

Youth and 4-H

# Youth as Partners: Mission and Statements in Support of Philosophy

Better Learning through 4-H Clubs

October 1995

## Staff Resource

### Mission

The mission of *Youth as Partners* is to provide opportunities for youth and adults to work as partners in the process of making decisions that impact a variety of components of the 4-H program. The goals of this approach to programming are to involve:

1. **Youth**, who will...

Develop skills in decision making:  
determining the problem, gathering information, listing the alternatives, weighing the alternatives, deciding what action to take, taking action, and evaluating results.

Develop leadership skills while facilitating the decision making process.

2. **Adults**, who will...

Accept youth as valuable resources.  
Develop skills necessary to promote youth decision making.

Develop skills necessary to foster youth leadership competencies.

3. **Youth and adults together**, who will..

Develop positive attitudes about working together.

Work as partners.

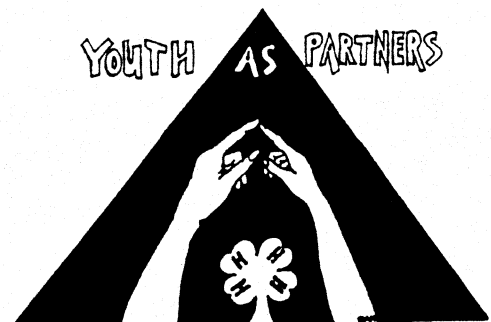
### Statements in Support of Philosophy

The following statements were developed by the *Youth as Partners* committee and are an integral part of developing a *Youth as Partners* approach to programming. Most of the philosophy statements are documented in research while some are the underlying beliefs, values, and attitudes of the committee members. The statements provide direction for the hopes and expectations of improved and successful programming.

The indicators of a successful *Youth as Partners* approach to programming are the following: (1) changes in attitudes, (2) the development of youth-adult partnerships, (3) a feeling by youth participants that they have influence in the decisions that affect them in the 4-H program, and (4) a feeling by adults that youth can be competent and effective decision makers. These statements are the foundation upon which an exciting and successful *Youth as Partners* approach to programming can be built.

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**1. In a democracy, people of all age groups have a right and a responsibility to participate.**

Equal opportunity in our democracy gives everyone the right to speak, to act, and to join. When youth have equal opportunity, they have a voice in decisions (they are heard by adults), they are perceived as capable (they are involved by adults), and they are included in the important decisions (they are connected with adults) (Bussler and Shields, 1990). In a democratic society young people have a right and a responsibility to participate in decisions that affect them (Lofquist, 1989).

The notion that empowerment of youth is necessary for citizenship socialization has been popular for some time (Easton and Dennis, 1969; Hess and Torney, 1967). Seventy-five (75) percent of Iowa Youth Poll respondents (545 randomly selected 13-18 year-olds) indicated that their input into their communities' decisions was "too little." Twenty-three (23) percent felt that such community input was "about right," while 2 percent felt it was "too much" (ISU Extension, 1990).

**2. Adults and youth need to identify and agree upon some common values. Then learn how to work together as partners and benefit from their diversity.**

Youth and adults are different from one another. The issue is not diversity, because diversity is a fact. The issue is finding the unity and common ground within the diversity, from which they can act (Boyte and Michels, 1988). All who are involved in a decision must have a level of comfort with the decision made.

**3. Collaborative power, rather than unilateral power, is the focus.**

Collaboration involves networking and cooperating to meet common goals, rather than having one person dictate the plans and activities (Boyte and Michels, 1988).

**4. Youth develop a sense of personal worth and competence by performing tasks that contribute to the well-being of others.**

Young people are often not expected to contribute to the well being of family or the community; social and legal restrictions limit the social contribution of youth (Kurth-Schai, 1988). Youth need an opportunity to contribute to society through involvement, cooperation, and personal responsibility.

**5. Leadership skills are best learned through the process of experiential learning.**

Experiential learning takes place when a person is involved in an activity, looks back at it critically, determines what is useful or important to remember, and uses this information to perform another activity. This "learning by doing" concept provides a sequential process that facilitates learning (Extension Service-USDA, 1992).

All learning is rooted in experience (Dewey, 1938). There can be, however, activity without learning. Therefore, there is a need for conditions under which experience is educational.

**6. Youth leadership in decision-making is vital to the future of clubs and communities.**

Strong and focused leadership must be developed and accepted, creative ways to address issues are essential, and risk-taking is critical to problem-solving for the future of communities (Campbell 1984).

## **7. Investing in human capital is critical to the future of clubs and communities.**

Human capital describes the value of the collection of skills, knowledge, and other mental and physical abilities that can be used in productive ways (to earn money or to contribute to the personal or community well being in other ways). The term human capital indicates that these abilities cannot be separated from the person, in contrast to financial or physical capital. Investment in human capital can be made through education, training, and health promotion.

## **8. Young people are the center of youth organizations.**

Youth development organizations exist to intentionally promote the positive, healthy development of young people (Walker and Dunham, 1993). The socialization of youth is the primary task of youth development organizations (Pittman, 1993). The mission of youth development organizations is to provide the challenges, experiences, support, and help young people need to develop to their fullest potential. These organizations purposefully work to meet the needs that are unmet in the environment and to enhance the learning of young people (Walker and Dunham). Research evidence indicates that young adolescents' ability to grow into healthy and mature adults is greatly influenced by the experiences they have, and the people they meet, during the nonschool hours (Carnegie Task Force on Youth Development, 1992). This report calls on American communities to do more than they are now doing to support the healthy development of young adolescents by providing them with ample, accessible, developmentally appropriate activities during their nonschool hours.

## **9. There are elements and needs which are essential for the healthy development of young people.**

To grow and to learn to optimal capacity in healthy ways, and to function successfully in an adult world, young people benefit from the following opportunities:

- Youth need to feel a sense of safety and structure;
- Youth need to experience active participation, group membership, and belonging;
- Youth need to develop self-worth achieved through meaningful contribution;
- Youth need to experiment to discover self, gain confidence, and gain control over one's life;
- Youth need to develop significant relationships with peers and adults;
- Youth need to discuss conflicting values and formulate their own;
- Youth need to feel the pride and accountability that comes with mastery;
- Youth need to expand the capacity to enjoy life and know that success is possible (Pittman, 1991; Konopka, 1973).

### **... and justice for all**

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