Youth Voice and the Y-VAL

Presented by **Youth MOVE Nevada** and

the Nevada Division of Child and Family Services

Roger Hart's ladder of young people's participation

Rung 8 Young people and adults share decision making

Rung 7 Young people lead and initiate action

Rung 6 Adult-initiated, shared decisions with young people

Rung 5 Young people consulted and informed

Rung 4 Young people assigned and informed

Rung 3 Young people tokenised

Rung 2 Young people are decoration

Rung 1 Young people are manipulated

Youth Voice

Why is the Y-VAL Important?

Youth Voice at Agency Level

Indicators for success

Incorporating youth voice

Shares a vision with the youth

Identifies areas of improvement

Improve engagement

Meaningful participation from youth

Theme 1: Overall Vision and Commitment

Organization values youth voice and youth have meaningful participation

- The structure for youth involvement in decision making
- Structure for broad engagement from youth
- Access to decision makers
- Clear roles
- And your agencies participation effort

Theme 2: Collaborative Approach

Youth work as valued and equal partners in decision-making

Youth involvement story:

- Agency creating a new service program to support children, youth, and families
- Small team works on eligibility criteria, payment processes, internal approvals, and selecting vendors
- Youth included in broader planning committee after initial small team
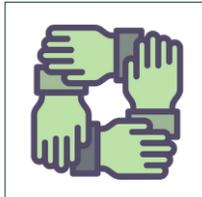
Theme 3: Empowered Representatives

Youth have support to maximize their potential to make decisions

Youth involvement story:

- Agency has monthly coalition meetings
- Youth has official position as a coalition leader
- Youth has standing agenda item to give specific input
- Youth is asked to hold comments until the youth agenda item

THEME 4: COMMITMENT TO FACILITATION AND SUPPORT

Organization shows commitment to youth voice by creating opportunities for involvement

FACILITATING AND SUPPORTING YOUTH INVOLVEMENT:

- Dedicated staff time
- Addressing barriers to youth participation
- Stipends for participation

THEME 5: WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Organization staff are ready to ensure authentic youth involvement. Leadership has set this expectation.

Youth involvement story:

- Agency is interviewing for a new clinical provider
- Agency includes youth on the interview panel
- Youth is encouraged to give feedback on the candidates
- Agency leaders have knowledge that the youth does not and makes the hiring decision offline
- Youth finds out who was hired through an agency announcement on their website

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THEME 6: PARTICIPATION IN DEVELOPING PROGRAMS AND POLICIES

Youth have an impact on how services work

Youth involvement story:

- Youth in addiction treatment facility
- Treatment planning team includes parents
- Team makes shared decision to change the youth's medication
- Youth is given new medicine the next morning
- Youth has questions about the new medication

policy handbook
ORGANIZATION OR AGENCY

Theme 7: Participation in Evaluation

Youth are engaged in efforts to determine how well the organization is doing its work

Youth involvement story:

- Agency has a centralized evaluation team
- Evaluation team works with all programs throughout agency
- Youth invited to participate in weekly staff meetings for evaluation team

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THEME 8: LEADING INITIATIVES AND PROJECTS

Youth have opportunities, necessary support, and access to resources to lead

Youth involvement story:

- Regional coalition wants a new logo
- Coalition has youth members
- Youth member suggests engaging youth by orchestrating a logo design contest
- Youth leads the project
- Coalition selects a new logo designed by a youth in the community

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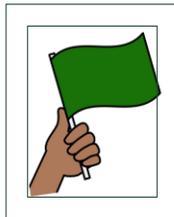
Summary and Resources

Summary:

- Authentic youth involvement is critical
- There are different levels to youth involvement
- Y-VAL is a tool that can help authentic youth involvement
- Y-VAL covers 8 themes that represent different components of authentic youth involvement

Resources:

- Ladder of youth involvement
- Authentic youth voice
- Y-VAL Themes

Thank YOU!

Youth Voice Agency Level Assessment (Y-VAL)

Eight Critical Themes

1. **Overall vision and commitment (8 items):**
The agency has developed formal structures and policies for voice/participation
   - Clear roles for participation
   - Transparent assessment of efforts to promote participation

2. **Collaborative approach (5 items):**
Young people are treated as valued partners in decision processes
   - Involved from the beginning, including decisions about what goals to focus on and how to address them
   - Respect and mutual learning, willingness to compromise, responsiveness
   - Youth-friendly meetings
   - Information/transparency about what will happen/has happened as a result of decisions

3. **Empowered representatives (5 items):**
Young people are supported in a way that will maximize their potential to have an impact on decisions
   - Multiple young people participating consistently over time
   - Supported preparation, meeting happens as planned
   - "Pipeline," opportunity to develop leadership skills

4. **Commitment to facilitation and support of Y/YA participation (3 items):**
The agency invests resources to support participation
   - Dedicated staff time
   - Addressing barriers: meeting times, location, transportation, child care needs, etc.
   - "Point person" whose job includes managing logistics of participation
   - Incentives provided for participation (may be monetary or non-monetary)

5. **Workforce development (4 items):**
The agency ensures that all staff are able to interact collaboratively with young people
   - Young people participate actively in hiring
   - Staff are trained about agency policies and commitment to participation
   - Job performance evaluation includes attention to staff competencies related to participation
   - Agency is developing peer roles

6. **Participation in developing programming/program policies (5 items):**
Young people have an impact on how the program works with the population
   - Substantial and systematic involvement in decisions about program models/services
   - Efforts to improve services, retention, accessibility
   - Efforts to make the organization more youth friendly/responsive—communications, privacy, decor, etc.

7. **Participation in evaluation (4 items):**
Young people are engaged in efforts to determine how well the agency is doing its work
   - Systematic efforts to gather feedback on services
   - Young people help decide on how efforts will be assessed
   - Young people are informed about findings from evaluation/CQI
   - Agency acts on data and reports on this to young people

8. **Leading initiatives and projects (3 items):**
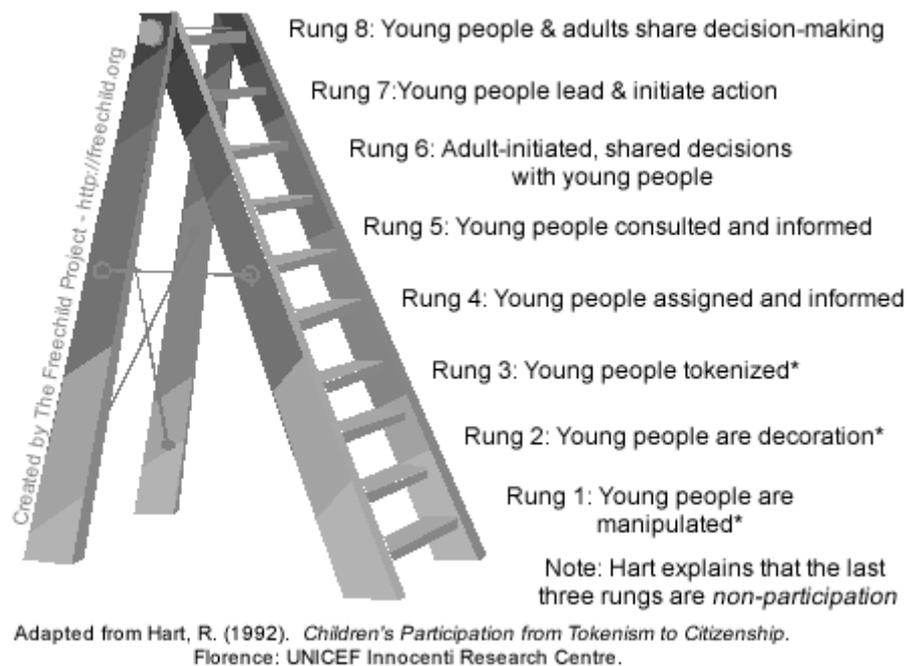**The agency supports young people to take the lead on projects they design**
   - Provides tangible support to initiatives initiated by young people
   - Young people can make decisions about funding
   - Transparency about funding distribution

Ladder of Participation

About the Ladder

Sociologist Roger Hart wrote a book called *Children's Participation: The Theory And Practice Of Involving Young Citizens In Community Development And Environmental Care* for UNICEF in 1997. This groundbreaking work put the work of young people and adult allies around the world in the context of a global movement for participation, offering needed guidance and criticism of many efforts. The "Ladder of Children's Participation," also called the "Ladder of Youth Participation," is one of many significant tools from the book.

Roger Hart's Ladder of Young People's Participation

Rung 8: Young people & adults share decision-making
Rung 7: Young people lead & initiate action
Rung 6: Adult-initiated, shared decisions with young people
Rung 5: Young people consulted and informed
Rung 4: Young people assigned and informed
Rung 3: Young people tokenized*
Rung 2: Young people are decoration*
Rung 1: Young people are manipulated*

Note: Hart explains that the last three rungs are *non-participation*

Created by The Freechild Project - http://freechild.org

Adapted from Hart, R. (1992). *Children's Participation from Tokenism to Citizenship.* Florence: UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre.

Degrees of Participation

8) Young people-initiated, shared decisions with adults. This happens when projects or programs are initiated by young people and decision-making is shared between young people and adults. These projects empower young people while at the same time enabling them to access and learn from the life experience and expertise of adults. *This rung of the ladder can be embodied by youth/adult partnerships.*

7) Young people-initiated and directed. This step is when young people initiate and direct a project or program. Adults are involved only in a supportive role. *This rung of the ladder can be embodied by youth-led activism.*

6) Adult-initiated, shared decisions with young people. Occurs when projects or programs are initiated by adults but the decision-making is shared with the young people. *This rung of the ladder can be embodied by participatory action research.*

5) Consulted and informed. Happens when young people give advice on projects or programs designed and run by adults. The young people are informed about how their input will be used and the outcomes of the decisions made by adults. *This rung of the ladder can be embodied by [youth advisory councils](#).*

4) Assigned but informed. This is where young people are assigned a specific role and informed about how and why they are being involved. *This rung of the ladder can be embodied by [community youth boards](#).*

3) Tokenism. When young people appear to be given a voice, but in fact have little or no choice about what they do or how they participate. *This rung of the ladder reflects [adultism](#).*

2) Decoration. Happens when young people are used to help or "bolster" a cause in a relatively indirect way, although adults do not pretend that the cause is inspired by young people. *This rung of the ladder reflects [adultism](#).*

1) Manipulation. Happens where adults use young people to support causes and pretend that the causes are inspired by young people. *This rung of the ladder reflects [adultism](#).*

The 7/8 Debate

Roger Hart's Ladder of Participation shows young people-initiated, shared decisions with adults as the top form of young people's participation, followed immediately by young people-initiated and directed. This is somewhat controversial an issue for many people working with and around young people. Essentially, the debate is which of these levels of participation is actually the most meaningful?

Many believe that shared decision making is most beneficial to both young people and adults. Others believe that young people are most empowered when they are making decisions without the influence of adults. Most often, this doesn't exclude adults but reduces their role to that of support.

Both arguments have merit; ultimately, it is up the each group to determine which form of decision-making best fits with the groups' needs.

Adapted from [here](#).