

Engaging Youth

A How To Guide for Youth Serving Organizations

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**Produced by the
National Youth Homelessness Learning Community**

This handbook has been written and produced by the National Youth Homelessness Learning Community, a collaborative effort of youth organizations to share knowledge and build the capacity of our sector to more effectively meet the needs of youth across Canada. We are extremely grateful to all the researchers and advocates in the field of youth engagement who have provided us with much food for thought and lively discussion, and we are particularly grateful to the youth who participate in our organizations in various ways and who shared their honest experiences of our efforts to engage them.

Introduction

Over the past several years youth organizations across Canada have been working diligently to develop programs and services that are relevant and effective in meeting the needs of youth. Specialized programs in the areas of transitional housing, employment training, mentorship, education, harm reduction and counseling have been designed and implemented, with a specific focus on addressing the needs of homeless and at-risk youth across Canada who are struggling to survive and take steps towards self-sufficiency.

What is typically shared among youth organizations is the fundamental belief that homeless and at-risk youth have skills and abilities and much to contribute to the communities in which they live. These same organizations are also dedicated to youth development and work hard to build skill and personal growth opportunities within their programs and services. It is well understood that positive youth development helps ease the transition to adulthood, and creates confidence and self-esteem, which are critical factors in motivating young people to set and meet personal goals.

But are we really engaging youth in the work that we do?

The Centre for Excellence in Youth Engagement defines the concept as:

“The meaningful participation and sustained involvement of a young person in an activity which has a focus outside him or herself”

There has been much written and discussed on the importance of youth engagement as a means to our shared goal of helping young people become contributing and healthy members of our communities. But organizations can sometimes struggle with how to do this well, and young people are particularly savvy to well-meaning attempts to involve them that are superficial. For young people with complex barriers such as homelessness, substance use, mental health issues, lack of education and who lack positive role models, the work of initiating and sustaining that engagement can be even more complicated.

The research tells us that when youth are truly engaged in the programs and services of the organizations that are working to support them, they are far more willing and able to participate, learn and grow and find the programs more interesting and relevant. They develop resiliency, are less susceptible to negative influences and feel empowered to move forward in a constructive way.

Isn't that what we are all working towards? Given this, then shouldn't every program and service in every youth organization be developed with a clear understanding of youth engagement as a fundamental core value?

This handbook is intended to provide staff at all levels in youth serving organizations, particularly those who are dedicated to creating opportunities for social inclusion of homeless and at-risk youth, some guidance on how to engage young people and what we need to do as organizations to create meaningful opportunities within our programs and services for youth to be the leaders and decision makers.

As simple as this approach may sound, the work can be difficult, and challenge organizations and staff in numerous ways. In most youth organizations, we need to look carefully at our ability to share power, and not just pay lip service to the concept of engagement. We need to identify where engagement is genuinely possible, and be honest about where it is not. We need to provide youth with support and resources to develop and implement initiatives that we, as service providers, may not have identified as priorities. And we need to continue to listen to, support, guide and mentor youth so that they develop and use good judgment and learn from their decisions. We need to give them the information they need to plan and the resources to execute those plans, and we need to know when to step back and let something take shape organically. This can be particularly hard for youth organizations in a funding climate of prescribed outcomes and traditional measures of "success."

This guide is not intended to answer all your questions but rather to get you thinking and talking in your own organizations about what you can do to create a climate where youth engagement is not only possible, it's actively supported and valued.

Section B

Youth Engagement – A Challenge for the Youth Services Sector

“We must be silent before we can listen. We must listen before we can learn.
We must learn before we can prepare. We must prepare before we can serve.
We must serve before we can lead.” ~ **William Arthur Ward**

The challenge of those in the youth services sector is to meaningfully engage youth and to help create an environment where decisions can be made which move them away from the street and into the mainstream community.

The premise of this section is that accepting and affirming the personal starting points of young people is critical to achieving engagement with them. Essential to that process of engagement is a move away from the traditional service models that nurtured dependence and instead build on the self-reliance youth have learned from experiences on the street.

1. Social and community starting points of young people on the street

Children in North America, regardless of cultural, racial, political and socio-economic starting points experience a ‘pre-maturity’ status from birth to the age of 18 (depending on the jurisdiction in which the child lives). This is a period of acceptable active learning; we define our children as safe while they learn acceptable patterns of conformity to fit into the world as contributing adults.

This learning is based on the assumption that there will be appropriate teachers, role models, and systems in place for successful learning; that there will be carry out the roles and responsibilities to ensure adequate learning and development of acceptable compliance to a dominant norm held by society. Adults in our society nurture children in varying degrees of available time and energy, guidance, control, and indifference. In part because of these inconsistencies the vulnerability of children cannot be over-emphasized.

2. The starting point of the individual child

It is important to consider what happens if this process does not unfold adequately:

- What if learning opportunities do not offer complete information?
- What if environments of care are not safe emotionally, economically, or physically?
- What happens when the individual child needs to shift to defense to interact in his/her world?
- Further, what happens when the chain of consequences and feedback mandate a child to take responsibility for his/her own survival?

We can easily speculate that the resulting scenario would be the creation of a different personal world with survival as its first goal. Without the capacity to acquire food and shelter, or the credibility to engage in a legal or “legitimate” exchange for whatever the child is able to offer/produce a focus on survival at the most essential level becomes most critical. Increasing numbers of children are entering just such a scenario.

Abandoned because of the collapse of systems, institutions, and measures developed for their nurturance and development, children must look within themselves for solutions to their continued existence. Not surprisingly, choices are often made to seek safety and acceptance.

3. Introduction to the framework of a perspective

Increasing numbers of children end up on the street making choices they believe will work for them. Without ways to participate in mainstream economy and life, young people arrive and continue within street culture, a culture of survival - adapting and fitting in order to make life work. Ultimately many remain there long after they are ready to leave.

Nothing can change the past for these young people. In strategies to assist them to move forward, why not use the experience and learning they already have? Accepting and affirming the starting points of young people who have experienced the survival culture of the street is critical. **Our challenge is to engage individual youth with his or her own agenda not ours.**

4. Theoretical perspective

The psychology of this perspective includes the following:

Change occurs when an individual becomes what he/she is, not when he tries to become what he is not. Without the safety to be what he is first, the person must resort to *defending* what he is, rather than looking forward to possibility of change.

Change does not take place through a coercive attempt by the individual or by another person to change her or him.

Change takes place if one takes the time and effort to be what he/she is – to be fully invested in his/her current positions as the foundation to move forward. The premise is that one must stand in one place in order to have firm footing to move; i.e. the person is constantly moving between what she ‘should be’ and what she thinks she ‘is’, never fully identifying with either.

In our role working with young people our role then becomes to actively:

- encourage, even insist, that the person be where and what he/she is;
- recognize and act on the belief/assumption that change does not take place by ‘trying’, coercions, or persuasion;
- believe that change can occur when the person first abandons for the moment what he would like to become and attempts to be what he is.

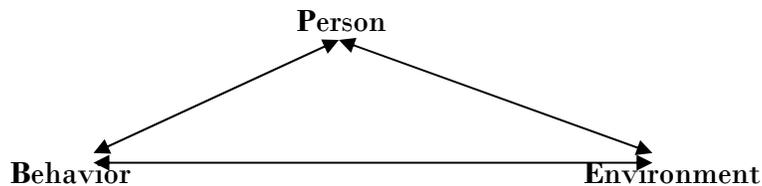
The mechanism which makes this possible becomes clearer in considering sociological perspective. An externally imposed idea may garner some compliance but because it does not originate within the individual psyche, it can be short-lived, defensively excused, and ultimately walked away from.

5. The sociology of why it is critical to start with individual starting points

Sociological perspectives allow us to understand that the person cannot effectively be perceived outside of the context of the environments he/she is part of.

Our role with young people is as a part of this environment, to be who we are as persons. Out of this perspective, the process of our ‘youth engagement’ will unfold as we are equally impacted by one another. *Integration* then becomes a movement together in newly defined ways for both. A person is a single whole human being. There is constant change based on the dynamic transaction between the self and the environment.

The interdependence between the person, their environment, and their learned behavior out of the environment build the person. The impact of environment shapes the learned behavior because it is what makes up the fabric of learned experience.



In the case of street-dependent youth the faith that they can accomplish what they set out to do is fundamental to engagement and change.

6. Street culture and culture as agent of change

When we apply this working perspective, that life on the street and street culture are like any other cultural experience, we have acknowledged the context and the human process together. Through cultural learning, young people adapt to survive. When traditional patterns have not worked, each alternative support system, peer culture, and eventually the street are the cultural contexts they seek as available options to ensure their survival. They learn what is necessary to ‘fit’ and decide to leave when that context no longer works for them.

7. Making use of cultural information

“True leadership is leading people to themselves.”

Our role is as “leaders” for very independent young people who have learned they need to rely on themselves to achieve their survival. Leaders do not take away the responsibility of the individual – they understand that it is essential to leave it intact.

As leaders of young people, we need to actively live the understanding that self-determination and independence require an intact sense of personal responsibility. Young people consistently identify that they cannot depend solely on others in the process of moving from street-life to mainstream life; the changes must come from within.

Therefore, it should be the objective of services available to street-dependent youth to inspire confidence, a sense of agency and control over their own lives.

By inspiring these aspects of self-efficacy motivation and self-reflexive problem solving will follow. Without a sense of self-efficacy, individuals, no matter what their situation, have a minimal sense of control in their lives. Without a sense of control, it is likely the individual will interpret the situation as hopeless which produces very real and unfortunate consequences. Most tragic is the loss of belief in oneself to act.

As leaders we have the potential in every conversation to listen first, and then to create our responses, by communicating the safe context of:

- **You have value**
- **Your ideas are necessary for your success**
- **Every day is a new day**
- **We are committed to believing in you**

Young person who are not seen and heard learn they are not valued.

Young people must be respected, valued, consulted, included and enjoyed, as responsible, active learners, and capable of setting and achieving goals. As we give them the tools to think about their own situation, they are able to define themselves and grow, and make choices to take themselves forward.

8. Youth engagement requires equally shared power and exchange between leaders and youth.

Traditional service models nurture dependence because they act out of a power base, which takes the power of individual choice away from the person we are helping.

Changing the Starting Point:

- Focus on the integrity and current reality of the individual
- Assessment tools, personal history, assigned labels rooted in power and are therefore not a first act of engagement
- Trust develops in shared socialization that informs two people of who they are in relation to each other within prevailing social circumstances.

Effective engagement practice would act on the beliefs that:

- Acceptance of self is foundational to the feeling of safety necessary to risk new choices.
- The resulting opportunity for self-determination is key in the development of independence.
- Responsibility and accountability develop through actions chosen based on past learning, unobstructed by the intervention of imposed theoretical paradigms which become an end in themselves, rather than serving the individual's encounter with their own reality.

Adaptation is a human process

It is a human response to survive in any environment. To rebuild life in the community, adaptation to mainstream culture is necessary. How will young people respond when we offer them our belief in their own ability to find options and move forward?

Personal volition is rooted in independence

It is a key component of any young person who has learned to survive on his/her own, and it must be the starting point for our work.

- An environment of unconditional acceptance - the safety to make mistakes and learn.
- Consistent reinforcement that access to the mainstream economy is necessary for full participation in mainstream community.
- Leadership to think and plan, and to identify each personal step toward making necessary choices and change consistent with each youth's personal goals.
- Community people who listen and encourage, representing mainstream feedback and direction of focus as interpreters and sources of cultural information and cues.

Volitional self-determined choices are recognized, owned and acted upon by young people creating change in their lives.

Section C

Barriers to Youth Engagement

Despite a general consensus of the merit of engaging youth in the design and delivery of programs intended to serve them, there are many reasons this can be challenging and at times daunting. As we have described, homeless and at-risk youth have focused on their own survival, and have typically grown up without positive adult role models. They have specific needs that need to be met if we are committed to actively listening to them and involving them in decision-making processes.

Some of the barriers described by youth include:

- **Time:** A focus on meeting basic needs, money, food and shelter leaves little time or energy to contribute to the organizations with whom you're involved or your community;
- **Perception of limited skills:** Homeless and at-risk youth have limited experience feeling valued by their families or communities which results in an inevitable lack of confidence and self-esteem. Simply asking does not mean that a young person will feel able to participate in traditional decision-making processes.
- **A lack of belief that anything will change:** Rarely heard and accustomed to surviving outside of traditional structures of family, school and community, youth are cynical about their ability to have a meaningful impact on decision making in institutions that affect them - even when genuine efforts are made to engage them.
- **Readiness:** For many youth, the opportunity to think about opportunities and engage in decisions making is new. The process requires a cultural shift away from street culture, and for many youth the development of the capacity to engage and the trust required to do so.
- **Language and cultural barriers:** Simply put, cultural or language barriers will keep youth from engaging in the opportunities provided through youth serving organizations.
- **Lack of approval from peers:** Many youth will not engage in processes or organizations if peers disapprove because the support of peers within street culture is the so significant.

From the organizations stand point, the barriers to effectively engaging youth are equally layered:

- **Insufficient funding:** Given that we know homeless and at-risk youth are focused on basic survival, we should not be surprised if they are unable to engage without incentives. Organizations should expect that engagement will drop if they are unable to provide food, transportation, honoraria etc.
- **Meetings are too formal:** The forums developed to engage youth should be sensitive youth and their capacity to participate. Young people who have not

- had positive adult role models, or positive experiences of “adult” settings are unlikely to be able to engage in those settings.
- No safe space within an organization: If a young person feels that reprisals from the organization or other authorities are possible if their views are shared, then they are unlikely to do so.
 - Staff and volunteers are ill-prepared to engage youth: Even in organizations with trained and skilled youth workers and social workers the skills of active listening, negotiating, power-sharing, and being able to admit either your limitations or when you’re wrong are not always present. Without focused training and the development of an organizational culture reflecting a commitment to youth engagement, agencies will have limited success engaging youth effectively and consistently.
 - Staff and program resources: Supporting youth leadership skills and empowerment requires ongoing organizational support in the form of trained staff and volunteers to mentor and guide the work being designed and driven by youth. Organizations unable to provide ongoing adequate staff and program resources for this personal and professional support will have limited success in their youth engagement efforts.
 - The organization isn’t perceived to be youth-friendly: Unless you consciously work to make your organization a fun, friendly, casual and safe place for young people, and provide opportunities for youth to express themselves in non-traditional ways of their choosing (e.g. art, music, film) then you will be challenged to find youth who are willing to be engaged.
 - The organization does not offer a range of ways to be engaged: Many homeless youth have difficulty making long-term commitments because of their focus on day-to-day survival. If youth engagement is to succeed in our sector, it must be offered in a variety of ways - from short-term program development to longer-term peer leadership or governance roles. If multiple starting points for youth engagement are not available within an organization, the pool of youth able to access and benefit from those opportunities will be limited.

Section D

What initiates and sustains youth engagement?

Why would youth decide to become engaged? The Centre for Excellence in Engaging Youth (CEYE) developed a Youth Engagement Process Model (2003) which outlines factors that allow, invite or encourage youth engagement:

- I. Youth *want* to become engaged because:**
 - they have some sort of personal interest/passion/enjoyment in the task, activity or organization
 - they have a professional/personal development/benefit; they could put it on their resume, it would break down barriers to employment
 - they want to prevent boredom

- there is someone else who got them inspired or provided encouragement (e.g. family member, peers, role-model, youth friendly advocate) or event
- they are seeking social networks
- the environment is youth friendly, there is an offer of good food, they recognize that good people are already involved
- they want to make change; they are not satisfied with current state of affairs
- they want to have a voice or make a difference

2. Youth feel they *need* to become engaged because:

- they have a sense of obligation
- they have a sense of guilt
- they have a sense of responsibility
- it is within their value or belief system
- they have to prove something
- it is a norm/natural progression; everyone else may be doing it

3. Youth feel they *have* to become engaged because:

- a family initiated-parent/guardian signed them up
- their school initiated mandatory community involvement
- it is a post-secondary application requirement

Both Eva's Phoenix and the YMCA of Greater Toronto's Youth Outreach and Intervention participants were asked what engages them. Their responses were similar and outlined an experience that:

- taught them new skills, knowledge
- helped them with their life goals
- included things they were passionate about, writing, arts, sports
- allowed them to feel like they were giving back to the community
- gave them a feeling of value, confidence, respect, belongingness
- gave them a social network
- gave them an experience of making decisions, being part of creating a better service for others
- allowed them to see results

4. How can we encourage engagement in street involved/homeless youth?

In the CEYE study "Word on the Street" (2007) respondents indicated they would more likely become involved if there was an offer of a stipend or honorarium to get them to the first meeting. Other important factors included: having very youth friendly staff or staff who were youth themselves facilitating the process; allowing the youth to make decisions through an advisory board; and working with the confidence or the lack thereof of the youth themselves before inviting them to become involved.

They summarized that “If an organization was able to offer a stipend or honorarium to street involved youth for their participation in engagement activities they may have more success in recruiting and keeping the youth coming back and sustaining their engagement. This does not have to be money specifically that is given but could include food, items of need (i.e. toiletries, phone cards, and gift certificates), bus tickets or other items which indicate that the organization values the young person’s contribution and respects that street involved youth may have distinct needs.”

5. Once in the door, what do we do?

“Word on the Street” provided feed-back from street-involved youth on what they felt was critical:

- talk youth-friendly (without condescending)
- have a youth friendly environment, both in design and structure
- go where the youth go or create an environment where youth can go
- treat youth as equals: youth engagement is about both youth and organizations learning, sharing and growing
- include youth in decision-making processes: start a youth advisory board, support youth to join your board of directors (with mentors!)
- let their voice be heard: be an advocate for the youth in your organization
- teach youth new skills and learn from their new ideas and strategies
- have youth appropriate activities: not all young people who want to become engaged want to be ‘committee members’
- give the youth an incentive to participate: make sure youth know what they will get out of the experience (references, honorariums, meals etc)
- make the experience count/matter: ensure that the work of the young people is meaningful
- try to be lenient and liberal: be aware that with the gifts young people bring; so do new challenges
- build a good relationship based on trust: we can’t assume that we will trust on day one...don’t expect me to trust you immediately when you won’t leave me alone in an office without a staff person
- respect, listen, understand and communicate
- allow youth based projects to take place: provide ownership to the experience
- provide youth with funding for them to take part in positive experiences: encouraging meaningful youth engagement sometimes does cost a little, invest in youth
- provide youth with transportation to and from engagement opportunities
- no shady business
- have fun

Other responses from both the Eva's Phoenix and YMCA participants included:

- Let the first meeting be asking the young people how they like to become engaged
- Ask youth their opinion, show you care about the answer
- Be non-judgmental
- No rules, allow us to set our own guidelines and plan
- Let us have a voice
- Keep us informed
- Allow us to help solve the problems

6. Now that we have engaged them, how do we get them to keep coming back?

The CEYE's Youth Engagement Process Model outlines how to sustain youth engagement according to individual, organizational and community and societal factors.

Individual factors

- the youth enjoys the or has a personal interest or passion in the task, activity and/or organization
- the youth gets personal rewards or benefits
- the youth has a sense of responsibility/commitment/obligation
- there is a need for acceptance
- it fits in with their values or belief system
- the youth has supportive peers or family encouraging them to remain connected
- the youth is working towards a goal
- the social aspects

Organizational Factors

- the task or activity provides opportunities
- it is a youth friendly environment
- it is a supportive environment
- there are role models
- their accomplishments are recognized

Community and Societal Factors

- the task or activity allows the youth to make significant, sustainable changes in the community
- the youth recognizes that there are problems in society and community
- there is nothing else to do in one's community

Section E

How to engage youth effectively – promising practices

Ideas on types of youth engagement

It is important to determine the type and level of engagement you, your organization and your board can have youth involved in: policy development, program development, programming, service learning, peer leadership/mentorship.

Recently a Report on the Environmental Scan of Youth Engagement in Ontario was commissioned by the Public Health Agency of Canada and prepared by Charlotte Lombardo.

Examples from the report included:

- The AIDS Committee of Toronto's Peer Outreach Program, which engages youth volunteers in staffing information tables and co-facilitating HIV workshops
- Planned Parenthood of Ottawa's pilot peer education program, in which grade 11 and 12 high school students deliver sexual health education to grade 7, 8 and 9 students.
- East Metro Youth Services in Scarborough uses discussion circles as a way to invite young people into a sharing space, which breaks down power dynamics.
- Town Youth Participation Strategies advocates for designated youth places on an agency's board of directors, or if possible the creation of a parallel youth board.
- The Youth Service Bureau of Ottawa has created a unique advisory structure comprised of five different youth advisory teams: a rainbow youth advisory addressing issues of sexual diversity, a downtown youth advisory which centres on issues of homelessness, an education and advocacy advisory, a harm reduction youth advisory, and an ethno-cultural youth advisory. These various teams feed into the agency's programs, and meet on a regular basis with the board of directors to drive strategic planning and guide program implementation.
- A new youth-driven advisory model is an increasing popular model among city youth councils like the Toronto Youth Cabinet and the Mississauga Mayor's Youth Advisory Council. These councils form the official youth voice within local government.
- Superior Points in Thunder Bay achieved strong success with a team of dedicated peer outreach workers who were drawn directly from the population

of marginalized youth that the agency serves. Key to this success was the integration of the youth outreach workers directly into the service provision team of the agency. Engagement was seen as an entry to increased stabilization in the lives of “at-risk” young people, opening up links to services and opportunities.

- The Teen Health Centre’s Kids Alliance program, targets grade school youth at high risk for dropping out, and invites them to form a youth action group to identify and address issues in the school or community.
- Integrate part-time positions for youth into your agency and take the emphasis away from volunteerism. An interesting suggestion was the creation of job-sharing opportunities, particularly for marginalized youth, to “get the training that they need to be able to go into some kind of a field that would help people that have been where they’ve been...only a very few people are capable to do that because they were there”.
- Planned Parenthood of Waterloo Region and Planned Parenthood Ottawa both use peer education theatre to deliver messages of sexual health promotion. Both agencies discussed the role of peer theatre in delivering youth-driven messages in an entertaining format that helps to break down barriers addressing issues of sex and sexuality.
- Mixed Company Theatre based in Toronto uses a forum theatre process to create and deliver plays that are by and for youth on topics such as bullying and HIV/STIs. In the second half of Mixed Company productions audience members are invited to intervene in the situations represented, to stage their own responses and resolutions to the dramatized issues. Theatre has been identified as a key tool for examining universal themes such as oppressions, manipulations, and relationships in engaging ways.
- Sketch based in Toronto, uses a diversity of arts programming to engage street-involved youth. By centering risk in the activity of creating art, participants are invited into progressively deeper explorations and relationships with themselves and with others in the group, “it’s a risk to make something, but it’s way less risky than disclosing something really personal...but within that there’s communication, there is expression and exploration of those deeper issues...and it’s incredibly healing for all of us.”

Using Technology:

- The AIDS Committee of Toronto is currently in the process of creating a website for youth around HIV information and advocacy.
- The Toronto Youth Council and MYAC both rely heavily on discussion boards and list-serves to maintain their youth membership.

- The Toronto Youth Council is also currently in the process of starting up a newsletter.
- Several participants identified the online youth activist community TakingITGlobal as a good potential resource or partner for the use of communication technologies to support youth engagement.

Section F

Youth Engagement Examples – Eva’s, YMCA, Backdoor, McMan

- YMCA of Greater Toronto’s Youth Outreach and Intervention Programs have one over-seeing Youth Advisory Council that provides direction and leadership for the programs while obtaining transferable skills that can be put on their resumes. Youth members are made up of current and past clients at the youth shelter, the substance abuse program, the transitional housing program and the pre-employment training program.
- The YOI also runs a peer mentoring program in the middle and high school system that teaches senior students skills and knowledge around harm reduction, communicating and presenting, and drug and alcohol pharmacology and resources. These seniors then work with the juniors to disseminate the information, act as mentors and provide support and referrals when required.
- Offer a way to build a personal plan (contract step) to integrate into community.
- Commit to: “*We will continue to be here to believe in you until you believe in yourself*”.
- What’s in it for you? \$15 incentive per planned STEP ... plus pragmatic conversations with community cultural interpreters.
- Reinforce that they should be proud of the choices and steps they have already made.

The Back Door

The Back Door offers leadership to long-term street-dependent youth choosing to build their sustainable participation in mainstream economy and community. Providing a safe space outside of the downtown core which effectively functions as an integration environment, where participants and community members participate as equal players in the cross-cultural exchange which produces shared learning and trust.

The Back Door offers a *business planning approach*. The process is *self-determined*. Each person identifies their own starting points, their goals, and a step by step series of contracted choices to carry out personal plans. Community people provide mainstream perspectives and cultural cues about what it takes to make choices work to accomplish plans toward personal goals.

The Back Door is an *integration environment*. The cultural movement from street to non-street is defined by the "contracting" process between participants and community volunteers.

Each *contract step* builds toward a goal identified by the participant and developed as a step by step plan. Goals/Steps are identified as an aspect of life in which they would like to effect change.

- where they are today: (**starting point**) in terms of one of employment, housing, education, finances, drugs/alcohol, legal, planning issues, volunteering, planning, personal issues, leadership, or identification
- where they would like to be (**goal**)
- what steps the participant needs to take to achieve that goal (**plan**)

The participant writes the above on a Contracting Sheet. 'Negotiation' of each contract consists of a conversation between a participant and a non-street volunteer to understand mutual perspectives and to identify workable options. These conversations also model non-street behavior for the youth, and the volunteer serves as a cultural interpreter to help the participant understand his/her goals in non-street terms.

Each contract step concludes with a handshake and payment of \$15. The cash is an incentive to secure initial and ongoing participation through the 24-month process, and addresses tangible access to participation in the mainstream economy.

The outcomes are that 7 out of 10 who make changes and achieve stable housing, employment, a reliable process of problem solving life, and more importantly a change in attitudes towards mainstream society. The contract is uniquely successful in nurturing self-determination and independence.

The participant decides what step he or she needs to take. The incentive provides the participant with a reason to continue thinking about how to get off the street, transitioning motivation from extrinsic (about the money) to intrinsic (about my life).

Eva's Phoenix

Eva's Phoenix is a transitional housing and employment training facility for homeless and at-risk youth. At Eva's, L.O.V.E. brings together youth who have been victims or perpetrators of violence to educate and empower them. The underlying concept is that young people need to define violence for themselves before they can begin to

heal. The anti-violence program helps them do this through the arts based programming. By capturing what violence means to them on paper and on film, young people achieve the self-awareness necessary to make positive life changes. There are also leadership workshops that teach youth about conflict resolution, group dynamics and effective communication - skills young people need to keep safe and reduce violence in their lives. At Eva's Phoenix, youth participate voluntarily, decide what arts forms that they would like to use and how the budget for the program is to be used.

Eva's Phoenix has two other significant examples of youth engagement: the Peer Mentorship Program and the Governance Committee. The Peer Mentorship Program is a way for graduates of Eva's Phoenix and other interested youth to contribute directly to the development of their peers and the Phoenix community, while further developing their leadership skills. Peer mentors are provided with training in leadership skills, conflict management, meeting management etc. and then define how they want to be involved to support the youth in the community. Young people have led a variety of workshops and trainings such as: art classes, cooking workshops, discussion groups on topics of interest, a breakfast club and orientation for new residents. Peer Mentors are paid a honouraria of approximately \$20 for 3 hours of work.

The Governance Committee is made up of 10 residents of Eva's Phoenix, one front line staff and one program manager. They meet monthly to discuss new program ideas as well as to identify and resolve any issues in the Phoenix community. The Committee is in the process of reviewing all of Phoenix's policies and procedures and making recommendations for improvements and changes where necessary. The Committee has a meaningful role in how the community functions and their work is directed by the young people who participate.

Section G

Other Youth Engagement Resources

For a vast number of resources in this field, check out the Canadian Centre for Excellence in Youth Engagement's Web site at:

<http://www.engagementcentre.ca/index.php>.

Involve Youth 2 – A Guide to Meaningful Youth Engagement – City of Toronto
(<http://www.toronto.ca/involveyouth/youth2.htm>)

An Emerging Model for Working with Youth and other reports of the Funders Collaborative on Youth Organizing

(http://www.fcyo.org/attachments/Papers_nol_v4.qxd.pdf)

Laidlaw Foundation Resource Links on Youth Engagement

(<http://laidlawfdn.org/cms/page1423.cfm>)

Youth Engagement in Canada, The Meal Exchange

www.mealexchange.com/index.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_download&gid=49

National Youth in Care Network (<http://www.youthincare.ca/>)