaborative - and this responsibility lies both with you and the adult in question. If there is some form of hierarchy, it should be transparent and not prevent any open communication between you and the adults.

When you get feedback:



- be open to feedback and try to understand it; look at it as an opportunity to learn
- Listen carefully and ask for clarification if you need it
- Try not to get defensive or see feedback as an attack
- Feedback can be positive, be happy to receive a compliment
- Thank the adult staff for his/her feedback

How to ensure you get the best out of your relationship with the adult staff member/volunteer



- Ask questions if they give you feedback that you don't understand
- Accept responsibility for your mistakes
- Always ask for and accept feedback
- Share success stories with the adults you work with. The focus should not be entirely on problems/mistakes
- Make notes
- Ensure that your relationship with the adult is two-way
- Attend meetings, if you agreed to participate always to participate
- Show that you care about being a member of the organisation

4. How to create equal partnerships

How can you create equal partnerships between adults and young people in your MA? Adults must realise that young people accessing the services as clients or as young volunteers carry with them the sum of their life experiences — both good and bad — gifts, talents, struggles, needs, family strengths and issues, culture, economic status and their experiences regarding sexuality. In order for an equal partnership to be emotionally and academically successful, adult staff members and volunteers have to know and value who young people are and what they experience in their lives.

Valuing each learner's authentic life experiences is important in developing a caring and supportive environment where young people can be at their best. As a staff member or adult volunteer, it is your job to support young people's growth and personal empowerment. This cannot be achieved through a top-down or authoritarian approach. From experience and research, we know that young people thrive best when adults facilitate their interests and playfulness, and allows them to interact freely with each other and the adult staff members.

As a staff member you need a toolkit of knowledge, attitudes and skills to be an equal partner with young people in your organisation.

What are your competencies as staff member/adult volunteer working in equal partnership with young people in your MA?



If you are thinking of promoting youth participation, you can use the following checklist to see what whether attitudes, knowledge and skills are well suited to equal partnership with young people. Tick the competencies that you already have and those you want to develop more during your interaction with your young volunteers

Category	I have	I need to develop 1. need to develop but is not urgent 2. development not perceived as needed 3. significant development is required			Comments
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Attitudes		1	2	3	
Willingness and motivation to work with young people					
Willingness to focus on the potential and experiences of young people					
Commitment to working in partnership with young people in line from an equal perspective					
Willingness to learn from young people					
Conviction that equal partnerships have a positive impact on the sexual wellbeing of young people.					
Willingness to challenge individual opinions, norms and feelings related to the sexuality of young people, to cultural and religious backgrounds and to gender identities and sexual orientation					
Awareness that one's own experiences, attitudes and behaviour influence the way you interact with young people					
Commitment to combatting discrimination and/or stigmatisation and promoting inclusiveness for all young people					
Zero tolerance of sexual and gender-based violence and discrimination, and willingness to protect young people from it					
Positive attitude towards the sexual development of children and young people, relative to their age and developmental level					
Openness to diverse backgrounds, gender identities and sexual orientation					

Confidence in your ability to defend/promote your interactions with young people with other members of your family, community or profession					
Understanding and respect for the many different perspectives relating to sexual choices, behaviour, and expressions					
Willingness to explore and accept personal/professional deficits in your interaction with young people "from an equal position					
Willingness to ask for help/accept advice					
Other:					

<i>Skills</i>		1	2	3	
Ability to search for and assess existing materials, methods and evidence-based information and research with regard to youth participation and the YCA					
Ability to use appropriate, unbiased language, understood by young people, that accounts for the diverse backgrounds, abilities, identities, and orientations of young people					
Ability to create and maintain a safe, confidential, inclusive and enabling environment for all young people					
Interpersonal /communication skills: the ability to listen to young people as equal partners, motivate, collaborate with them					
Ability to refrain from imposing personal views, assumptions and beliefs on young people					
Ability to respond appropriately to provocative and challenging questions and situations					
Ability to make connections between sexual behaviour, the wellbeing of young people and the choice to prevent against unwanted pregnancy, HIV and other STIs					
Ability to collect relevant data, regarding SRHR of young people in your context					
Ability to work as part of a multidisciplinary, diverse and intergenerational team					
Other:					

Knowledge		1	2	3	
Key SRH facts and most pressing needs of young people in your geographical area					
Sexuality in general (aspects related to sexuality)					
Relationships and different lifestyles of young people in your community					
Healthy aspects of sexuality					
Sexuality and rights					
Diversity in sexual feelings, gender identity and sexual orientation					
SRHR of young people and their evolving capacity to make decisions					
Social and cultural determinants of sexuality (e.g. gender norms, laws/policies on consent etc.)					
Determinants of sexual behaviour of young people in your context					
Online and offline information sources about sexuality, to be used by young people					
Child protection policy in the organization					
Useful and up to date materials, methods, and sources for youth participation and YCA					
Other					

Before and during your interaction with young people in the MA, it is important to regularly address and discuss this checklist with your team or manager in the MA.

As a young person, you also need a toolkit of knowledge, attitudes and skills to be able to interact equally with adults in the MA

Before and during your interaction with adults in the MA is important to regularly address and discuss this checklist with your peers and with someone you trust in the MA.





Tips on how to improve equal partnerships in the MA

For both adults and young people:

- Creation of a safe space for interaction between adults and young people
- Consideration of intersecting social drivers for young people and adults (e.g. gender norms, ethnicity, social economic status)
- Seeing failure as a part of the learning process. When you both agree that the interaction can fail, it creates an atmosphere of safety. You will both know you can try and try again.
- Creating clear goal orientation together. Know where you want to go together; set goals together and monitor your journey towards achieving those goals together
- Receiving and giving timely, specific feedback to each other is key.
- Language is important. How adults talk to young people and vice versa plays a crucial role in striking a healthy partnership, so try to find a common language that respects both young people and adults.

What are your competencies as a young volunteer who works in equal partnership with adult staff and volunteers in the MA?



If you are giving YOUTH FRIENDLY SERVICES or planning to do so, you can use the following checklist. Tick the competencies which you already have and those you want to develop more during your interaction with the adult staff member/volunteer

Category	I have	I need to develop 1. need to develop but is not urgent 2. development not perceived as needed 3. significant development is required			Comments
Attitudes		1	2	3	
Willingness and motivation to contribute to the MA					
Willingness and motivation to learn and grow					
Feeling of belonging to the organisation/ clinic					
Conviction that working in partnership with adults will have a positive impact on the work of the MA.					
Willingness to challenge individual opinions, norms and feelings related to sexuality, to cultural and religious backgrounds, and to gender identities and sexual orientation					

Awareness that one's own experiences, attitudes and behaviour influence the way you interact with adults					
Commitment to combatting discrimination and/or stigmatisation and promoting inclusiveness for all young people					
Zero tolerance of sexual and gender-based violence and discrimination and willingness to protect young people from it					
Openness to diverse backgrounds, gender identities and sexual orientation					
Confidence in your ability to defend/promote your interactions with young people with other members of your family, community or profession					
Understanding and respect for the many different perspectives relating to sexual choices, behaviour and expressions					
Willingness to ask for help and accept advice					
Other:					

<i>Skills</i>		1	2	3	
Ability to listen to adults as equal partner					
Ability to use appropriate, unbiased language, understood by adults, that accounts for the diverse backgrounds, abilities, identities and orientations of young people					
Ability to create and maintain a safe, confidential, inclusive and enabling environment for your peers					
Ability to refrain from imposing personal views, assumptions and beliefs on adults or peers					
Ability to respond to provocative and challenging questions and situations					
Ability to work as part of a multidisciplinary, diverse and intergenerational team (e.g. with community providers, peer providers, doctors, nurses, etc.)					
Ability to translate feedback from peers, young people and other stakeholders in your community into action					
Other:					

Knowledge		1	2	3	
Your organization's mission, vision, main policies, programmes and processes					
Key SRH facts and most pressing needs of young people in your geographical area					
Sexuality and rights					
Diversity in sexual feelings, gender identity and sexual orientation					
SRHR of young people and their evolving capacity to make decisions					
Social and cultural determinants of sexuality (e.g. gender norms, laws/policies on consent etc.)					
Determinants of sexual behavior of young people in your community					
Accurate terminology in SRHR					
Online and offline information sources about sexuality, to be used by your peers					
Child protection policy in the organization					
Other					



References

IPPF:

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