

Qualitative Analysis:

Youth-Adult Partnership  
(YAP)

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## **Part I- Qualitative Analysis**

A qualitative data analysis of youth-adult partnerships can enable a practitioner to more easily categorize and understand its intricacies. This analysis is made possible with the help of provided narrative data from a 30 minute focus group session conducted with three youth co-researchers (Shawna, Madison, and Hanna) involved in a Youth Engagement Initiative within a large youth serving organization.

The narrative data from the focus group provided me with a small glimpse into the extensive world of qualitative research analysis. Close analysis of the narrative data allowed me to gather a large amount of information about the youth-adult partnership. I began by coding the narrative data (see Appendix 1), which is a way of developing and refining interpretations of the data (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). The codes that I chose were based on emerging themes that I found to be prevalent in the data.

During the data analysis I followed principles of the grounded theory approach which “is a method for discovering theories, concepts, hypotheses, and propositions directly from the data rather than from a priori assumptions, other research, or existing theoretical frameworks” (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998, pg. 137).

The following is a detailed analysis of the themes and findings gathered from the interview. I have also compared the narrative data to two other articles, which provided me with further insight and a deeper understanding of youth-adult partnerships.

### **Creating Positive Relationships**

Within the YAP, many positive relationships formed between the individuals involved. These relationships are the foundation for positive youth development and engagement. Relationships within YAP are described as not just existing between youth and adults. Included are the relationships of adults to adults and youth to youth. These relationships developed because of various factors, which are thoroughly described by the youth in the interview. Some of these factors involve open communication between the adults and youth; which allowed for transparency. Collaboration is another key component in the development of relationships within YAP.

*“It’s important that we’re all able to come together and meet in the middle. I think that’s why we needed a positive relationship between all of us to sustain the initiative.” –*

*Hanna p.#*

The relationships that are created within YAP are non-ageist, which means that there is non-discriminative behavior towards the age of an individual. Maintaining this mindset allows the youth and to be themselves around each other, and utilize the language that they feel most comfortable with. This non-ageist mindset can be viewed as a form of showing respect for each other.

*“You know we are able to be ourselves with each other, and it’s not about the age.”  
(Hanna, p.#)*

Relationships within the initiative involve everyone learning from and supporting each other. It is important that these relationships are maintained and nurtured. Eventually the youth evolve to become mentors. It is clear that the youth maintain a non-hierarchical stance with the idea of being a mentor. The view of mentorship according to

Shawna is that a mentor is not perfect, and has made mistakes in life, and she wants to share this knowledge with others and provide support.

### **Support and Advocacy**

Support is another main theme in my findings from the YAP narrative. An important aspect of support, that I believe is unique to YAP, is that the support that is put in place is actually utilized. Support in YAP is represented in various ways and has many different components to it. Support involves giving active help, encouragement, cooperation, and empowerment. The co-researchers Hanna, Madison, and Shawna describe that they are always encouraged to use their voice and say their opinion, rather than not. This form of advocacy empowers the youth, and encourages them to advocate for themselves.

*“I’m really surprised that if there was no agreement from other people outside of our Initiative that you guys (adults) backed us up. We were always encouraged to say our opinion rather than, um,not.” – Shawna p.#*

### **Skill Building and Transference of Skills**

The youth develop life skills through YAP, which allow for positive youth development. An example of this in the narrative data is a when Shawna explains that the adults would provide them with wages when they do something, as opposed to receiving a gift card. When examining this closer I am able to see how this teaches the youth about the value of money. It also shows that the adults place trust within the youth that they will spend the money that they receive appropriately; which ultimately provides the youth with a sense of empowerment. Because of the empowerment and confidence gained from

being apart of the initiative the youth were able to transfer this to other aspects of their lives, which were outside of the initiate.

*“Yeah, the being engaged and the adults have really given us the ability through just experiences through teaching and mentorship and supporting. To be able to go out and do other things and they were a major support for us even if it’s nothing to do with Initiative. For example I’m on this Youth Homeless Task Force, for the city and it has nothing necessarily to do with anything that we’re doing in the Initiative, yet, you know, you and Cane are still supporting me to do that....” – Madison*  
p#

Overall, the youth described that they felt better prepared for life because of projects like these.

#### **YAP Narrative in Relation to School Based YAP**

When I combined the data that I collected from the narrative of YAP with another article, I was able to see correlations in the data as well as insights into the expansion of further research on youth-adult partnerships.

When I compared the article written by Mitra (2009), I was able to see how a youth-adult partnership can be implemented into a school-based setting. It provided me with an ability to understand youth-adult partnerships on another level, in comparison to understanding them through the voices individuals who are directly involved in YAP. I found many comparisons throughout the article, even though the focus of the article is on youth-adult partnerships within a school-based setting. Applying YAP to a school-based setting has allowed me to understand the positive effects that the partnerships has on the youth. Mitra (2009) describes, “these partnerships have led to improvement in

curriculum, and assessment development” (p.408). This is because of the students providing the adults with instant feedback, students have also assisted teachers with co-creating the curriculum (Mitra, 2009). The article considers the youth that are not succeeding in the current system, and the impact that youth-adult partnerships has on this demographic. Mitra, (2009) states that “students not succeeding in the current system, including those failing subjects or at risk of dropping out, can offer particularly insightful advice on problems with school structure and culture” (p.409).

Mitra (2009) states, “in the successful youth-adult partnerships in this study, youth valued mutual respect and responsibility as the key difference in the relationships within their youth-adult partnerships, as compared with most of their other interactions with adults” (p.415). When I compare this to the data that was analyzed in the YAP narrative I can see that there is a common theme represented which is that of respect and responsibility.

The article further examines how positive youth-adult partnerships can improve positive youth development outcomes (Mitra, 2009). This occurs by providing youth the opportunity to participate in decision-making, which increases the student voice (Mitra, 2009). This can lead to an increase in students attachment to their school, which correlates with improved academic outcomes (Mitra, 2009).

The research conducted by Mitra (2009) allowed me to further develop the concept of building relationships that I explored in my analysis of YAP. Further analysis in the study was conducted to look deeper into group process to identify what aspects of relationship building proved to be most important to group members in the youth-adult partnerships (Mitra, 2009). Four themes emerged during this process, which according to

Mitra (2009) were: “respect among group members, meaningful roles, capacity-building opportunities, and group size” (p.415). Respect and capacity-building are two themes that reflect the data that was collected from the YAP narrative. The youth in YAP were respected by the adults, and vice versa. They were also constantly challenged to build their skills and their capacity within the organization, as well as outside of the organization. The two other themes that were examined by Mitra (2009) were meaningful roles and group size. These are two concepts that were not explored in my initial analysis. When I view these themes in relation to YAP, I can see how group size and meaningful roles can play an important part in the initiative. This was not been explored in the analysis because it did not pose as an issue for the individuals who were interviewed. It seemed that a possible issue in YAP was to ensure that there was enough growth within the group. With respect to roles that are played in YAP, it appeared to me that there were no defined roles, but perhaps there were roles and they were just not explored in this particular interview that was conducted. Further research may need to occur in this area to explore the roles that occur within YAP and how that influences youth development and engagement.

### **The Mentoring Relationship**

The article, *Moving Beyond Youth Voice* by Serido, Borden & Perkins (2011) provided me with insight with regards to the data that was drawn from the YAP narrative. The article describes the youth-adults partnership as a mentoring relationship (Seido et al. 2011). The relationship that is developed is not always effective, and it is explained by Seido et al. (2011) “that the mentoring relationship must be authentic, consistent, and enduring, with both the young person and the adult receiving benefit from the

relationship” (p.47). After reading this article, I noticed that the YAP narrative has a strong focus on what worked in the initiative, as opposed to what didn’t or what could be improved upon. Through comparison with other articles, I am able to understand the weaknesses that lie within youth-adult partnerships and where improvements can be made.

Seido et al. (2011) describe that just listening to a youth will not provide positive youth development. There needs to be a combination of listening and providing the youth with opportunities to act on issues that are meaningful to them and have an impact on their lives (Seido et al. 2011). In the YAP narrative, it is clear that the youth involved are passionate about the initiative, and that the opportunities that are given to the youth are meaningful to them.

Another theme that was discussed in the article, which was similar to that of the YAP narrative, was the power of the voice of a youth. Seido (2011) describe that “youth voice contributes to positive youth outcomes by helping young people to authentically engage in community initiatives” (p.57). In the YAP narrative, the youth describe how they were always encouraged to use their voice, which in turn empowered them to speak up outside of the initiative.

### **Conclusion**

My analysis and interpretation of the narrative data on YAP has led to the insights discussed, such as that of building relationships which are the structure for the successes in YAP. I have examined the importance of support within a youth-adult partnership, and the life skills that are learned and transferred into other aspects of the youth’s lives. A discussion has been formed around the correlations of the YAP narrative and the youth-



adult partnerships that are formed in school setting. I have determined what I have found to be missing in the data which is further analysis of roles, and group size, as well as an analysis on the complications that occur within youth-adult partnerships. Overall, this qualitative analysis provided further understanding how youth-adult partnerships can lead to positive youth development and engagement.

**Part II - Coding**

Code	Memo	Examples from Interview
Engagement	Being present or actively involved.  Occurs between youth to youth, youth to adult, adult to youth and adult to adult.  Includes being responsible and accountable	“Having the youth engaged, and being able to provide what they need to be engaged.” (Madison) “...really actively engaged and adults that are creating the space for that...and engaging the youth, and being engaged by the youth.” (Madison)
Reflexive	Researcher John’s role in the process.	“ Can you talk a little bit more about what you mean by space?” (John) “ So, there’s two sides of it.” (John)
Physical Environment	The physical space that is surrounding the individual.	“...adults create the space like the areas that we meet. Like we have a meeting room, and there’s food and coffee, which is always a good thing. The physical space is important.” (Madison)
Learning from Each other	Providing each other with knowledge.  Occurs between youth to youth, youth to adult, adult to youth and adult to adult	“ You mentor us and learn from us and often times our responses, like you’ll get the ‘a-ha’, ‘oh!’, going on where you’re also learning just the same.” (Hanna) “ I think we are all a resource for each other.” (Hanna) “ Or you can have, um, you can have learning where you learn vicarious learning, where

		you learn from peoples mistakes”. (Hanna)
Non-Ageist	<p>Being non discriminative towards a certain age group</p> <p>YAP is inclusive of all ages, and attempts to bridge the gap between various ages.</p>	<p>“ I think we also have a relationship where it is non-ageist.” (Hanna)</p> <p>“um, and yeah they’re usually kind of younger, so if we do,like,have that, like ageist kind of problem, then they’re really good at making,especially the younger ones, not that big of a gap and stuff.” (Shawna)</p> <p>“ You know we are able to be ourselves with each other, and its not about the age.” (Hanna)</p>
Skill building	<p>The formation of various abilities through exposure and knowledge.</p> <p>Capacity-building</p> <p>Within skill building there is also the transference of the skills that are learned through YAP into other areas of the individual’s life.</p> <p>Opens up opportunities for the youth</p>	<p>“ Even simple things like having us get a wage when we do something rather than just like getting a gift card was a big difference I think, for a lot of us.” (Shawna)</p> <p>“...everyone in the group feels like they’re better prepared for life in general because of projects like these.” (Madison)</p> <p>“... to be able to go out into the community away from just this group and go and engage youth in anything else that I am doing, and support youth, and advocate youth.” (Madison)</p>
Support	<p>Giving active help, encouragement and empowerment in a respectful way</p> <p>Within YAP the support that is given provides the youth and adults with a sense of comfort</p>	<p>“...we’ve always had help from you guys whenever we’ve needed it.” (Shawna)</p> <p>“...whenever I have questions when like, how does this work, you’re still there if I need you which is awesome.” (Madison)</p> <p>“...because I feel that we are</p>

	<p>The support that is given within YAP is always very flexible in nature</p> <p>Patience</p> <p>Support is actually utilized within YAP</p> <p>Cooperative</p>	<p>really strong.” (Hanna)</p> <p>“ We are always encouraged to say our opinion rather than,um,not.” (Shawna)</p> <p>“ Just because the adults are wanting to engage them doesn’t mean the youth want to be engaged at that level. We don’t always want to do the paperwork stuff sometimes that’s okay with the adults.” (Madison)</p>
<p>Building Relationships</p>	<p>Open communication</p> <p>Transparency</p> <p>Respect</p> <p>Within building relationships is collaboration</p> <p>How relationships intertwine: youth to youth, youth to adult, and adult to adult. Keeping them active</p>	<p>“ I think that’s why we needed a positive relationships between all of us to sustain the initiative.” (Hanna)</p> <p>“ come to have an open relationships where we know what everybody’s strengths are, and know a lot of their experience so that we’re able to, kind of cultivate a stronger group by honoring that.” (Hanna)</p> <p>“I’ll ask Cane what he thinks we can do, or who I should talk to.” (Madison)</p>
<p>Advocacy</p>	<p>Occurred within YAP when adults advocate and support youth. Also with youth advocate outside of YAP and into the community.</p>	<p>“Be able to go out into the community and help and support youth better, and engage them, and be involved in other things.” (Madison)</p> <p>“I’m really surprised that even if there was no agreement from other people outside of our Initiative that you guys (adults) backed us up.” (Shawna)</p>
<p>Growth</p>	<p>Maturity within the youth Introspection Growth within YAP in</p>	<p>“ I think this group is really good for introspection, cuz you are able to look back and</p>

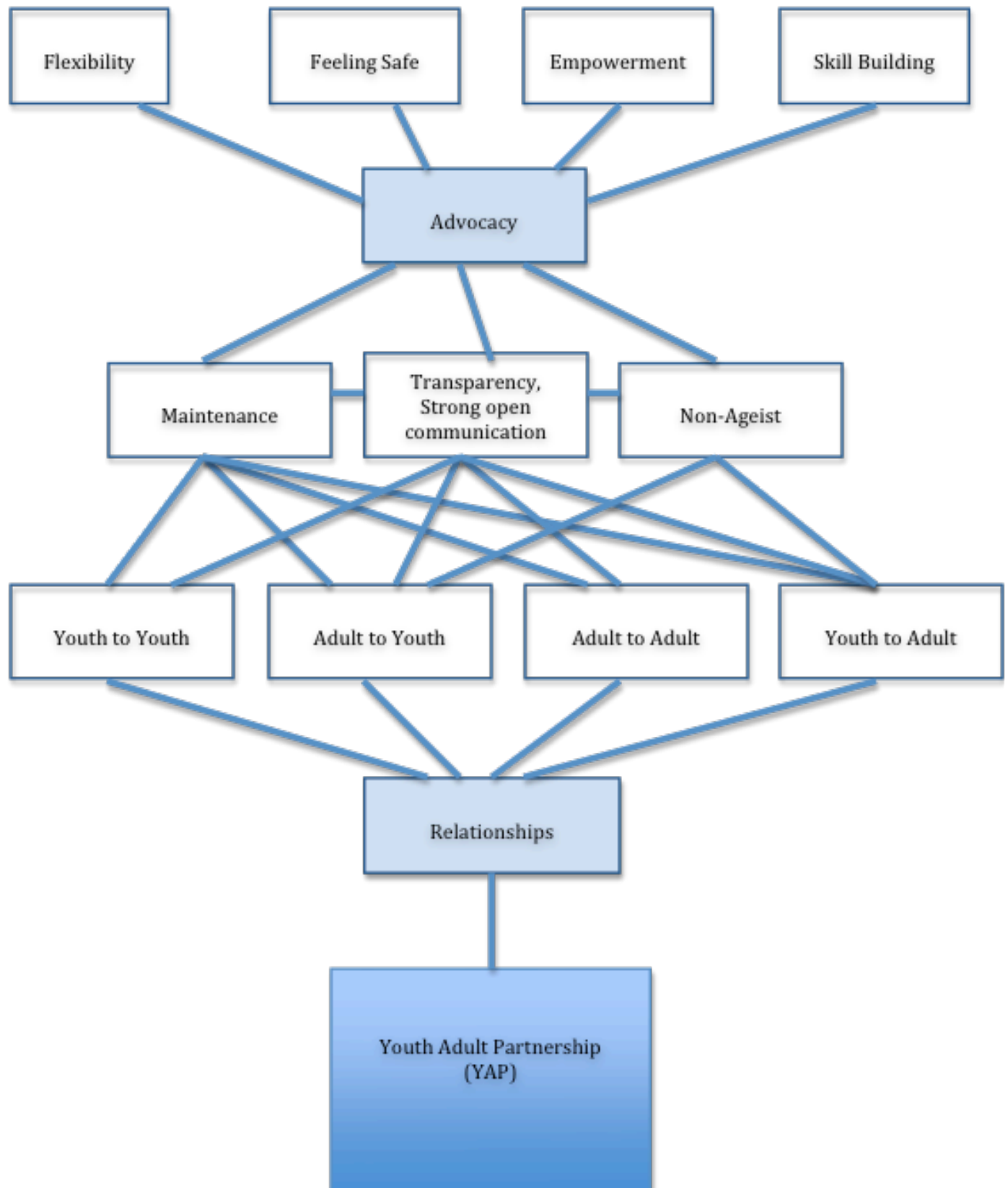
	order to maintain the initiative.	see your growth.” (Hanna)
Maintenance / continuation of YAP	Thinking ahead Reflection How to maintain the effectiveness of the initiative	“ I feel like one of those things to, to make us stronger is adding more youth.” (Shawna)
Labels	Is there empowerment through labels, or does it cause a sense of separation Young Adult to Adult Do we need labels to identify?	“ I don’t know I’ve never liked the whole labeling part of the young adult to adult.” (Shawna)

**Part III- Typologies**

Context Chart on the Youth-Adult Partnership

In this context chart I have provided a brief overview of what makes the Youth-Adult Partnership program successful, with the key points being relationships, and advocacy. I have related the box of relationships to the various types of relationships that were described in the interview. From the different types of relationships I have described what needs to occur in order for these relationships to be successful. I have then linked these to what comes out of the successes of these relationships, which is advocacy. I have then summarized what the youth explained comes out of advocacy. This chart not only links together the connection between relationships and advocacy, but it portrays the progression of relationships and the positive outcomes of various relationships in YAP.

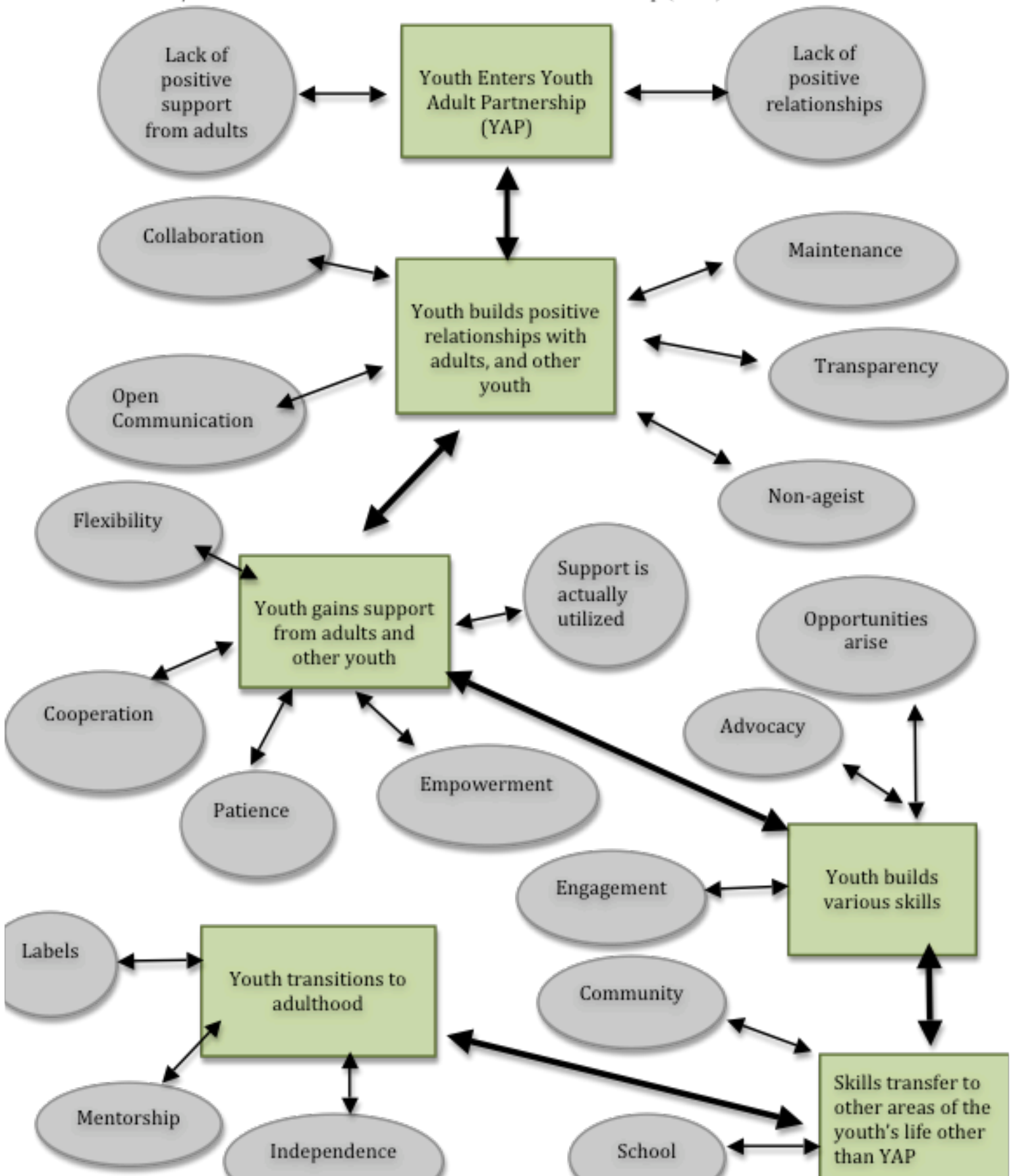
Context Chart on the Youth-Adult Partnership



### Event/State Network

This event/state network provides a visual representation of the ideal process that a youth would experience when entering YAP. It begins with a youth who enters the program who does not have positive support, or positive relationships in their life. The next event is the youth building positive relationships with adults, and other youths. The various grey circles around this event describe the states or particular experiences that the youth may go through. From the formation of the relationship the youth then gains support from other adults and youth, then builds skills, the skills transfer to other areas of the youths life, and then the youth eventually transitions to adulthood. This network clearly displays how the formation of relationships is key to positive experiences that the youth will experience in this youth-adult partnership.

Event/State Network: Overview of a Youth Adult Partnership (YAP)



## References

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Appendix

Youth Adult Partnership (YAP)

Context:

The following is narrative data from a 30 minute focus group session conducted with three youth co-researchers (Shawna, Madison, and Hanna) involved in a Youth Engagement Initiative within a large youth serving organization. The three youth Co-researchers have been involved in the initiative for over two years and have a strong perspective on “what works well and what doesn’t” within a youth adult partnership (YAP).

Adult Co-researchers: John, Cane, Katy  
 Practicum Students: Kayla, Stacy

The data was collected for a National Research project to determine characteristics of a positive YAP in the context of their Youth Engagement Initiative.

The following definition of YAP by the National Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement was utilized: A youth adult partnership results when youth and adults work together as a team to make decisions that affect their lives. Both adults and youth have the opportunity to make suggestions, decisions and recommendations. One is not valued over the other; it is a collaborative and mutual relationship. Mutuality is all about a two way street, where both youth and adults are teaching each other, learning from each other, and making decisions and acting together. Youth adult partnerships focus on nurturing, emphasizing youth and their contributions rather than their problems.

**Narrative data from focus group session conducted by adult co-researcher**

Coding

Reflexive
Engagement
Physical Space
Support
Build Relationships
Learning from Each other
Non-Ageist
Advocacy
Skill building
Growth
Maintenance / continuation of YAP
Labeling

(John):

JOHN (interviewer): Thank you for coming. All of you have been involved as youth Co-researchers in the Youth Engagement Initiative for over two years. What I would like to do is ask you questions pertaining to your experience with the adult co-researchers in your initiative. We're here to talk about YAP and this is part one of a series of questions : interviews we're going to be doing within the project to really determine what are some good practices pertaining to YAP within the context of our organization and Youth Engagement Initiative. Remember to speak from your heart and that there are no right or wrong answers. Also, in responding to questions think about your answers in the context our organization and Youth Engagement Initiative. Lets start. My first question is ...What does the YAP look like within our organization? 18

MADISON: I think that it really looks like youth that are accountable and responsible and are really actively engaged and adults that are creating the space for that and engaging the youth and being engaged by the youth.

JOHN: Can you talk a little bit more about what you mean by space?

MADISON: Well, like, the adults create the space like the areas that we meet. Like, we have a meeting room, and there's food and coffee which is always a good thing. The physical space is important.

HANNA: It's not just a physical space.

MADISON: No, it's definitely an emotional space as well.

JOHN: Okay.

HANNA: Like, you, um, yourself and Cane, are both active adult mentors.

I believe that all of us feel we can call on either one of you at any time of the day or night. And so there's really that familiar relationship between all of us where it's bilateral learning, you know, um. You mentor us and learn from us and often times our responses, like you'll get the 'a-ha', 'oh', going on where you're also learning just the same.

JOHN: So, there's like two sides of it.

HANNA: Ya. Relationship with parody.

MADISON: I think to, like, uh, having the ability to still have a very good working

relationship that has less of a stuck up, kind of, professional, more the ability to laugh and have fun, none of us really having to worry about what language we're using or what topics we're discussing

HANNA: I think that is huge....

JOHN: Hanna, you talked about the emotional space.

HANNA: Yeah.

JOHN: *pointing to Madison* ...You talked about the physical space.

HANNA: I think a huge part of the reason why our YAP is so strong is because there's strong, open communication, there's flexibility.

MADISON: And transparency.

HANNA: There's transparency, and there's understanding, and there's, um, uh, this is my sick brain working, um, there's also compromise.

HANNA: For example, if someone doesn't have a ride to a meeting, there's flexibility from not just the youth helping the youth get there, but the adults helping the youth get there.

You know, we started meeting in a location that is more central for all of us. Works better for one team member who's still in school.

It's important that we try to accommodate each other.

Doesn't matter if it's just youth or adults, it's important that we're all able to come together and meet in the middle. I think that's why we needed a positive relationship between all of us to sustain the initiative

MADISON: Yeah

JOHN: This is really interesting, you have brought up a number of different themes regarding YAP. Let me ask the following question.... Given what you've just said and to re-cap and add to.... what do you think are important themes then, to make a YAP work?

MADISON: Transparency. I think transparency and um, for the youth to have the ability to choose what level they are engaged in. Just because the adults are wanting to engage them doesn't mean the youth want to be engaged to that level. We don't always want to do the paper work stuff sometimes and that's ok with the adults.

HANNA: I think that we also have a relationship where it's non-ageist.

MADISON: Mhm.

HANNA: When we come into the room, none of us are feeling like we have to kind of watch the way we speak, or bite our tongues from who we are.

You know we are able to be ourselves with each other and it's not about the age, it's about the conversation and tasks at hand.

So there's not this like hierarchy of feeling or that I have to watch what I say around the adults.

MADISON: mhm

HANNA: ...as equals.

MADISON: Yeah.

SHAWNA: I don't know. I guess like the Adult Interns that we've had, like, we've had a couple different ones, like, you can really tell the difference. Like, I didn't think their support would really be that big of a difference. Think, if we didn't have them, we'd have a lot harder of a time getting to meetings, and feeling more, like, organized when we get to things.

MADISON: Mhm

SHAWNA: Um, and yeah, they're usually kind of younger, so if we do, like, have that, like ageist kind of problem, then they're really good at making, especially the younger ones, not that big of a gap and stuff.

MADISON: Yeah, they've been a big support.

JOHN: That's a really good to hear...

MADISON: The adult interns, well yeah, I agree. The interns that we've had (Lana and Katy) have been awesome and back to kind of creating that, that space. Cause part of that space is the things like, you know, you need a ride... and looking after that logistic is important. You know, being on Facebook and sending out meeting reminders and sending out minutes and all of that stuff. Having the youth engaged, and being able to provide what they need to be engaged, and the interns have been amazing at doing that.

JOHN: Think about your experience with the Youth Engagement Initiative, what are things that resonate with you? What are things that come to mind? That you feel were supportive, you know, around your relationship with the adults.

SHAWNA: I think, I don't know, I think, now looking back on it, like, I'm really surprised that even if there was no agreement from other people outside of our Initiative that you guys (adults) backed us up.

We were always encouraged to say our opinion rather than, um, not.

HANNA: So there's empowerment.

SHAWNA: Yeah, and then um, yeah. Hanna's been saying, like, we've always had help from you guys whenever we've needed it.

Um, which has made it a lot easier to go to things. Even simple things like having us get a wage when we do something rather than just like getting a gift card was a big difference I think, for a lot of us.

MADISON: Even being fed.

SHAWNA: We have also learned and experienced a bunch of stuff. Like when I consult with groups I can pretty much point out five things that need to happen to make the group process work.

MADISON: Yeah, the being engaged and the adults have really given us the ability through just experiences through teaching and mentorship and supporting. To be able to go out and do other things and they were a major support for us even if it's nothing to do with Initiative. For example I'm on this Youth Homeless Task Force, for the city and it has nothing necessarily to do with anything that we're doing in the Initiative, yet, you know, you and

Cane are still supporting me to do that....

whenever I have questions when like, how does this work, you're still there if I need you which is awesome.

JOHN: Madison, just continuing on that train of thought.... Personally, what has the adult relationship in our Initiative meant to you?

MADISON: Well, it's, I don't know if I could quantify or qualify what it's meant to me, like, it's been absolutely amazing,

and opened every door I could imagine to open up. Like, I'm doing stuff, like, when we started as a youth co-researcher in another project four years ago, I would never would have ever imagined that I would be doing all of this and with the symposium and with everything else that I'm doing and, it's, I, I still can't even fully believe it that it's gotten to this point.

JOHN: When you look at qualities of adult co-researcher within this Initiative, just to build on that, what are those qualities that you see?

MADISON: Um, it's definitely like have the ability to relate to youth and have conversations on a youth kind of level, all that stuff. And have the experience to be able to be in that mentorship position, and open up the doors, and have the ability to be transparent so that everything that they know the youth knows, and just have ability to create a positive space and be

that supporting and willing to take the time to sit down. And even thought it might take them five minutes to do something and fifteen if they do it with a youth, be willing to take the time to teach the youth to do it.

It's been amazing to have the opportunity to learn how to conduct research and everything else that is happening in our Initiative... it has been insane.

HANNA: Um, me personally, I believe that uh, the YAP within our team has given empowerment not just for group but for ones self, um, the support is key and is really important and not just adult to youth but also youth to youth, youth to adult, and adult to adult.

And that's where it's really important that these relations, there's so many kinds of and at varying levels. Or not necessarily levels, they're just all a little bit different. And they all intertwine, and they're all supported and thus you have strong structure.

Um, I think it's really important to mention that there's a level of advocacy there, where again it's not just adult to youth, it's the youth to youth, youth to adult, adult to adult. It is really important in engagement to advocate for each other, you know... Like, it's important that if one of the youth members needs medical help that another one of us says 'I'll take you to the clinic if you don't feel comfortable going by yourself, but here's the address and this is what you should be doing and this is the protocol, and if you have any questions'. Like, there's lots of times if I have any questions about anything, I know I can contact anyone part of the group: adult or youth. And that's really important and I think everybody feels the same with me. And that that support is utilized. That the support is not just there, but it is actually used.

JOHN: So, what's interesting is that you have expanded on the YAP to not just youth to adult but also the importance of youth supporting youth.<sup>22</sup>

MADISON: And even older youth to younger youth too, right? Like, Hanna is a little bit older, Shawna and I are the same age. We all help each other where needed, right? Like, I have no problem driving people and driving them to this and that and what not.

And then again the adults help by supporting that with a little bit of gas money.

HANNA: In our group there is a celebration of different strengths and experiences and how we support each other.

MADISON: For sure.

HANNA: And we all have come to have an open relationship where we know what everybody's strengths are, and know a lot of their experience so that we're able to, to um, kind of cultivate a stronger group by honing in on that, you know?

Like, Shawna had a question about a lease on an apartment and she was able to call me and ask, and then I wasn't entirely sure so I called Cane and asked. There is that kind of like, we know who to go to, we know who might have an idea, we use that, we use that relationship, we keep it active.

MADISON: And like, we're all students and so especially, like, you know, with studies, when we have school-related questions, even if it's 'what is this assignment?', what is this and that? Even like, sometimes I have paper questions I end up calling Cane or John. But through you and other projects before, I have that connection with Carla so I still have that open door with her. I call her and go 'Carla, help me'.

JOHN: The next question I'm going to use the developmental lens. And this is something I've been studying for a few years. Again I want you to speak from your heart if any one of these elements resonates with you. What's so important in human development is that you have empowering relationships. Secondly, what's really important is that you feel safe not only emotionally but physically safe in any environment or setting. What's important is that you feel like you're learning, you're taking on new things that expand your knowledge, etc. The other is that you feel like you have voice. That, that you're engaged. You know, this is youth engagement.

SHAWNA: I agree, and it's helped with like other things too and Hanna was saying, like, I'm more of a patient person now after like, a couple years after this whole project. I think I'm able to better to speak about things. I know how better to say things in ways that maybe people can understand more and relate to more, comes across better in general. And like, even with things, like, for instance, Hanna was talking about my lease. Before this project, I might necessarily have spoke about a problem with something, but now I educate myself before I go into it. Like, I wouldn't sign a lease unless I knew exactly everything that was on that lease, and blah, blah blah, and was explained to me and what-not. I think like, before this whole project, like, it would have been a lot more difficult for me to do that and I think like, 23 everyone in this group feels like they're better prepared for life in general because of projects like this.

HANNA: I think we're all a resource for each other.

JOHN: You guys have been co:researchers You've been researchers

SHAWNA: Yeah, like even my renter. Like, I was telling him all this stuff I do and he said "I don't know a single nineteen year old that would even think capable enough to do that" and I said, 'you'd be surprised'

MADISON: Yeah, and like, I found too like, by doing, by doing this project and being

empowered and giving the voice  
and being given the ability to learn all of these amazing things, it's been, it's empowered to be able to go out into the community away from just this group and go and engage youth in anything else that I'm doing,

and support youth, and advocate for youth. Even if it's just me going and picking someone up at quarter to one last night and bring them to my house to sleep on my couch. But it's given me the ability to help and support....

HANNA: Madison's youth shelter.

MADISON: Hah, yeah. It's given me the ability to help and support them in a lot of different ways because I have the resources behind me now to be able to go "you need to go talk to this organization, there's these programs, or let me go, you know I'll ask Cane what he thinks we can do, or who I should talk to and,  
sort of really be able to go out into community and help and support youth better and engage them, and be involved in other things and really be able to go in there and know what I'm talking about or at  
least have Cane behind me go, you know, when I've talked to him, he suggested things you need to look for and being able to do that on my own but still feel like I have the support of the group.

SHAWNA: Fine tuning our skills.

MADISON: Yeah.

JOHN: Fine tuning your skills. So just building on what you're talking about now, is, I have one last quick question. Do you have time for one last question?

MADISON: I've gotta run.

JOHN: You've gotta run?

MADISON: Yeah, I've gotta get to work. So....

JOHN: Oh that's fine. Thank you so much Madison. This is great information guys. So just building on what we're talking about, so one last question is, um, how can we 24 then, you know, I sense that there's a number of things that are really positive that are happening, but you can always build sort of a stronger approach to a YAP. So given that, last question, so how can we build even a stronger YAP within initiative. So think about some of the needs we may have.

HANNA: I think that's a really good question....

HANNA: ...because I feel that we are really strong.



So, I think it's just um, continual maintenance because every relationship takes maintenance. So, it's a matter of keeping, just doing what we're doing I guess, and, and nourishing those relationships, being understanding when people can't make it to meetings, and kind of, making that judgment call, 'are they slipping away?' or is it life?. If you feel that they're slipping away, or it's life, it's really important to say 'your voice needs to be heard. If you want to speak, we want to listen and we'd love to have you'.

SHAWNA: We've all had that time where we've.....

HANNA: It is ebbs and flows. And yet, I still think that this group is cohesive and strong. So how do we get stronger? I don't know how to answer that. There's always room for improvement, but I do feel that we're really strong. So it's a matter of maintaining our relations and continuing to empower each other and be resources for each other. Um, if you were to say 'how do we get stronger in term of when we start adding more youth' I think that would almost be an easier question.

SHAWNA: I was gonna say, like, I feel like one of those things to, to make us stronger is adding more youth.

Like generally I'm usually against those kind of things cause I don't like change, and you know that kind of thing. But I mean, in reality it has to happen.

And in reality, like if we just are thinking that 'oh we really like this group, this is a good group', if we ask someone a bomb might go off, like that's not really realistic in the fact that we do need younger people because, I mean, I don't know Hanna might get married in a few years and she doesn't have time to be in the group anymore, you know? And she's, so like, I mean, like, life can happen and you will eventually leave.

HANNA: I think me having a baby makes more sense.

SHAWNA: okay, well, we'll eventually age out, and then we need people who have had our experience, who have had a little bit of what we are, and let them continue on the legacy.

HANNA: And I think it's also really important to keep that group open and again not looking across age, like, looking past that boundary, so that it does encourage people that are, you know, young youth, to more mature and elders, you know?

**So when you do age out it's not like you're not kicked out of the group.**

Like, there's certain shifts and dynamics that will constantly be changing as they always do with relationships, with people, with community, with society, but it's important I think to keep that option open for involvement. Whether or not you're currently on a Youth Agreement or, Agreements with Youth Adults, not in care, in care, five, thirty-five, fifteen, it doesn't matter we should still keep that open,

cause the more support the better. I think this is the bottom line.

SHAWNA: And I think its hard cuz like when I look at myself when I was like, I don't know 16, 15, I should not have been in this group, but like, I mean, in reality there's a lot of kids that...

HANNA: Or you mean you really should have...

SHAWNA: Well, exactly I mean, I didn't, like, if I would have said like when I was 16

I could do all these things I would've been like, no, it would've been horrible, but, I mean, there's like that growing phase and it's hard for, like me, to look back and say oh yeah, I'm going to be like whatever, but I grew into this. So, it's, you just kind of just, your now, I'm now 19 that it just happened that way, but I think a lot of kids need this experience and know that they can do it.

HANNA: I think this group is really good for introspection, cuz you are able to look back and see your growth. You know, see, we can look back at ourselves before the growth in the group at different times. You know, I can look back and say my involvement was really strong here, and that it tapered away and I can look at those dynamics of why and, and, you know, identify those things of which keep me more involved and that hinder involvement at times such as school and work it's the worst of it, but....

JOHN: I like what you said about this whole aspect of relationships and really when you think about it, you guys are ready to move on to a different type of relationship. I see you guys in the project becoming the adult.

SHAWNA: Even though we are young, I feel like a lot of us do feel like we're in that adult stage.

JOHN: Yeah, that's right, that's what I'm sensing from what you're saying

SHAWNA: You know when people say youth I kind of cringe a little bit. I don't even like the labels of it. Like, people feel empowered by saying young adult and I don't even like the label of it.

HANNA: The thing is, it's tough because it has to explain the, the dynamic of the group because you do need to be able to identify that there is a youth side and adult side.

JOHN: But I think Shawna is right around the labeling. You know...26

HANNA: I agree

JOHN: I don't call researchers, youth co-researchers, these are co-researchers.

SHAWNA: I mean even when you, yeah, cuz if you put like say, I don't know, 18 year olds, like 6 of them and then you have like 6 16 year olds and you call them all like youth or all young adults, at least 4 out of each group are going to say they don't like that label. I don't know I've never like the whole labeling part of the young adult to adult

JOHN: So, would you say that that's something you would like to see improved upon?

SHAWNA: I think like Hanna said, it is needed because people need to see that relationship. If you just say this is a 16 year old and this is an adult it doesn't have as much power.

HANNA: I think if we don't use it then I don't think the title is youth engagement. Does that make sense? We are identifying youth then its 'blank' engagement. I don't know...

JOHN: Yeah, well, you know it's important to have an identifier for context, like you're saying, but also that we're not stigmatizing or labeling.

HANNA: But we're not identifying ourselves with that.

SHAWNA: I don't think we always need it when we're in meetings and blah, blah, blah when we're saying yeah, we're the young adults in this group and blah, blah, blah. I think, I think it's obvious. I mean...

JOHN: Yeah.

SHAWNA: I mean we are definitely different ages. So...haha.

JOHN: Are we? Really?

SHAWNA: Yeah Sometimes you would think not, but....

HANNA: Sometimes we act a little bit older.

SHAWNA: No, exactly, You, Cane, and Katy are all the same that way because you don't....I'm just saying you guys don't act like, you know, old like, organizational people that have something stuck up there.... It's just know how you guys act.<sup>27</sup>

HANNA: I think it's interesting about things in life. It's like you can grow or mature as, um, an old soul I think and at some point it does switch where your actually getting old and you have a youthful soul.

SHAWNA: Are you thinking about midlife crisis, or?

HANNA: No. Maybe.

JOHN: But you know you can see this project evolving where you guys become mentors, you're going to mentoring anyway and you see that happening. Look how much Hanna has mentored you (Shawna). Look how both of you are mentoring Madison.

HANNA: Look at the mentorship between Deborah and Madison. That's huge and Madison and Shane. I mean, Madison has her ear like on the ground and her hands in community which is really cool.

SHAWNA: Yeah, and like I mean everyone I think like before when I was younger used to think **mentors were smart people that never screwed up.**

Now, you're kind of getting in that age it's just like the reason why you have all this knowledge is because you screwed up so many times, so obviously you did wrong.

HANNA: Or you can have, um, you can have learning where you learn vicarious learning, where you learn from people's mistakes.

SHAWNA: That's quite rare right. I think everyone now thinks we're mentors we know what works what doesn't

HANNA: We had our ups and downs...

SHAWNA: We screwed up so many times. We wanna share that knowledge with other people and I think it would be a good learning experience for all of us...

HANNA: Yeah.

SHAWNA: I don't necessarily get mentored outside of this group.

HANNA: But we're all people. And I think that, that is what that is, is that we all screw up.

So it doesn't matter if your 50 or 25, you can have the same relationship issues. You know what I mean? Like, there are people, we're people, we all have same needs and similar wants. You know the need for safety, food, shelter, water. We all have the same needs.

JOHN: Ok, I think we're about to wrap up. This has been excellent : lots of good information and it would interesting to involve other a co-researchers and get a response from them as well. 28

*John then redirects his questions to two practicum students (Kayla & Stacy) who have been supporting the initiative over the last few weeks and have been recording notes at the focus group session....*

John: Has there been anything said today that resonates with both of you in your experience with good relationships/partnerships?

KAYLA: It was interesting because yesterday talking about our project at our Thurs meeting in a team in Port Alberni we wanted to talk about, um, youth engagement and it came down to one word.

STACY: Relationships kept coming up every time.

KAYLA: Relationships, this, if you think about just a normal relationship of someone you love, somebody you care about, you nurture that relationship, it's just like you said it's all about relationship maintenance because that dynamic is always, like, like, capitalized like on my page because that's what it is. It's a relationship.

KAYLA: It's not these are the subjects. These are the adults. And like you said (Hanna) the label is important because you have to recognize the bias that society has to youth. It's there. "You're just a kid; you don't know any better."

STACY: yeah.

KAYLA: You have to recognize that because without recognizing it you can't talk about it.

STACY: Yeah.

KAYLA: You can't correct it, you can't move it away from that.

HANNA: I agree. Well said.

STACY: Yeah, I think something I really noticed in this group, even just coming in, in the few weeks is the human relationship, not we're up here and then here's the youth or young adults or whatever. You can just feel that even just coming into this group – how powerful the human aspect is in it.

KAYLA: Yeah. Not poster children. They have things I don't have because of my age because of my experience. They have what we like to call youthfulness, but there's a certain, I can only say essence that they have that I'm drawn to because I don't have that. I did when I was their age. So, there's a gift that goes along with that age in your life. There's a gift that adults don't have. 29

HANNA: I think it's important that you said that because I feel that even with Madison like I feel connected to this group and I feel if I were to be, um, if I were to resource myself out to youth I can help the youth, but Madison really has that gift of her eyes and ears are on the street. She still is that you, so when she's saying that people are calling her at 1 in the morning those are her peers still and she's able to mentor and be a leader and a resource for her peers and there is something

powerful in that and at point when does that go?

And it's like all of a sudden I'm like 25 and I'm like oh I don't know

all these spots in Langford or where ever it is.

SHAWNA: I feel a lot of the time too like you and me when we were in our whole foster care and our trauma time like we feel like we went through a lot of it more alone and Madison went a lot of it through, with groups of people and that kind of stuff and she connects to groups of people and I think that's what made the difference between us is that we wanted so badly to be independent whereas Madison so badly wanted to be in a group of people.

HANNA: And that's where that different wealth and, actually that's a really good point because when I was going through all of my stuff, um, the hardest parts I've had in my life I actually really did have really strong youth/adult partnerships with, uh, friend's parents, um, counselors at school, it was never really social workers, but counselors at school. Um, and those were the strong relationships that kept me grounded. I didn't feel I identified with my peers.

SHAWNA: I felt like it was always adults were always the ones that had the resources and knew what I was talking about.

HANNA: Yeah, I felt like I was more on par with adults and adults could understand my frustration, where my friends is saying she's poor because she only got a hundred dollars for her weekly allowance and I knew I only had enough for food for two weeks. Like, ok, like that understanding wasn't there? But, as you say, Madison has been in a group who she's able to be the leader of that group now.

SHAWNA: And now she's excelled in that way and us...

HANNA: Totally.

SHAWNA: And yeah, it's different like I think if I wanted to have a big change it would probably be to go in like more schools and blah, blah, blah and have like counselors and what not and like social workers have a better understanding of how to deal with youth where as I think Madison would want to be with the youth and have that change, that impact and we would probably be, and its, it's a good thing 'cause your changing the whole system rather than just one or the other's....

HANNA: And that's a huge part of why I think our group is so powerful is we do have such varied strengths and they're all honored, all honored as equally as the 304 other which is important you know like we're never competitive against each other. We're ecstatic for the opportunities, we're encouraging and supportive.

JOHN: So, a lot of information. Thank you, thank you so much