



# Supporting Youth through Community Engagement

The Peace Corps' approach to youth development focuses on recognizing youth as positive contributors within their communities and acknowledging that they have specific assets which can be enhanced, such as social competencies, empowerment, commitment to learning, and positive values. This asset-building approach to youth development is not intended to be a quick fix, but rather a long-term vision that calls for community-wide responsibility for youth. Engagement from a wide range of community members, representing a variety of perspectives and roles (gender, age, leadership positions, etc.), is an important component.

This tip sheet provides practical strategies for Volunteers to help strengthen community support for youth.



## Tips on How Community Members Can Support Positive Youth Development

- **Demonstrate positive values and responsible behavior.**

Avoid using the “Do as I say, not do as I do” approach by recognizing that the most effective way to encourage positive, responsible behavior is by modeling it for youth.

- **Recognize positive, responsible behavior in youth.**

When you see youth demonstrating mature, responsible behavior, affirm and encourage them.



- **Support and listen to youth.**

Young people need to know that they are being heard. Ask questions and encourage their interests and talents, including academics, arts, sports, and family life.

- **Appreciate youth efforts.**

Recognize youth for the contributions they make. You can do so with a celebration, a note of thanks, or a simple expression of gratitude.

- **Encourage youth to take action and get involved in their community.**

Invite youth to get involved in programs, clubs, and different initiatives in their community.

- **Express concern and compassion for youth.**

Take the time to talk to youth and listen to their concerns and fears. Support them in finding solutions or finding the help they need.

- **Identify and address risky behavior.**

Look out for youth and notify family members or other community stakeholders when you see unsafe behavior.

- **Promote respect for diversity.**

Encourage youth to be tolerant, respectful, and understanding by recognizing the value of differences.

- **Encourage youth involvement in constructive activities.**

Promote young people’s involvement in constructive pursuits such as sports, music, arts, theater, cultural expressions, and religious associations.

- **Establish clear expectations, rules, and consequences.**

Be clear and consistent with youth about your expectations and boundaries. Be fair and follow through with youth when they break the rules or make mistakes.

### Sources of Community Support for Youth

- Family
- Teachers
- Peers
- Religious and spiritual leaders
- Mentors and other caring adults
- Coaches
- Neighbors
- School leaders and administrators
- Community and municipal leaders
- Health workers
- Community-based organizations



## Additional Resources

Peace Corp’s **Life Skills and Leadership Manual** (No. M0098), comprises 25 participatory positive youth development sessions organized into four units that cover personal and interpersonal development, goal setting, action planning, and leadership and teamwork.

Peace Corp’s **Participatory Analysis for Community Action (PACA) Training Manual** (No. M0093) is designed for Volunteers to use participatory processes to build partnerships with their communities in the development process. It includes information about how to conduct community mapping and needs assessments, and effective priority-ranking of activities. The **PACA Idea Book** (No. M0086) provides field-based examples.

Peace Corp’s **V<sup>2</sup> Volunteerism Action Guide: Multiplying the Power of Service** (No. CD062) includes the elements of service learning with important cultural considerations; a step-by-step guide to service learning projects; and a template for local groups to adapt and design their own service activities.

Peace Corp’s **Working With Youth: Approaches for Volunteers** (No. M0067). With examples from Volunteers around the globe, this resource covers planning, implementing, and evaluating youth activities; tools, techniques, and games for working with youth; and adapting health, education, and leadership activities for youth.

Peace Corp’s **Youth Camps Manual: GLOW and Other Leadership Camps** (No. M0100) provides the tools to run successful youth camps, including activity ideas, counselor training, health and safety resources, and monitoring and evaluation tools.

The Search Institute’s **40 Developmental Assets for Adolescents** are building blocks of healthy development that help young children to be healthy, caring, and responsible.

UNICEF’s **Child and Youth Participation Resource Guide** is an annotated bibliography of child and youth participation resources.

# Key Strategies for Strengthening Community Support for Youth

In an ideal world, all of the following strategies would be in place to support an asset-based approach for youth support. However, it's important to be realistic and recognize that not all of these strategies can be achieved at once. Tackle those that offer the most promise or where you find a supportive partner, and gradually you will help build a strong foundation for community engagement.

## Youth Achievement

**Encourage youth-led community improvement projects.**

*Example:* Introduce your counterparts to the Peace Corps' **V2 Volunteerism Action Guide** (Publication No. CD062), which covers the key components of a service learning project and emphasizes the leading role of youth in determining community needs and solutions.

**Offer competitions for youth to solve community problems with their innovative ideas.**

*Example:* Working with community partners, organize a small grant program that incentivizes youth to creatively respond to pressing community needs.

**Showcase youth achievement.**

*Example:* Partner with schools or organizations that serve youth to ensure that youth are recognized for modeling positive behavior and contributing to a vibrant community.



## Strong Messaging

**Applaud efforts that offer youth participation opportunities.**

*Example:* Through local media, highlight organizations, associations, legal structures, and religious groups that present youth engagement and participation opportunities.

**Strengthen messaging that the community cares about youth.**

*Example:* Using posters or events on topics of concern to youth, emphasize the value that youth offer to their communities as problem-solvers and agents of change.

**Promote respect for and understanding of diversity.**

*Example:* Identify areas of tension or disagreement in the community and seek out opportunities to promote tolerance and respect for diversity through facilitated dialogue or special programming.



## Safe Space

**Offer youth healthy alternatives to risky behaviors.**

*Example:* Facilitate extracurricular activities and other youth-focused programs such as **life skills** workshops that can help steer at-risk youth away from unsafe activities.

**Establish safe physical spaces for youth.**

*Example:* Work with local government, community organizations, schools, or faith-based institutions to ensure that youth have safe, clean places to meet and play.

**Let youth know where to go to find help.**

*Example:* Disseminate information widely among youth and adult supporters on where youth can go to find emotional support when needed.



## Building Capacity

**Bolster youth clubs and programs that can be sustained by the community.**

*Example:* Tap into existing youth programs or clubs and offer to help strengthen their efforts through a new activity or initiative; or help expand their reach by engaging more youth.

**Encourage local governments and civil society to give youth a voice.**

*Example:* Assist organizations in inviting youth members to participate in their decision-making process or serve in an advisory role for the agency.

**Generate more youth volunteer opportunities.**

*Example:* Encourage local government and civil society associations to create service opportunities for youth to support their mission and engage in community improvement.

