



The initial themes below are based on a preliminary analysis of the entry survey to the project. These entry questions give us a sense of our understanding about youth-adult relationships at the beginning of this project and the resulting themes will help shape and refine our research questions. It is important to note that the responses are mainly from adult team members of partner organizations and universities. The responses and themes will continue to grow as other team members (e.g. youth co-researchers, student co-researchers, organizational staff and academic researchers) fill in the survey.

1. What does the term "youth-adult partnership" mean to you?

Youth and adults working together

Balanced/sharing power

- Relatively equally balanced in terms of power
- Sharing power
- Making decisions together
- Adults step back as primary leaders to allow young people to feel empowered and contribute

Relationships: professional and personal

- Working relationship
- Negotiated relationship
- Natural and authentic relationship
- There is often a level of personal relationship involved: Adults aren't afraid to share some aspects of their personal life with the young people because the relationship isn't just based on the role that each plays or WHAT each person is (i.e. teacher and student) it's based on WHO each person is - which is partly the role they play, but not all
- Understanding each other's roles, being perceptive in the relationship

Common goal

- Shared common purpose
- Mentoring, coaching, support and help may be part of the relationship, and may be reciprocal, but are secondary to the common purpose

Mutuality/Reciprocity

Reciprocal learning

- Learn from each other
- Mentoring component with the adult and coaching by the youth
- Skills for both are developed
- Reciprocal exchange of ideas, skills and knowledge

- Understanding each other's role and perspective

Mutual and equally valued contributions

- Acknowledge each other's life experience
- Equal opportunities to apply unique skills, knowledge and perspectives
- Each bringing skills and/or knowledge to the task that improves the result of the activity
- Equal in opinion
- Equality and respect for what each other contributes

Mutual benefits

- Adult and youth both benefit, mutually beneficial
- See the benefit of working together
- Adults see the partnership as a chance to learn and grow
- Personal goals like skill development and personal growth
- Sometimes to provide support to one person in the partnership
- Value intergenerational relationships for improving our communities/organizations for everyone

Mutual respect

- Respect each other

Roles/characteristics of adults:

Trust and avoiding assumptions

- Benefit of the doubt

Professionalism as honesty, vulnerability, and willingness to be challenged

- Adult shows their vulnerability at times without fear that it will undermine their authority or professionalism
- Adults can acknowledge when they don't know the answer or what's best
- Professionalism looks different in YAPs
- Opinions/needs/wants of the young people are taken seriously, even if they're inconvenient to the adult. I.e. If a young person asks, "Why are we doing this" the adult sees it as an opportunity to discuss and consider the possibility that there is no good reason why we're doing this rather than saying b/c you have to or I said so.

Partnership characteristics/values:

- Collective
- Inclusive
- Open communication
- Trust to address challenges constructively
- Happiness and celebration
- Sense of community and belonging
- Age inclusive: Intergenerational relationships are valued
- Clarity of roles
- YAP as the ideal form of partnership and engagement

2. How would you define “youth”?

Age-based:

Most definitions of “youth” were age-based, with a range of ages that extended from minimum of 12 years to a maximum of 25 years. There does not seem to be much consistency across responses about the age range. Many designated a category for “young adults”, or “emerging adults” which ranged anywhere from 18-29 years of age.

Youth:

Under 25 (2 responses)

20 and under (2 responses)

12-17 (2 responses)

13-25

Early adolescence (12) to mid 20s

12-18

Young/emerging adults:

18-24 (3 responses)

18-29

Education stage:

A few definitions of “youth” were based on education stage:

- e.g. Between high school and end of post-secondary (2 responses)

Life circumstances:

A couple definitions referred to life circumstances:

- e.g. Adults are employed, living independently, advanced stages of education, rejoining education, finished undergraduate

Structural:

A couple definitions of “youth” were based on structures/systems:

- e.g. Youth Criminal Justice Act has a legal definition

Youth is defined by systemic exclusions based on (young) age (17 and under):

- e.g. right to vote, access to decision-making, opportunities to improve their communities, etc.

Personal characteristics:

One definition was based on personal characteristics:

- e.g. Someone eager to experience new things and looking for opportunities

3. What does your workplace look like in terms of youth-adult interactions? How would you describe it?

Some examples of youth-adult interactions/relationships in our organizations:

- University student – Professor: Formalized set of roles, unidirectional mentorship, colleague/partnership (with PhD students or in one-on-one situations)
- High school students – Staff/Teachers: Camaraderie, joking, sense of family “the overall culture treats them like they're [students] equal members of the school community.”
- Volunteer - Youth ‘customer’: “Volunteers might go the extra mile to get-to-know or help and support a young customer”
- Youth council – Staff - Community members: Staff and community members come to youth council for input and feedback
- Staff – Youth: Staff must manage behavior issues
- Security – Youth: Security in an enforcement role
- Youth as volunteer, participant, co-op student, work placement, paid employee: Working in partnership with adults, alternatively taking the lead on collaborative projects

Youth-adult relationships/interactions vary greatly within and across organizations

Y-A interactions vary across different services/programs within the same organization

Some of the youth-adult interactions are really positive. [...] staff or [...] volunteers might go the extra mile to get-to-know or help and support a young [person]. We run different [...] programs for youth, so there are interactions happening there as well that are usually positive, but not always. There is a youth council that is very respected--they run amazing events for youth in the community and many staff and community members come to them for input and feedback. In other cases the interactions can be really confrontational and sometimes negative (e.g., when security or by-law must take on an enforcement role or when facility staff must manage behaviour issues).

Young people and adults move in and out of different kinds of roles, interactions and relationships:

I work as a professor - so there is a part of my workplace in which youth-adult interactions take the form of "teacher" and "student" (or "learner"). This is a somewhat formalized set of roles. At present, I have an administrative position that sees me providing service to students on our campus. This gives me the opportunity to work in one-to-one or small group settings with students, which I find gives me much greater flexibility to work in partnership with the young people I meet.

Youth-adult partnership approaches need support and application at all levels of an organization (front-line and administrative/executive)

Youth-adult interactions are lacking at 'higher' levels of organizations even though supported in principle:

Great youth-adult interactions except at the Board level. . . we're getting there

Youth adult interactions occur regularly on the 'frontlines' but as you ascend the hierarchy there is less and less to almost a forced interaction because it is seen as the 'right thing to do'. There seems to be a concern from the adult side that the youth will not be able to 'comprehend' the scope of issues and consequences [...]

My immediate workplace has youth with meaningful roles, their voices are heard and they have opportunities to make contributions to the work of the organization. [...] however the organization as a whole has a lot to learn about the efficacy of youth engagement and youth-adult partnerships

Leadership for a culture of YAP does not guarantee youth-adult partnerships on the frontlines:

Overall, the culture [...] nurtures [...] YAPs. That's because most of the people in leadership positions model and encourage it. However, there are some adults who interact with youth in a top down way...where they expect the youth to conform to their expectations and if they don't, they receive the consequences. These situations seem to be about what's easiest for the adult, not what's best for the youth or the relationship.

Systemic/structural factors influence youth-adult interactions and partnership:

We still strive to make the definition work in all of these roles [youth as volunteer, participant, co-op student, work placement, and/or paid employee], although sometimes project deadlines, client requirements, youth needs and their objectives, time and funding pressures mean that we don't always meet our ideal

The space where YE and YAPs can flourish is often invaded by structured bureaucracy and the roles that adults play [within the bureaucracy] can steamroll over [...]

Personal factors influence youth-adult interactions:

In a high school environment in which I work, youth-adult interaction may vary depend on several factors: 1) The personal relationship with student-teacher or Principal; 2) Students' interest in subjects; 3) How relevant is the information students receive in a personal and practical way.

Also, see Q1 re: Roles/characteristics of adults

4. What are the outcomes of these youth-adult interactions at your workplace?

Outcomes for youth

- Having a voice: Being listened to/heard
- Feel empowered: A sense of shared power and responsibility
- Feel valued: Expertise and contributions are respected
- Learning and skills: Critical thinking skills, improved knowledge, better understand of the world
- Personal growth
- Belonging: feeling connected and ownership over buildings and programs
- Tension and frustration
- Feel disrespected

Outcomes for adults

- Learning: Improved knowledge and skills for adults

Outcomes for both adults and youth

- Occasional frustrations and disappointments
- Sense of harmony: Positive relationship building and mentoring
- Learning, teaching
- Sense of accomplishment: Participate in a change process that benefits all involved
- Changed behaviors
- Feeling good
- Power struggles

Outcomes for organizations and communities

- Better informed program decisions 11
- Increased capacity to fulfill our mission and mandate 11
- More effective results 11
- More relevant and effective youth programs and services 11
- Building leadership
- Achieving goals
- Planning events/conferences
- Amazing projects
- Ideas are upto date
- Socially responsible youth
- Better products for intergenerational audiences
- Positive, welcoming, community atmosphere

5. What seems to be working really well in these youth-adult interactions/partnerships?

The most common responses are listed here:

- Time to nurture relationships
 - Getting to know on another, quality time, regular communication, etc.
 - Forming strong relationships with a few young people attracts other youth so there is no challenge with recruitment
- Mutual respect
- Listening with empathy and an open mind
- Understanding each other
- Regular and respectful communication:
 - Not being preachy or condescending

In addition, respondents listed the following as things that work well in their contexts:

- Open and supportive culture for youth-adult interactions/partnerships
- Concrete youth events/activities (e.g. conferences, forums, programs)
- New opportunities/roles for youth to contribute as they get older
- Shared leadership that changes as needed
- Synergy of ideas from adults and youth
- Working toward more opportunities
- Modelling youth engagement practice
- Emotional connection to the issue, task and/or people
- Shared guidelines and purpose
- Results
- Psychological engagement
- Helpful feedback and communication
- Flexibility
- Positive, partnership-style interactions
- Creative approaches
- Willingness and openness to share and be oneself
- Transparency

What adults do

- Take a relationships-based, strengths-based, youth engagement approach
- Take the time to get to know youth
- Demonstrate respect
- Demonstrate value of contributions that youth make
- Are open to youth opinions and contributions
- Act as supports and advisors rather than dictators

What youth do

- Are patient with adults and give them another chance after interactions don't go well
- Engage with and inspire youth service practitioners

6. What seem to be areas of most difficulty in these youth-adult interactions/partnerships?

Many of the most common difficulties were the flip side of the things that were working well:

- Lack of understanding where each other is coming from
- Lack of or miscommunication:
 - E.g. Miscommunication that leads to perceptions that adults don't care or aren't interested, and that youth are not committed enough
- Time pressures
- Fear and insecurity of adults and youth about each other (e.g. perceived power and stereotypes) and their own capacities to work together
- Lack of genuine engagement by either side of the partnership

In addition, the following were also identified as difficulties:

- Lack of knowledge:
 - E.g. No formal youth work training re: youth's developmental needs
 - E.g. Young people are not aware of their rights or responsibilities
- Distance
- Busy youth, demanding schedules
- Lack of commitment on both sides when things don't go as a planned
- No/minimal organizational structures or resource foundations that sustain YAPs
- Difficulty establishing boundaries
- Difficult balance between acceptance and challenging behaviors
- Difficulty balancing position of power/authority with meaningfully relating to youth
- Mistrust and failure to acknowledge mistrust
- Thinking that engaging youth is just an exercise rather than understanding that the work is better when meaningfully working with youth
- Uneven playing field:
 - E.g. Adults are often more prepared and resourced but there is resistance to addressing these imbalances both at the practical level (e.g. shifts in structure, media, compensation, etc.) and also at the conceptual level (e.g. attitude shifts amongst adults and younger people, as well as culture shifts in the organization/community)