

Asset #8: Young people are given useful roles in the community.

THE IMPORTANCE OF YOUTH AS RESOURCES

People of all ages need to feel that they can make a contribution and play a meaningful role in their community, whether it's at home, at school, or in the neighborhood. Research shows that youth who feel valued and useful have higher self-esteem, a greater sense of personal control, reduced delinquency, greater social and personal responsibility, reduced substance abuse, and better social skills.

This asset for the month of February focuses on including youth in decisions that affect them and creating participation and leadership opportunities where their contribution can make a difference. The following discussion topics can help young people recognize opportunities to serve as resources.

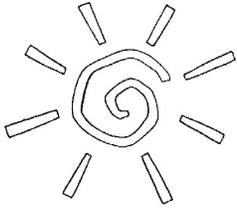
- What would you like to share with adults about your experience in your home, school, neighborhood or faith community?
- Who are some adults that you could talk to about making positive changes?
- How will you know when these changes happen?
- How would you like to be recognized for your contribution?

Keep in mind that serving as a resource doesn't have to be a large effort. Adults can help youth serve as resources simply by asking them to share their opinions, skills or knowledge, such as how to play a game or use technology such as text messaging.

Remember!

It's important that young people's efforts be recognized and celebrated!

Be sure to create opportunities to show that you value each individual's unique contributions.



ACTIVITIES

FOR FAMILIES

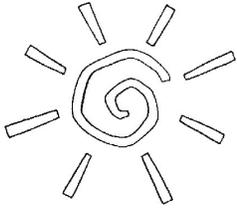
- Hold family meetings. For example, one meeting can focus on discussing which kinds of tasks each household member is best at and enjoys the most. Then, review everyone's current chores and make changes based on each other's skills and interests.
- Involve children in planning events such as holiday celebrations or trips. For family events, young people can help plan menus and cook, or plan games and activities for younger children; for vacations, they can research destinations and activities.
- Ask children what they do or don't like about their daily routines, and find ways to improve them.

FOR ALL ADULTS

- Ask a young person to teach you something new—a game, a hobby, a computer skill, etc.—or to share their favorite music or YouTube videos with you. It's empowering to be able to introduce adults something that they don't already know.
- Ask a young person for advice on solving a challenge or completing a task. You'd be surprised at the quality of suggestions you receive.
- Be sure to notice young people's contributions and talents in every aspect of their lives.
- Help a young person find age-appropriate opportunities to serve as resources in their community. For example, many cities and towns have a youth advisory committee or other group of young people who provide input regarding issues affecting youth.

FOR ADULTS WHO WORK DIRECTLY WITH YOUTH

- Does your organization allow young people to sit on boards and committees that affect its mission and programs? Including youth input at the highest levels not only creates valuable opportunities for young people but also helps your organization ensure that it's in touch with the needs and desires of the youth you serve.
- Be sure to create opportunities for all youth to feel like valuable resources. For example, a county sheriff's office found that youth with low grades wanted to volunteer in the community as much as better students, but the community rarely asked those underachieving students to contribute. All young people deserve the opportunity to feel that their opinions and contributions are valued.



AT SCHOOL OR IN YOUTH PROGRAMS

- Create leadership and contribution opportunities in your classroom or programs. Groups such as student council, playground peace monitors, traffic safety patrol, and others are great ways for young people to feel like their contributions are valued, especially if they have some responsibility in making decisions for the group. In younger grades, classroom responsibilities like line leader help students feel like their contributions make a difference to the class. Middle and high school students can even help interview new staff and participate in school improvement teams.
- Invite students to share their opinions and suggestions about activities, and incorporate their suggestions in the future. Give young people choices about which activities they take part in.
- Encourage young people to write letters to the editor, to companies, or elected officials to share ideas or express opinions. Help them develop and share constructive suggestions to address their concerns.

**This article was provided courtesy of Project Cornerstone.
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