

Youth involvement in JOHAP partner responses to HIV and AIDS

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The Joint Oxfam HIV and AIDS Program (JOHAP) in South Africa seeks to strengthen the civil society response to HIV and AIDS through supporting integrated community-based services for HIV prevention and care, including a focus on gender.



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The various case studies presented in this series were written by different people. As much as possible we have tried to maintain their style of writing to preserve authenticity and accuracy.

This document is one of a number of publications highlighting learning during the third phase of JOHAP (July 2006–June 2008). If you wish to view these visit; http://www.oxfam.org.au/world/africa/south_africa/articles.html

One of JOHAP’s strategies to strengthen the quality of the civil society response to HIV and AIDS is to strengthen partner organisation’s capacity to document and share their work. This case study and others in the series are a result of some of this work.

Front cover: Aleck Tivani riding his bike, a common means of transport in the area. Photo: Gcina Ndwalande/OxfamAus.
Left: Ashens Malati (aged 16, grade 9) during a lesson on discrimination, and HIV status disclosure. Photo: Gcina Ndwalande/OxfamAus.

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1. Introduction

The Joint Oxfam HIV and AIDS Program (JOHAP) works through partner organisations to achieve change in people's lives rather than through the direct implementation of projects. Partners range in size, scope and influence. A range of partners work specifically with young people as their primary beneficiary group. The ways they involve young people in their work varies as does the success and sustainability of engagement.

In order to understand better and to share successes and challenges of engaging young people in HIV and AIDS related work, JOHAP implemented a case study process. This involved documenting and sharing the ways in which four partner organisations have engaged young people from their communities in their HIV and AIDS work.

The study focuses on the work of the following partner organisations:

- KwaZulu-Natal Progressive Primary Health Care based in KwaZulu-Natal
- Lamontville AIDS Service Centre based in KwaZulu-Natal
- Targeted AIDS Interventions based in KwaZulu-Natal
- Moletsi Community Radio Station based in Limpopo.

Note: This report makes use of the United Nations definition of young people as being those between the ages of 15 and 24.



Left: Limpopo: Grade 9 students during a class on sexually-transmitted infections. Photo: Gcina Ndwane/OxfamAus.

Right: Kwazulu-Natal: Local youth listening to HIV and AIDS information. Photo: Matthew Willman/OxfamAus.



2. Conceptual overview

Organisations working with HIV and AIDS are showing a growing appreciation of the importance of involving young people in projects. As competent members of the community, their participation as full and active partners in program design, decisions, implementation, monitoring and evaluation is valued and sought.

There has been a move away from employing a problem-based approach when working with young people. Such an approach focuses on protecting young people from the risks to which they are exposed, while the preferred approach is concerned with building on their competencies and positive characteristics. The change is partly due to an appreciation of the benefits of youth involvement for both the organisation and the young people served. In addition, it has been recognised that this rights-based approach emphasises the participation of young people as a human right and as an end itself.



3. What is involvement?

The terms youth involvement or youth participation, which are used interchangeably, have a variety of meanings in different contexts. However, the concept generally refers to youth partaking in and influencing processes, decisions and activities.

The involvement of young people should not be an option that can be withheld and it cannot be an additional part of a process. It is a right for all young people and something that needs to be invited and encouraged rather than coerced and manipulated. Although the level of involvement tends to vary according to their developing capacities, young people are usually most engaged in areas that matter to them.

Young people at school in KwaZulu-Natal in a play-acting session on HIV and health issues. Photo: Matthew Willman/OxfamAus.

4. Benefits of youth involvement

An organisation may benefit from improved program outcomes as a result of:

- new ideas and different ways of doing things;
- information about youth needs and interests leading to better decision-making;
- feedback about the effectiveness of existing services to youth;
- peer-to-peer outreach efforts;
- shared responsibility resulting in increased availability of human resources;
- a higher degree of acceptance of messages, services and decisions because young people help shape them;
- synergy from the energy and enthusiasm of young people and the professional skills and experience of adults; and
- greater credibility of the organisation with young people and others.

Young people participating in organisations may benefit by:

- improved status in the community;
- development of competencies and self-esteem;
- improved skills and experience as leaders;
- increased knowledge and understanding of other cultures;
- improved self-discipline and time management;
- increased career choices; and
- appreciation of the roles of adults.



Students at a primary school in KwaZulu-Natal where HIV and AIDS prevention activities are supported.
Photo: Matthew Willman/OxfamAus.

5. Motivations for youth involvement

For youth involvement to be effective and sustainable there should be a widespread understanding of its intrinsic value. Various aspects should be considered in this regard.

Participation is a human right and an end in itself.

Young people have a right to dignity and respect, a right to have a voice and to influence matters affecting them. Participation matters for its own sake, regardless of other benefits. The

Convention on the Rights of the Child places an obligation on ratifying countries to respect and protect the right of children and young people to participate in their laws, policies and practices.

Participation is critical to self-development, learning and life-skills.

Young people develop their knowledge, skills, competencies and confidence through an ongoing process of action, reflection and adaptation. The more they participate in meaningful interaction, the more experienced and effective they

become. This empowers them to be more meaningfully involved. This positively self-reinforcing process contributes to psychological and social wellbeing. Young people who have been involved in participatory processes where their voice is heard, their opinions are valued and they can assert their will are better equipped to deal with threatening or unfair situations. They will be able to cope creatively, seek advice or leave a harmful situation.

Participation builds effectiveness and sustainability.

When young people are involved in creating and managing projects and programs they have a sense of ownership. This encourages the contribution of ideas and actions, which influences the success of the project or program.

Many young people want to participate.

The desire to make a difference, be included and be involved has been asserted by youth in many contexts, including key international conferences. Young people insist, however, that the role be meaningful.

Youth involvement is integral to the democratic ethos and strengthens society.

When young people see that their own ideas and actions produce positive change, they often feel a sense of self-worth, connection and civic responsibility and are prepared to participate in democratic processes.

6. Obstacles to involving young people

There is a widespread desire to involve young people in projects, but there are obstacles that can make the process a challenging one. Many of these can be overcome by making changes in program design and through training. The primary concerns are:

- Involving yong people in decision-making goes against traditional and professional practices.
- Additional costs may be incurred for training, supervision and transport.
- Young people at school or work cannot participate during regular working hours.
- The inevitably high turnover of young people as they grow older and pursue other interests or income opportunities.

Mahlasti Sekhula (aged 6) and his sister Tezney Sekhula (aged 1) live in a household headed by their sister Yvonne.
Photo: Gcina Ndwane/OxfamAus.



7. Case studies

In order to document and share the ways in which four partner organisations engaged youth from their communities in their HIV and AIDS work, consideration is given here to the organisations.

KwaZulu-Natal Progressive Primary Health Care (KZNPPHC)

The programs run by the KZNPPHC include:

- a community health workers program;
- capacity-building of community-based organisations;
- a program which focuses on training hostel residents as HIV and AIDS peer educators;
- a skills development program; and
- an integrated development and HIV and AIDS prevention and awareness project.

The last project listed aims to create awareness and promote HIV and AIDS prevention in six areas of Sisonke District: Hlokozi, Jolivet, Mashakeni, Stepmore, Mqatsheni and Lotheni. The project creates opportunities for youth development in the district through life skills education and the formation of social groups. The opportunity for young people to explore their talents for self-development is part of the project package which includes:

- life skills and HIV and AIDS peer education;

- facilitation of the formation of social clubs;
- facilitation of co-operatives formation;
- life orientation for schools in sexuality and reproductive health;
- education and awareness through sport tournaments and recreation;
- abstinence by choice campaign; and
- training on gender issues.

Lamontville HIV and AIDS Support Centre (LASC)

LASC was established in 1996 to empower youth to deal with HIV and AIDS, sexually-transmitted infections prevention, gender issues and socio-economic development issues through training, workshops and community outreach campaigns.

LASC undertakes to raise awareness in schools, churches, taverns and shebeens and conducts peer training and education, public campaigns, peer counselling, condom demonstrations and distribution, and hosts an information centre.

About 40% of Lamontville residents live in formal housing, while the remainder live in informal settlements and hostel dwellings on the outskirts of the township in the southern part of Durban. There has been an increase in the number of informal

settlements in the area in the last few years and young people from dwellings in these settlements are very vulnerable. There is a high level of unemployment and it is estimated that 32% of young people are no longer at school are unemployed. There are also a number of orphans living with unemployed relatives in the crowded conditions.

The LASC was formed by young people with some technical assistance from other organisations. Ten years down the line, three-quarters of the programs still focus on youth development initiatives and consultation with young people has become their core organisational culture. Young people drive most annual general and strategic planning meetings with help from adults. LASC's policies emphasise how important it is to involve young people in decision-making, planning and monitoring of programs.



Moletsi Community Radio Station (MRCS)

MCRS reaches an estimated 300,000 listeners in a radius of 60km from Moletsi village which is 25km from the city of Polokwane in Limpopo. It serves a mainly rural community which consists of about 30% employed as farm workers, 20% middle class residents and 50% of people who are unemployed. A total of 70% of the listeners are young people, with 80% of these being young women. Teenage pregnancy constitutes 80% of the birthrate within the community. The radio station broadcasts programs that deal with development, economic, health and religious issues, 17 hours a day, seven days a week. Twelve of the 14 staff members at MCRS are aged under 35 years.

The radio station has pioneered an innovative program in collaboration with six taxi associations. The station produces an audio cassette with music that appeals to different ages. The cassette, which is played in the taxis, has messages that encourage openness about sexual matters, provide information about HIV and AIDS prevention and encourage people living with HIV and AIDS to live openly and positively.

The station also conducts school-based education and awareness campaigns. Presentations given to schools are recorded and aired on radio every Wednesday so that common issues raised in the schools can be shared.

Targeted AIDS Interventions (TAI)

TAI started implementing social development projects in communities

throughout South Africa in 1995. The organisation offers services and training in HIV and AIDS education, home-based care, counselling and peer education. The services and training are delivered through a number of projects including the Shoshaloza Aids Project which is funded by JOHAP. TAI focuses on men as positive agents of change within their communities, and the positive effect of these changes on women in the community. TAI believes that young men need to be provided with skills to become positive agents of change.

The Shosholoza project helps boys aged between 15 and 20 years to form soccer teams that compete in a league. The soccer team members are trained as peer educators and they develop plans to reach out to their peers, families and communities using verbal methods such as edutainment and discussions. They are trained in HIV prevention, including the provision of correct information, prevention options such as abstinence and condom use and through personalising the risk. Caring for and supporting people infected with or affected by HIV is encouraged as a means of AIDS mitigation. Sexuality is portrayed positively and correct information is provided regarding sexuality and puberty. Positive masculinity, especially relating to gender issues is emphasised.

*Grade 9 students of Maphokwanw High School receive an AIDS awareness magazine.
Photo: Gcina Ndwane/OxfamAus.*

8. Youth involvement in practice

Different organisations have various methods of involving young people in projects and processes. These often include incorporating them into project proposal writing and evaluation processes. MCRS offers young people the opportunity to do presentations on the successes of a project, the challenges faced and the lessons learned during the process. The adults aim to assist the young people to make changes and to develop skills that help them through the project process. LASC gives each volunteer the opportunity to spend a week in the office where they are trained in the use of the photocopier, fax machine and computer.

Young people can and should be involved in project design, implementation and evaluation. TAI Executive Director Gethwana Makhayne said: “The context in which we work changes all the time so we need to be flexible. We have small committees [of] decision-makers. We have planning and review meetings to check what works and what doesn't work and how we can improve. Before we start the next budget cycle, we have meetings with youth where they can participate in formulating the objectives and activities that become part of the proposal. When donors come, we ask them to talk directly to the youth and we tell the youth to speak openly and honesty because it is a process for us

Involvement

to grow. This is another way in which youth are involved in monitoring and evaluation.”

Youth volunteers are often the most obvious candidates for permanent positions that become available. Gugu Kleinbooi described how she started as a volunteer for PPHC after having completed a diploma in human resources but being unable to find employment. As a volunteer she worked full-time in the office and did administration on the computer in return for 40 Rand (AUD \$7) a day for travel expenses.

“One day a program manager needed somebody to accompany her into the field to do some training so I went with her. She was very pleased with the way I helped her. She asked if I could do training. Training had been part of my human resources diploma course, so I said ‘yes’.”

Gugu said she was introduced to various concepts through working together with the staff member. “She was doing training on the formation of community-based organisations. I listened to her over and over again until I understood completely. One day she threw me in the deep end.” The staff member was not feeling well and asked Gugu to conduct the training. Gugu was subsequently tasked with conducting regular training herself.

“At that stage I was still a volunteer. I facilitated community meetings, workshops and seminars and wrote reports for

funders. I learned to handle things in different situations because every meeting is different. I learned the protocols of addressing traditional leaders and the dress code and behaviour expected by the communities in which we worked. We started writing proposals together and I learned what a proposal is all about.”

Gugu found it very challenging to work in hostels because men would harass her particularly with regard to issues such as using a condom. “I got very angry and said I would not go back there. My mentor said that I shouldn't take it personally. It's the way they are and the environment they are in that makes them so rude and arrogant. I learned to understand why they behaved like that, to accept them and to handle the situation. Now I am working in all nine hostels.”

After more than a year, Gugu resigned to find employment that included a medical aid benefit. However, while looking for a job, she was contacted by the organisation where she had been a volunteer and asked to apply for a post that had become available at the organisation. “There were five candidates, but because of my previous experience with the organisation, I got the job. I worked in the office as a project administrator for all the projects and



programs. After two years I was promoted to a project coordinator and started to work with youth. I was very pleased to be working with people who face the same problems as I do. I had a platform to express my opinions, my views and my beliefs and seek strategies of how best to face these challenges.”

Gugu said she had learned a lot from the young people and they had learned a lot from her. “So many people say that I am their role model. I tell them the story of how I started as a volunteer and now I am employed. If I did it, they can do it. Maybe they can do better than I did,” she said.

Gaetane le Grange, now Co-director of TAI describes some of the challenges that may arise during attempts to involve young people in HIV and AIDS projects. When she was 25, Gaetane was the youngest person on the board of a funding organisation. “I had to fight so many battles and I was personally attacked because I kept saying that we are designing these programs for orphans and vulnerable children involving a huge sum of money and there is not a single young person in this room. I was always told that young people cannot participate at this level. I’m not sure what level that is supposed to be...If we want to talk about the meaningful participation of young people we have to adopt an attitude of ‘we don’t know better’.”

She said that the only way that any sort of project can be successful is for project facilitators to learn to listen to young people and hear what their issues are. “It is intimidating for a young person to come in and participate on an equal footing with people who have been doing this for a long time and are well educated, but it’s up to us to make it possible for young people to express their opinions and make a valuable contribution.”

*A young child in Phalaborwa, Limpopo, receiving care from a JOHAP-supported partner organisation.
Photo: Gcina Ndwalande/OxfamAus.*

Young people need to be consulted regarding many aspects including, for example, what issues they regard as important. Gaetame said: “Adults come in with this preconceived notion that they understand what the problem is and they know how to fix it. And there’s very little consultation with young people to ask them: ‘how do you think we can fix it?’ because the assumption is they don’t know.”

Gaetane said she was criticised for encouraging youth participation. As the youngest person on the board she found it difficult for people to take her seriously. She said that it appeared other board members regarded her as less experienced and as a result they knew better. She said it was emotionally draining to see that her ideas, which had been disregarded initially, were adopted in subsequent board meetings.

An 18-year-old youth volunteer, Ntokozo Khurwago, who is still at school said that prior to his involvement as a volunteer he would compete with friends regarding the number of partners they had with each one having to get one new partner a week. “If that couldn’t happen, we would say he was a fool,” he said.

He subsequently moved to another area and got involved with another group of boys. “I ended up wooing anything that wore a skirt. I divided my partners into two; those that were for ‘exercising’, whom I didn’t want to be seen with, and those that I would take to the soccer field when there was a game.

The latter made the boys go mad because they were beautiful,” he said. In the school holidays he worked as a truck conductor and would ask women for sex in return for giving them a lift in the truck.

Ntokozo was subsequently introduced to the TAI Shosholoza project and asked to attend a course to educate soccer players about HIV and AIDS. “After I attended that course, my life completely changed. I found myself not wooing women. After the course I left all my partners except one and this one was attending virginity testing. Since joining this project I feel like I am born again.”

Among the activities that TAI included in its programs, and found successful, was one that required each child to be given a bag and some rocks. For each thing that the children could think of that makes a child vulnerable, the participants put a rock into the bag. In between adding the rocks, the children play soccer with a bag of rocks on their backs. The activity helps the children to realise the daily impact of vulnerabilities on the lives of children.

TAI also assists youth participants to act as ‘big brothers’ to orphans and vulnerable children. In this way they provide care and support to others.

With their focus on soccer, TAI creates awareness among young people by comparing a person’s journey of life on earth to the life of a soccer player in the playing field. They consider what a soccer

player needs to function at his best and achieve his dreams and what elements can make a soccer player unsuccessful such as alcohol and drugs. The comparison is then drawn to children who face challenges in their daily lives.

Administrative support for youth programs is critical and may include training to provide youth participants with information and support to enable them to develop their own plans. TAI said the role of the adults in the process is to “maintain momentum”, encourage participants to prevent the project from coming to a premature end, and to provide funding.

“We have an income generation project for our soccer players and the children for whom they are caring for,” Gaetane le Grange said. “Three soccer boys and 12 kids form a team. We’ve allocated 2,000 Rand (AUD \$350) to each team. It’s up to them to decide what they are going to do for income generation. We are not prescriptive. If we get the proposal and it looks a bit dodgy, we will rather help them refine it.”

In order to assist young people to understand the purpose of projects, one organisation uses the KAMSE behaviour change model. According to this model, 'K' stands for knowledge, 'A' for attitudes and values, 'M' for motivation, 'S' for skills and 'E' for enabling environment. “So I say to them that they need to think how to change boys from not caring for orphans and vulnerable children to being proactive and meaningfully caring for such children,” Gaetane said. In order to do this, one needs to consider their knowledge and attitudes. “Do they know how to engage with young children? What are their attitudes? Perhaps culturally they were told they are not supposed to. How do you change that attitude?” Gaetane said that she takes the youth participants through a behaviour change process and then encourages them to repeat the process with other young people in order to get them involved.

TAI includes an ongoing mentoring system which sees a facilitator meeting with all the participants on a regular basis. “We have a monthly theme and we go beyond imparting knowledge to attempting to change attitudes,” Gaetane said. “We have discussions and role-plays and we draw pictures and use various methods to help them to see the issue from a different perspective. Some of this is addressed in an initial workshop, but most happens throughout the year. It’s something that you can’t just blaze in and change.”

Mduduzi Phehle, past LASC Director said LACS considered ways in which young people could be engaged in the decision-making structures to ensure their meaningful participation and developed a tangible methodology to mobilise young people from the community to serve on all the subcommittees of the organisation. In addition, young people were appointed to chair two of the committees. “Every decision in these subcommittees is made and implemented by the youth themselves. They are the ones that drive the whole initiative, while being monitored and supervised by our centre. When they encounter any problems or difficulties, we believe very are capable of coming up with solutions themselves, but we support them with technical assistance. When we evaluate programs or design new programs they actively participate in that,” Mduduzi said.

MCRS developed a positive activity through involving taxi associations. This focused on taxi drivers who are often young people, and also targeted the passengers. “We wrote a letter to all taxi associations and offered to provide audiotapes with music appealing to all age groups. The tapes included messages relating to HIV and AIDS, as well as other health messages,” MCRS Manager Nare Poopedi said.

A joint celebration of World AIDS Day was a particularly successful project for PPHC in terms of the number of community



members that attended the celebrations. Youth participants in the project and people from the wider community were involved and local leaders and school educators attended even though the schools were closed for the holidays. As a result of this event, the community took the youth participants more seriously because they discovered that adults worked with them. They even began to talk about the boys’ activities to other adults.

*Young people at school in Limpopo, such as Mahlatse Malatji (aged 15), participating in HIV and AIDS prevention classes.
Photo: Gcina Ndwane/OxfamAus.*

9. Lessons learned

Recognise the benefits of volunteers.

One advantage of using youth volunteers is that it is more cost-effective than employing staff members. While one staff member can reach only a certain number of beneficiaries, many volunteers can reach a far larger number of people with the same information. In addition, as volunteers live and work at a grassroots level all the time, the program is often more effective because information is being taken to the people instead of relying on people coming to a central place.

Organisations find that volunteers are often passionate about being agents of change, and are better equipped to speak to their peers than an adult would be. “Young people can be reluctant to ask questions or exchange ideas with adults,” LASC Support Group Coordinator Queen Mdoi said.

In addition, as volunteers operate on a grassroots level within the community they can provide feedback from the community and can easily be asked to conduct surveys as part of monitoring and evaluation processes.

LASC’s experience is that because so many young people are unemployed and want jobs, they are keen to volunteer and get the work done.

Thandeka Ntuli, PPHC Board Member and Acting Director said, “Volunteer work for an NGO (non-government organisation) is also often a good opportunity for youth who are not sure of their career path as it often gives them a chance to explore different kinds of work. In addition to full-time volunteer opportunities, NGOs can also offer students part-time work during the [school] holidays or at times when staff members are taking leave. This is beneficial to the students who can get the experience as well some income and assists NGOs that may be understaffed.”

Evaluate volunteers, their experience and what they have to offer.

While this may be time consuming, organisations that work with young people may give volunteers insufficient mentoring or coaching and may simply not realise the benefit that the volunteers could provide to the organisation.

Travis Mayo, a 24-year-old Peace Corp volunteer joined an organisation at a very busy time when a number of reports were due. Although he had some academic and practical experience, he said that the NGO did not ask what he could offer them. He believes that he had quite a lot of knowledge about various aspects of business and management that could have been of benefit to the organisation. “But at this point I’m very much at the lowest rung on the ladder of decision-making,” he said. He suggested doing an evaluation of

volunteers and assessing what they have to offer and their previous experience. He also suggested doing a more intensive orientation and training.

Encourage volunteers in whatever way possible including showing appreciation.

Volunteers are most often unemployed because of the socio-economic conditions in the area where the projects operate. “They tend to get demoralised because there are no incentives to motivate their participation,” according to LASC Board Chairperson Sivanda Mkhulisi. LASC holds a party once or twice a year in appreciation of the work of volunteers and gives them certificates indicating their involvement. Travis Mayo said that his organisation held birthday parties for the volunteers and included them in staff lunches and outings, treating them like full-time employees.

“Many youth who volunteer do so in the hope that they will eventually be employed by the centre. If, after a couple of years of voluntary service, there is still no prospect of employment, some of them become discouraged,” said Mduduzi Phehle.

It is also encouraging for volunteers to be included in training courses or workshops intended for staff members. Personal training and mentoring can also help to find the right roles for volunteers who lack experience.

Volunteers can also be asked to accompany staff members almost like an apprentice. This gives them the opportunity to participate and observe what staff do and how projects and activities are carried out. This does not involve additional resources and requires minimal time of the staff members concerned. This practice is largely concerned with an 'action learning' approach.

Volunteers who have skills can also be used for ad hoc activities rather than hiring someone external. Such activities may include transcribing focus group recordings and doing field work for basic surveys. Where there is a budget for such activities, volunteers can be paid for performing the tasks.

Volunteer peer educators may also be motivated by the increased recognition and status that they receive within the community. This can encourage them to continue with the volunteer work or become peer educators. This recognition comes from their families, communities, peers and from outsiders, such as donors visiting a project in order to do an evaluation.

Youth participation often requires work with adults.
Thandeka Ntuli of PPHC found that problems relating to youth participation can be caused by the adults operating in the same environment. “You can give youth certain skills but the process will never be

successful unless you work with the adults operating in the same environment.” PPHC experienced difficulty with some educators in schools because the way they approach young people is different to the way adults would usually approach students to talk about HIV and AIDS issues. PPHC Project Coordinator Musa Ndlovu suggested that educators may also need to be trained in order to understand the methods used.

Adults working with young people also need to learn to delegate and to trust the young people to fix a problem, rather than tell them how to fix it, according to MCRS. Although this requires a mindset change for the adults, it is also a change for the young people involved in a project. However, MCRS found that the benefit of this approach was the vitality and energy generated by young people finding their own solutions.

Working with young people requires creativity from everyone involved in projects, according to MCRS presenter Ronny Lesudi. Contributions and involvement need to come from both the adults and the youth involved in the projects.

However, organisations find that the confidence of adults to encourage youth participation develops with time especially if a step-by-step process is followed. Gaetane le Grange suggested that if the board of an organisation wants to involve

the young people within three to four years, the process can be implemented gradually. In the first year, young people can observe and be mentored by the existing board members. They should be given the opportunity to discuss processes and activities after the meetings so that they do not feel intimidated asking questions in front of the entire board. Older board members should also be reminded of the need to encourage youth participants.

Adults may also need encouragement to work with young people involved in projects. Young people participating in this study said that adults have more experience than the youth. “They have been through the stages we are now going through so they can inform us and show us how to deal with the problems we are experiencing,” MCRS peer educator Angy Kola said. Another MCRS peer educator, Daniel Mothoa, said: “Adults can act as mentors to youth and advise them about matters that are beyond their comprehension. They can deal with things that are too difficult or sensitive for youth.”

The different community forums provide great opportunities for adults to encourage young people to participate at every level in order to have maximum impact.

Make allowances for volunteer turnover.
Although it is challenging to recruit, train, motivate and evaluate a new group of volunteers, it should be seen as a success if youth volunteers become employed or get scholarships to study.



Unfortunately, however, there are volunteers who become pregnant or start using alcohol or drugs, for example, despite having been exposed to messages of abstinence and the use of condoms and having been seen as role models or mentors. It is a challenge to try to ensure that such peer educators or volunteers continue to practise what they are taught even some years down the line. Some monitoring is required in this regard as peer educators who do not 'walk the talk' can be negative influences in the community in which they operate.

Anticipate some of the challenges of working with young people.
Many young people are at school during the week when training sessions are often held and they may have extensive demands such as writing tests and participating in sporting teams.

They may also be approached by different organisations asking for their involvement.

Organisations running projects may be under pressure due to their commitments to funders and this may be a foreign concept to the young people involved in the project.

Young people work better when they feel that they are trusted, according to Musa Ndlovu of PPHC. “It is very difficult to engage young people because from a young age they've been taught not to talk back to their elders and other things like that,” she said. “So if they disagree with something that an older person is saying the chances are that they are just going to shut up anyway. So we need to build that into young people, that it's okay to disagree with somebody, even if they are a lot older than you, and that the opinions of young people do have value.”

Young people may also be afraid of conflict. One former volunteer felt that she was held back by the fear that people would be cross with her and would not like her anymore. She suggested that young people need to learn how to deal with older people who have certain ways of thinking.

Young people often need lots of encouragement, particularly if they have not completed their schooling and are unemployed. They may feel that they are worthless and as a result need lots of motivation and need adults to show that they believe in the young people.

Projects involving young people need to include activities that they enjoy and find fun such as competitions.

*Grade 9 students from Limpopo during an AIDS awareness session.
Photo: Gcina Ndwalande/OxfamAus.*

Conclusion

It is critical that young people learn skills and become involved in the activities of organisations working in the field of HIV and AIDS, among others. The opportunities for young people to become volunteers in projects do exist and should be encouraged. Young people certainly do learn better from other young people than from adults, and this is especially important for organisations trying to spread messages relating to HIV and AIDS.



Students in KwaZulu-Natal during a discussion on HIV and health issues.
Photo: Matthew Willman/OxfamAus.

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Acknowledgements and references

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Resources: organisations and web sites

YouthNet

Youth involvement is a cross-cutting theme for YouthNet's work, which is reflected in many of the publications and throughout the Web site. <http://www.fhi.org/youthnet>

African Youth Alliance

This program which is founded on a youth participation strategy through the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), PATH, and Pathfinder International operates in Botswana, Ghana, Tanzania, and Uganda. It is concerned with HIV prevention and adolescent reproductive health. <http://www.ayaonline.org>

At the Table: Youth Voices in Decision-Making

The clearinghouse has information on youth participation, engagement and empowerment. A variety of tools, documents, research, and links are available, as well as profiles of successful youth-adult partnerships and youth-serving organisations. <http://www.attthetable.org>

Carnegie Young People Initiative

This organisation promotes youth participation in decision-making. It provides reports from a variety of countries on youth participation in public decision-making. http://www.carnegieuktrust.org.uk/young_people

Children, Youth and Families Education and Research Network (CYFERNet)

Type "youth participation" in the search box on the CYFERNet site to find useful resources. <http://www.cyfernet.org>

FreeChild Project

This comprehensive web site provides resources for social change by and for young people, including useful tools on working with adults as allies and an excellent bibliography of youth involvement resources. <http://www.freechild.org>

GTZ

GTZ, a German donor, supports the Innovative Approaches in Reproductive Health project which focuses on approaches, measures and experience from work with youth and refugees. <http://www.gtz.de/youth/english/index.html>

International Youth Foundation (IYF)

IYF works with hundreds of companies, foundations, and civil society organisations to strengthen and scale up existing programs. The web site provides background on projects and useful documents on youth participation and youth development. <http://www.iyfn.net>

Contact details

The JOHAP program currently operates in two provinces; Limpopo and KwaZulu-Natal.



Right: Young children in Limpopo who receive care from a JOHAP partner organisation.
Photo: Gcina Ndwalane/OxfamAus.

Back cover: Children of Maganas Primary School on a break from a lesson organised by the YMCA Amamzintoti on community development, HIV and AIDS and health issues.
Photo: Matthew Willman/OxfamAus.

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