Youth Engagement:
A Best Practices Guide

Prepared by:

Arin Shatto, Former Community Engagement VISTA, WV Community Development Hub

Erin Hudnall, MA, West Virginia University

This resource was published in partnership between the WV Community Development Hub and the One Foundation.

THE HUB West Virginia — Community Development Hub

One Foundation

What is Youth Engagement

Based on the data we collected, through interviews with youth engagement practitioners and focus groups with young people, *youth engagement* in the context of this Manual is defined as: "the intentional participation and sustained involvement of young people in spaces where they serve as equal partners, stakeholders, and decision-makers." Here engagement represents active participation in community initiatives.

Why does engaging young people matter?

Although there are numerous benefits to successfully engaging and sustaining the involvement of young people, the ones listed below were some of the strongest and most powerful themes represented in responses from youth engagement practitioners across West Virginia that we interviewed for the purposes of this research project.

1. Young people are the future leaders of our communities. They play a role in the success of our state and its community development work. If we empower young people to invest in our communities now, they will gain the knowledge, skills, and incentive to create thriving communities for themselves and generations to come.
2. Engagement opportunities remind young people that they have power and agency.
3. Youth engagement provides young people with the chance to cultivate leadership skills and experience.
4. Engagement opportunities can help prepare young people for life after high school such as college, vocational training, civic responsibilities, the workforce, and more.
5. Youth engagement opportunities can serve as a connector for young people, allowing them to meet new people and gain a greater understanding of how their community functions.
6. Engagement provides young people with space where they can develop, lead, and implement projects that positively impact their community. When done right, youth engagement endeavors allow young people to discuss issues that are affecting them, their loved ones, and/or their community and develop ways in which to address them.
7. Engagement allows young people to empathize with one another and build relationships based on shared experiences.
8. Youth engagement can foster a stronger sense of belonging to the broader community and encourages young people to give back to the community in various ways.

How does youth engagement connect to The West Virginia Community Development Hub's work?

The West Virginia Community Development Hub (the Hub) is a statewide nonprofit organization that is rooted in four pillars of work: community coaching and local capacity building; supporting the community development system; policy solutions for systemic change; and community development communications. Regardless of the sector, the *community* comes first. What is critical to recognize is

that young people also belong to communities and in turn, must be meaningfully engaged in the process of community development.

The Hub recognizes that community development is a challenging effort that requires significant guidance. An approach known as "accompaniment," walking alongside an individual or community towards a shared vision, is used to ensure that initiatives are truly community-driven. As members of a community, young people also want to be afforded the flexibility to explore and act upon their own ideas in the places they call home. In the organization's work, this practice is often demonstrated in community coaching and local capacity-building programs. However, this Best Practices Manual can extend the scope much further. By offering learnings and successful case study examples provided directly by youth engagement practitioners and young people across West Virginia, this resource will equip you with tools to walk alongside young people in your communities, help foster the next generation of change-makers, and assist in building a sustainable future where West Virginians can thrive together!

Acknowledgments

To our interviewees and focus group participants, thank you for graciously offering your time, photos, and expertise. This resource would not have been possible without your contributions!

Liz Brunello, American Friends of Service Committee, WV Appalachian Center for Equality (ACE)

Tabatha Craddock, Teacher and Main Street Teens Advisor, Ripley High School

Melissa Garvin, Grafton Community Member, All Aboard Grafton Member

Katie Loudin, WV Program Director, One Foundation, Former Director of Community Engagement and Leadership Development, Center for Community Engagement, West Virginia Wesleyan College

Kayla McKinney, Co-Founder of One Voice Project

Melissa McKinney, Founder of Stages Music School, Director of One Voice Project

Olivia Morris, Regional Manager - Region 1, Generation West Virginia

Lou Murrey, Coordinator, The STAY (Stay Together Appalachian Youth) Project

Stacy Raffo, Community Coaching Programs Associate, The Hub

Liira Raines, Regional Organizer, Our Future West Virginia

Stacie Rohn, CEO, Boys and Girls Club of the Eastern Panhandle

Takeiya Smith, Youth Organizer, Our Future West Virginia

Jessica Vincent, Director, Center for Community Engagement, West Virginia Wesleyan College

Kinsey Walker, STEM Education and Outreach Coordinator, National Energy Technology Laboratory, US Department of Energy

Jennifer Wells, Executive Director, Our Future West Virginia

Kayla Wright, Network Engagement Director, Generation West Virginia

Jason A. Young, Founding Producer and Artistic Director, The Vintage Theatre Company

Table of Contents

`

Authors Note

In every region around our state, community members are making positive changes in the lives of West Virginians through community development and engagement. From weekly community meetups to creative placemaking projects to restoring treasured community landmarks, West Virginians are working tirelessly toward an even brighter vision of the future. However, young West Virginians are largely absent from the process of defining and enacting the changes they would like to see in their communities. As two West Virginian researchers in our early and mid-twenties with experience being engaged in our own communities, we noticed this widespread challenge and sought to contribute to solutions. For us it is critical to honor the voices of young people in this Manual and protect the integrity of the research process while also recognizing that many of the common themes identified are representative of our own experiences.

We hope that this guide sheds light on further possibilities. We not only want the guide to help facilitate greater youth engagement across the state, but also to showcase how thoughtful, positive youth engagement can aid in solving some of the problems many of us share concern over: creating a strong economic base with a youthful workforce; bridging the generational gap for greater understanding and a stronger capacity to work together; getting more families involved in community development; and retaining young talent in our state. "When young people can give back to their communities and be a part of truly defining that place's future, they are more likely to stay"[1]. Community engagement is a key retention factor for young people.

Society has a collective responsibility to build a strong foundation for youth engagement and development. However, these systems cannot be built without young people. They must be engaged in the entirety of the process, from beginning to end and every part in between. Through this research, we have seen firsthand the incredible impact that engaging young people has on rural communities in West Virginia.

We hope that you find something useful to take back to your own community, share the guide and what you have learned with others, and feel inspired to take action! Young, old, and somewhere in between, we are all in this together -- every West Virginian uplifting another in honor of us all -- youth included.

In Partnership,

Arin Shatto, AmeriCorps VISTA[2]

Erin Hudnall, MA

---

[1] (Generation West Virginia 2019)
[2] Note: Generation West Virginia's data is on those between the ages of 18 and 40.

About Our Research Processes

To contribute to the challenge of lack of youth engagement in the state, we went straight to the source: we interviewed young people and those working with them. Our interviews began in October 2019 and ended in January 2020. We held five focus groups with youth ranging from 16 to 21 years old (40 youth in total) and interviewed 20 youth engagement practitioners, and consulted professional community development practitioners and community leaders to understand further how to make this guide useful for and representative of the people who graciously contributed to it.

Our interviews focused on gathering successful and challenging instances of youth engagement through community stories and first-person accounts of service and community engagement work. These experiences range from smaller, one-time youth engagement projects to growing or sustained youth engagement in communities. The results of these conversations were the guiding principles for the information presented in this document.

In this guide, we define "youth" as those between the ages of 16 to 21, which is in line with the National Academy of Sciences definition of adolescence[3]. "Adult" is defined in the guide as anyone above this age range.

---

[3] (National Academies of Sciences 2020)

Best Practices for Youth Engagement

The bolded and italicized text within each paragraph identifies the key takeaways of the respective best practices. Any text within quotations is a direct quote from our participants.

1. Recognize that adult voices and ideas are often respected more than those of young people.

This practice is listed first because it is foundational to the other best practices. According to young people who participated in our focus groups, acknowledging the power differences that exist between them and adults is crucial to successfully engaging young people. Adults we interviewed reinforced this idea as well. Young people vocalized that in their experiences working with adults, they have been dismissed because they "did not look, speak, act, think, or dress in the ways adults do or in ways adults expect them to." ***In order to address these power differences, our participants recommend that adults recognize young people's desire to be respected and take responsibility to collaborate with young people in fostering an environment of mutual respect.*** Some strategies expressed by young people throughout the course of the research include "recognizing them as equal partners," "inviting diverse voices to the table," and "expressing a willingness to hold folks accountable for their actions."

To see how other communities put this practice into action, see Case Studies 1-8.

2. Facilitate meaningful collaboration, foster an environment of understanding and openness.

The majority of U.S. volunteers are middle-aged adults, those between the ages of 40-60.[4]. This standard demographic group and young people have different perspectives, approaches to work, and collaboration due to the time in which they grew up[5]. (Check out the Resources page to learn more about the characteristics and beliefs of different generations). ***"Young people want to work alongside adults who express a sincere willingness to adapt, collaborate with, and learn from them."*** Fostering an environment of mutual understanding and openness can help bridge these generational gaps. ACT for Youth offers a step-by-step process for achieving the strong collaborative relationships that young people eagerly seek. (You can also access this information on the Resources page).

To see how other communities put this practice into action, see Case Studies 1, and 3-8.

---

[4] (Wilson 2012)

[5] (Rotolo and Wilson 2004)

3. Establish a foundation for mentorship and leadership through genuine youth engagement practices.

Young people that participated in our focus groups reinforced their desires for "guiding, friendly, and approachable" relationships with adults. ***Young people want to feel cared for and respected, but most importantly, they want adults to do the work alongside them so that they can learn new skills that will benefit them in the future***. Through these mentoring relationships, "leaders for the next generation are born and are equipped to give back to their communities." From a community development perspective: "It is crucial to remember that it's not about the *quantity* of young people present but the *quality* of sustained engagement that counts!"

To see how other communities put this practice into action, see Case Studies 1-8.

4. Nurture authentic relationships with young people.

Building authentic relationships with young people begins by talking with and listening to them. "Supporting individuals as whole people matters"[6]. ***It is important to note, however, that this requires a physical presence.*** As reinforced by practitioners we interviewed, "Young people must have a foundational relationship with adults before they will begin to trust or work alongside them." Those seeking to engage youth in community development work should have one-on-one conversations in places where young people already are and ask them what they envision for their communities. Don't dismiss their ideas; rather, express how young people's interests can connect to the work that's happening in the community and invite them to take part or offer them the space to create new opportunities for engagement that pique their interests. Strategies like active listening can offer guidance on ways to navigate these kinds of conversations. (To learn more about active listening, visit the Resources page.)

To see how other communities put this practice into action, see Case Studies 1-3, 5-8

5. Create spaces that allow young people to feel valued so that they can contribute to the work.

Young people simply want to have access to spaces where they can spend time together with their peers. "Access and connection to peer networks are crucial"[7]. This approach is two-fold. Making engagement opportunities accessible requires that young people – and all people – know that they are encouraged to participate and are recognized as co-creators of a space. Once folks are gathered together, they are offered an opportunity to build relationships with one another and cultivate a deeper connection to the community they call home[8]. Additionally, the process fosters a supportive peer network to lean on and grow alongside. ***To do this effectively, adults need to create comfort zones for young people by being positive, welcoming, and fostering a sense of belonging***. Consider

---

[6] (Generation West Virginia 2019)
[7] (Generation West Virginia 2019)
[8] (Wilkinson 1991)

making a space more inviting by playing music, providing board games for folks to play together, offering food, and displaying an authentic demeanor of approachability. A youth engagement practitioner we interviewed said, "A way to reinforce this is by outwardly acknowledging young people's presence and the values that they bring to the table!"

To see how other communities put this practice into action, see Case Studies 1-8.

6. Ask them then let them: a strategy for acknowledging young people's capability, building trust, and keeping the work fun.

In order for young people to feel genuinely engaged, they need to be included in the entirety of the process. Remember that young people and adults alike are invested in this work *together*! According to youth engagement practitioners, **"*This means offering them a platform to discuss the issues or projects that are important to them, making decisions as a group, and working collaboratively to see the initiative through."*** But first, adults who are facilitating this process must build trust with them and keep the work *fun*! "Young people trust adults that are reliable, remind young people that they are welcome to show up as they are, encourage them, and those who are willing to be vulnerable and share their experiences openly. This can be difficult, so incorporating fun is essential! Be enthusiastic, offer incentives to keep the work joy-centered, and make sure that young people feel good about being engaged in the work."

To see how other communities put this practice into action, see Case Studies 1-3, 5, 7, and 8.

7. Work to rectify the organizational, community, and individual barriers that may keep young people from being engaged.

Youth engagement practitioners identified challenges that, if alleviated, would allow them to more successfully engage young people in community development work. "Insufficient funding/staffing," "limited sense of community with few opportunities to be engaged," "lack of transportation," and "a collective feeling of hopelessness" were the barriers most commonly identified by experienced youth engagement practitioners. These are often complex challenges that require innovative solutions. *Consider utilizing grant funding; engage with policy at the local, state, or federal level* **(subscribe to The Hub's legislative Hubbub for specific strategies and best practices)***; or cultivating strong community partnerships* **(such as organizing a carpool to engagement opportunities)** *to address these factors that limit young people's engagement.*

To see how other communities put this practice into action, see Case Studies 1-6, and 8.

8. Build collaborative partnerships with local schools.

To effectively engage young people in community development work within the community, adults can go to where they are: schools. This can be a challenging partnership to navigate considering the policies, scheduling conflicts, and other limitations that influence a school's capacity to collaborate with external partners. ***However, it can be a mechanism for establishing networks of champions to***

assist in successfully engaging young people in the community. Youth engagement practitioners who work in or directly with schools suggested, "For adults who are unfamiliar with this process, begin by building relationships with school personnel on a local level. Identify teachers, administrators, and others who share similar values and are eager to make a difference - they can collaborate with club advisors or school counselors to get young people involved." Before making a formal proposal to these partners or others (such as the local Board of Education) "ensure that the project is an ongoing effort that requires recurring involvement and presence from adults."

To see how other communities put this practice into action, see Case Studies 2, 4, 5, and 7.

9. Cultivate opportunities to engage young people in the arts to help bolster their confidence.

Artistic expression practiced in the community provides young people a space to gain confidence in leadership and other abilities through planning and participating in expressive projects. Music, art, theater, dance, and others provide nurturing environments for young people to cultivate their individual strengths and talents. ***Creative arts can foster a platform for young people to connect through shared experiences, empathize with one another, and build a powerful sense of ownership over their community that is incomparable to traditional forms of engagement.*** While it is important to note that community development initiatives and programs do not have to be centered around the arts to successfully engage young people, these options offer unique strategies to consider if engagement is lacking.

To see how other communities put this practice into action, see Case Studies 1, 3, 7, and 8.

10. Use a variety of communication styles to spread the word about engagement opportunities for young people.

Young people *want* to be engaged in initiatives that are happening in their community, but they can only do so if they are made aware of those opportunities. One common strategy is to use social media platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, "to reach young people in spaces where they are already engaging." ***However; most young people who participated in our focus groups said that they "favored being personally invited to participate and having direct asks for their involvement because it feels more genuine."*** This is a trend amongst U.S. volunteers[9]. To make these interactions more intentional, "discuss why young peoples' participation is important and give them action steps to consider when moving forward." Looking for additional communications tactics to try? Consider designing posters that differ from the norm - such as "circular shapes, larger sizes, splashes of color, postcards to hand out" - that are more likely to catch the eyes of passersby.

To see how other communities put this practice into action, see Case Studies 1, 4, 7, and 8.

---

[9] (Lee and Brudney 2012)

Case Studies

We have included ten case studies in this manual to help to put these strategies into practice. The case studies are organized into three tiers: beginner, intermediate, and proficient. Consider where you are in your current level of youth engagement and find the case studies that will be most helpful to you and your work.

BEGINNER: Building a foundation for youth engagement practices
Adults who are seeking to build a foundation for youth engagement practices. They have little experience collaborating with young people.

Reference these Case Studies to replicate or spark other ideas to begin engaging young people in the process of community development work:

- Chalk the Walk
- Trick-or-Treat for Canned Goods

INTERMEDIATE: Facilitating youth engagement practices
Adults who are working to facilitate youth engagement practices and have some experience working alongside young people, but may have difficulties recruiting new young people or engaging them in new initiatives. They have cultivated strong, trusting relationships with young people in their community/organization and are committed to building momentum with youth-driven projects.

Consider these Case Studies to replicate or spark other ideas for recurring initiatives to continue engaging young people successfully:

- Create Your State Youth Convening
- Utilizing Existing Networks

PROFICIENT: Advancing youth engagement practices
Adults who are working to advance youth engagement practices and have consistent experience collaborating with young people. They may have encouraged young people to lead group discussions, coordinate community initiatives, and develop one another's leadership capacities.

Consider these Case Studies to challenge young people to think on a broader scale to take their work to the next level:

- Appalachia Center for Equality Program
- Community Third Space
- One Voice Project
- Youth Steering Committee: The STAY Project

BEGINNER: Building a foundation for youth engagement practices

CASE STUDY 1: Chalk the Walk

Who: All Aboard Grafton

What: Chalk the Walk

When: Annually

Where: Grafton, WV

Why: This event was sparked by a group of young people asking Tom and Donna Hart, local community leaders and business owners, if they would use sidewalk chalk outside of their coffee shop where young people frequent, *Espresso Yourself*. After the couple agreed and they reflected on the group's work, their daughter Breana decided to take the lead on the initiative and make it an annual opportunity for self-expression and community engagement. She guided young people through the process of planning and executing the event. If Breanna found that ideas or suggestions of young people might steer them off course, she would politely suggest an alternative prefacing it with, "What do you think about…" or "What if we did it this way…" so that ultimately, young people still had decision making power in the process and have full ownership of the outcomes.

How: Young people visit businesses on Main Street to seek permission about using the sidewalk space(s) outside of their establishment for the event. Once this step is completed, event organizers work to engage their peers, families, community members, and even visitors to partake in the event to express themselves creatively and add welcoming art to spaces downtown. They have also prioritized capturing these events through pictures, including the one below, to promote community engagement and share their successes within Grafton and beyond!

Best Practices Used: Recognize that adult voices are often more respected than young people's; Foster an environment of understanding/openness; Establish a foundation for mentorship and leadership; Nurture authentic relationships with young people; Create spaces where young people feel valued; Ask them then let them; Work to rectify barriers that may keep young people from being engaged; Engage young people in the arts; Use a variety of communication styles to spread the word.

Further ideas to consider:
- Recruit young people to take a lead on the project
- Speak with local business owners to get them on board
- Advertise the event in a variety of ways, such as posters, an ad in the paper, or public announcements at school, to invite others to partake

(Photo provided by Tom Hart, Grafton Community Member, Owner of Espresso Yourself)

CASE STUDY 2: Trick-or-Treat for Canned Goods

Who: WE LEAD Poverty Reduction Team at West Virginia Wesleyan College

When: October 2019

Where: Buckhannon, WV

Why: Members of the WE LEAD Poverty Reduction Team are passionate about issues pertaining to poverty. They recognized that these challenges exist in the local community and wanted to create a visible service opportunity that would engage young people on Wesleyan's campus as well as community members who are eager to combat the devastating challenges associated with poverty, like food insecurity.

How: Young leaders collaborated with *The Upshur Cooperative Parish House & Crosslines Inc,* faculty, staff, and students on Wesleyan's campus, as well as the broader community of Buckhannon to ensure the project would be efficient, safe, and fun for all participants. Together, these groups gathered and collected non-perishable goods to donate to *The Upshur Cooperative Parish House & Crosslines Inc*, each of which were counted and documented.

Best Practices Used: Recognize that adult voices are often more respected than young people's; Establish a foundation for mentorship/leadership; Nurture authentic relationships with young people; Create spaces where young people feel valued; Ask them then let them; Work to rectify barriers that may keep young people from being engaged; Build collaborative partnerships with schools.

Further ideas to consider:
- Collaborate with a local organization who shares a similar mission and/or values to the group
- Find strategic ways to engage other young people who have a desire to be involved
- Allow community members to participate and interact with younger participants

(Photo provided by WE LEAD Poverty Reduction Team Members, West Virginia Wesleyan College)

INTERMEDIATE: Facilitating youth engagement practices

CASE STUDY 3: Create Your State Youth Convening

Who: Create Your State

When: November 2019

Where: Princeton, WV

Why: Brady Walker recognized that young people need to be provided with spaces where they can express themselves freely, create, dream, and collaborate with one another to develop an initiative that will better their communities. He saw this happening with adults but realized that young people weren't included in the conversations. Brady and Lori McKinney hope to make this event an annual or bi-annual event in the coming years to keep the momentum going.

How: Eight-year-old Brady, a talented citizen artist of Princeton, West Virginia, has participated in several Create Your State programs which are typically designed for adults. After his last experience he spoke with Lori McKinney, who coordinates Create Your State, and expressed his passion to make the opportunity accessible to young people. Lori connected with his excitement and the two got to work. After a few planning meetings designed to coordinate the details of the event, such as where it would be held, how young people would be invited, and who might facilitate the event, the first Create Your State Youth Convening was born!

Best Practices Used: Recognize that adult voices are often more respected than young people's; Foster an environment of understanding/openness; Establish a foundation for mentorship and leadership; Nurture authentic relationships with young people; Create spaces where young people feel valued; Ask them then let them; Work to rectify barriers that may keep young people from being engaged; Engage young people in the arts.

Further ideas to consider:
- Allow young people to express their ideas freely and have ownership of the process
- Give young people decision-making power
- Have a few adults present, who the young people trust, to facilitate the conversation

(Photo provided by Debra June Williby-Walker, Create Your State Youth Convening Attendee)

CASE STUDY 4: Utilize Existing Networks

Who: Center for Community Engagement & Leadership Development, West Virginia Wesleyan College

When: Ongoing to ensure that collaboration is being successfully maintained and partnering relationships are strong and reciprocal.

Where: Buckhannon, WV

Why: Youth engagement practices and community development work often stretch folks too thin. To save valuable resources like time and money, it is critical to rely on networks in our communities and across the state that can mutually benefit from the work. Through these collaborative relationships, best practices, resources, and more can be shared across partners. Additionally, young people can learn from this process and the adults that contribute to it and work to replicate it successfully in their communities.

How: Service Scholars are WVWC students who engage in service opportunities for seventy-five hours per semester in exchange for a scholarship. In order for these young people to meet the requirements outlined in the program, the Center for Community Engagement & Leadership Development had to lean on existing networks within the community. Site placements for students vary throughout the community, from civic organizations like the police and fire departments; to nonprofit agencies such as food pantries, direct services, and after school programs; and public schools at all levels. In order to maintain such strong ties with these partners, the Center for Community Engagement has continued to build trusting relationships with numerous site supervisors to support student success.

Best Practices Used: Recognize that adult voices are often more respected than young people's; Foster an environment of understanding/openness; Establish a foundation for mentorship and leadership; Create spaces where young people feel valued; Work to rectify barriers that may keep young people from being engaged; Build collaborative partnerships with schools; Use a variety of communication styles to spread the word.

Further ideas to consider:
- Make a list or map of other organizations - including local schools, nonprofit organizations, community foundations, and more - in the community who are dedicated to making a difference
- Schedule in-person meetings with representatives of said organizations to strategize how to create an effective network
- Develop a system that allows for functional, transparent, and clear communication

(Photo provided by Jessica Vincent, Director, Center for Community Engagement, West Virginia Wesleyan College)

PROFICIENT: Advancing youth engagement practices

CASE STUDY 5: Appalachia Center for Equality Program

Who: American Friends of Service Committee

When: The coordinator aims to meet with these groups of young people three times per week after school.

Where: Logan High School and Sherman High School

Why: In order for young people to be engaged in their communities, regarding policy actions or other capacities, they must be informed about the issues that are creating injustices. American Friends Service Committee's (AFSC) educational programming does that and so much more. The organization listens to the suggestions that young people have and actively incorporates those things through its everyday work. However, learning does not stop there. Young people participating in the program walk away with valuable, tangible skills that will prepare them to continue giving back to their communities and help build leaders for generations to come!

How: Through the Appalachian Center for Equality program, AFSC meets with high school students (approximately 40-50 in total) to plan meetings around college readiness, vocational preparedness, and social issues; coordinate trips; and allows them to lead, implement, and plan projects they'd like to take part in.

Best Practices Used: Recognize that adult voices are often more respected than young people's; Foster an environment of understanding/openness; Establish a foundation for mentorship and leadership; Nurture authentic relationships with young people; Create spaces where young people feel valued; Ask them then let them; Work to rectify barriers that may keep young people from being engaged; Build collaborative partnerships with schools.

Further ideas to consider:
- Connect with local school personnel who are eager to make a difference
- Build trusting relationships with young people who will participate in initiatives/programs happening in the community
- Approach this opportunity as a mutual learning experience

(Photo provided by Liz Brunello, American Friends of Service Committee, WV Appalachian Center for Equality [ACE]

CASE STUDY 6: Community Third Space

Who: Espresso Yourself

When: 2017

Where: Grafton, WV

Why: Although their initial motivation was to earn a living, Tom and Donna Hart recognized a need in their community for a space where folks could comfortably exist with one another. Thus, *Espresso Yourself* was born. Due to the lack of third spaces in West Virginia - spaces outside of one's workplace or home - *Espresso Yourself* has had an incredible impact on young people in the community. Many of them visit regularly, not only to enjoy coffee or treats but to simply be together. Tom and Donna have been intentional in creating an environment where young people feel safe. This is clearly demonstrated by their demeanor towards and treatment of young people. Whether it be over a board game, a cheerful tune at the piano, or by the fire, young people now have a space to exist with one another - without the fear of judgment or ridicule - and just *be.* Young people and families have adopted the space meaningfully in the community. As a result many of Grafton's community events, such as First Fridays, are aided by the presence of *Espresso Yourself*.

How: *Espresso Yourself* is a cozy coffee shop nestled in the heart of Main Street in Grafton, WV. The owners have been intentional about designing a space that facilitates engagement amongst all who visit. There are a variety of seating possibilities available, ranging from tables to couches. This provides options for those who may want to be productive and those who may be meeting to share in conversation with one another. Music is always playing and fosters a warm environment. Two pianos are situated in the room on opposing sides, open for anyone to use freely. There are a variety of board games available for those who want to relax with one another. These elements create an environment where people of all ages feel comfortable in sharing space and interacting.

Best Practices Used: Recognize that adult voices are often more respected than young people's; Foster an environment of understanding/openness; Establish a foundation for mentorship and leadership; Nurture authentic relationships with young people; Create spaces where young people feel valued; Work to rectify barriers that may keep young people engaged.

Further ideas to consider:
- Identify a need in the community, such as a third space
  - Note: a third space does not have to be a new or existing business, but the principals of this example can be applied to any meeting venue
- Work with community members and young people to create a vision/purpose for the space and allow them to be a part of the process

(Photo provided by Tom Hart, Grafton Community Member, Owner of Espresso Yourself)

CASE STUDY 7: One Voice Project

Who: Young musicians

When: Ongoing

Where: Princeton, WV

Why: The arts facilitate a different kind of interaction amongst young people. The act of writing and performing music is vulnerable in nature and offers folks the platform to share personal experiences. It also fosters an environment where young people feel open, safe, and empathic towards their peers. Music is also a way to unite people, a means in which to gather those who may or may not share similar ideals.

How: The One Voice Project began after the project founder experienced a major tragedy in her life. She found healing through songwriting and was later asked to share her music. Through this experience, she realized that her story might allow others to heal as well. In the early stages, the One Voice Project focused on weekly courses to develop skills like songwriting, self-expression, and more. It later evolved into mentoring and supporting young people who were experiencing mental health challenges and eventually blossomed into full production tours to schools and community centers across the east coast. As the project leader continued to share her story through music, other young people were inspired to do the same and as a result, they have changed lives and facilitated connections amongst young people who are facing similar challenges.

Best Practices Used: Recognize that adult voices are often more respected than young people's; Foster an environment of understanding/openness; Establish a foundation for mentorship and leadership; Nurture authentic relationships with young people; Create spaces where young people feel valued; Ask them then let them; Build collaborative relationships with schools; Engage young people in the arts; Use a variety of communication styles to spread the word.

Further ideas to consider:
- Identify young people who are passionate about sharing music (or other art forms) with others
- Cultivate a safe space for those young people to share their stories
- Facilitate leadership development amongst those young people

(Photo provided by the One Voice Project website)

CASE STUDY 8: Youth Steering Committee: The STAY Project

Who: The STAY (Stay Together Appalachian Youth) Project

When: The youth steering committee meets quarterly.

Where: Central Appalachia

Why: The STAY Project is focused on creating a network of young people, between the ages of 14 and 30, to support one another to stay in their homes across Appalachia. In order to provide them with a platform to lead and build peer mentoring relationships, the organization established the youth steering committee and expresses clear intentions of adhering to the progressive model.

How: STAY believes that authentic youth engagement practices occur when young people are valued in the space they're in, when they are given decision making power and are trusted to make decisions on their own, and when they feel heard. One of the most transparent reflections of these values is their youth steering committee: a group of nine young people who are elected by their peers and serve two-year terms. The steering committee is equipped to make decisions regarding budgets, salaries, and programming and serve as the faces of STAY in their local communities.

Best Practices Used: Recognize that adult voices are often more respected than young people's; Foster an environment of understanding/openness; Establish a foundation for mentorship and leadership; Nurture authentic relationships with young people; Create spaces where young people feel valued; Ask them then let them; Work to rectify barriers that may keep young people from being engaged; Engage young people in the arts; Use a variety of communication styles to spread the word.

Further ideas to consider:
- Fully commit to prioritizing young people
- Allow young people to have input throughout the formation of a youth steering committee
- Give young people the space to make decisions and offer suggestions for how things can improve

(Photo provided by Lou Murrey, Coordinator, the Stay Together Appalachian Youth (STAY) Project)

Resources (And How to Find Them)

To access the **generational chart listed on page 7**, visit
http://www.naesp.org/sites/default/files/acrossgenerationschart_ND19.png

To access the **principles of collaborative practice on page 7**, visit
https://sites.google.com/site/interncoachingandmentoring/communities-of-practice-and-collaborative-teaching-practices. Scroll to the bottom of the page until you see the graphic for Collaborative Practice. Click on that graphic and it will enlarge on a separate webpage.

To access the **information on the community collaboration process on page 7,** visit
http://actforyouth.net/youth_development/communities/collaboration.cfm.

To learn more about **active listening strategies on page 8**, visit
http://www.bumc.bu.edu/facdev-medicine/files/2016/10/Active-Listening-Handout.pdf.

To learn more about **how to engage with policies on page 8,** visit
http://wvhub.org/community-development-policy-program/.

To subscribe to The Hub's Legislative Hubbub, visit :
https://wvhub.us10.list-manage.com/subscribe?u=22d9115ec8abbf9a41f73bd73&id=01e9fa6354 and
fill out the boxes provided.

Bibliography

Generation West Virginia. 2019. https://generationwv.org/

Lee, Young-joo, and Jeffrey L. Brudney. 2012. "Participation in Formal and Informal Volunteering: Implications for Volunteer Recruitment." *Nonprofit Management and Leadership* 23(2):159–80.

The National Academies of Sciences. 2020. "The Promise of Adolescence: Realizing Opportunity for All Youth."

Wilkinson, Kenneth P. 1991. The Community in Rural America. Rural Sociological Society: Social Ecology Press.

Wilson, John. 2012. "Volunteerism Research: A Review Essay." *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 41(2):176–212.