

PDP Communiqué

The Power of Youth

Eugene J. Monaco, Executive Director and Public Service Professor,
Professional Development Program

Recognizing and addressing the needs of youth has gained considerable attention over the past decade both globally as well as in the United States and for very good reason. The sheer disproportionate growth of the youth population in relation to the population as a whole demands society's attention. Research in 2010 conducted by the World Population Foundation estimated that people under the age of 25 represented over half of the world population. Furthermore, the United States Census Bureau has reported that 25% of the U.S. population is below the age of 18. These striking statistics strongly suggest a significant shift of this population cohort on the world stage. As a result, policy makers, educators, and others have come to realize the need to pay greater attention to the ways in which we, as a society, attend to the needs and wants of this group. When society does not provide constructive and productive ways to address the needs and desires of its youth, we see the results in incidents such as the recent riots in France, Greece, and other parts of the world. These isolated incidents are occurring more frequently. They are examples of dysfunctional "acting out," stemming from the unmet needs and wants of youth; they illustrate the grave negative consequences that can and do result from such frustrations.

Although including youth in decisions that affect them has always been recognized as a best practice by educators and others who work with youth, this practice has not been commonly embraced by those outside of this arena. The national success of the Youth Voices movement has changed this. Youth Voices provides a uniform platform for the inclusion of the youth population in the decision-making process by promoting youth summits and youth action councils. Furthermore, Youth Voices has proven to be effective in giving young people a seat at the decision-making policy table, as well. Consequently, the shifting attitudes toward youth's active participation in the decision-making process have gained traction as policy makers have realized the positive and productive outcomes that can result from youth involvement. This organized movement has succeeded in disproving the myth that youth should be seen and not heard. Their work continues to be instrumental in effecting change.

Experts both in Youth Voices and in community service learning, such as Zeldin, Camino, and Kielsmeier, have done extensive research that strongly suggests that the involvement of youth, particularly in those decisions that affect them directly, has a

Continued on page 6

Network of Resources

Creating Youth Partnerships

Annual Forum

At-risk Youth College Challenge Program

A World Fit for Children

Pg. 2

Pg. 2

Pg. 3

Pg. 4

Pg. 5

A Newsletter from the
**Professional
Development Program,
Rockefeller College**



**UNIVERSITY
AT ALBANY**

State University of New York



Eugene Monaco engaging Youth Ambassadors Sabrina Hawkins and Carrie Holmes in discussions regarding the latest child welfare trends.

VOLUME 26, SPRING 2011

ED KEFSHIGESSNER

PDP has long recognized the importance of involving youth in the professional development of staff working in public and voluntary agencies. Over its twenty-five year history of providing training services on independent living and adolescent services, we have partnered with youth through engagement and empowerment to make our training programs stronger and more meaningful for the recipients.



Youth in Progress Leaders Darius Holman, Zhai-Yeng White, and Liz Johnson

Network of Resources: An Essential Component to Promoting Self- sufficiency Among Foster Care Youth

Working side by side with youth, by nature, is a rewarding experience. The youth gain a deeper understanding of their needs and the support they need to achieve success, while adults become refocused in their mission to help youth succeed. Also in the process, youth have made connections to adults that share their vision for success and the overall improvement for those that follow in their footsteps. Diane, a senior in business administration at the University at Buffalo states: "I am a former foster care youth and I know how important it is to have a positive adult mentor to encourage young adults to move in the right direction."

Gaining insight from youth about what their needs are and how to meet them is essential in promoting positive outcomes and successful transitions. PDP has been a leader in partnering with youth to develop the skills of caseworkers from local social service agencies and voluntary child care agencies to help foster care youth prepare for self-sufficiency. The Upstate Adolescent Services Resource Network (ASRN) has been a staple at PDP and is part of a broader consortium serving all of NYS. This network was created in 1989 and is funded by the NYS Office of Children and Family Services to promote self-sufficiency among foster care youth. This project, coordinated by PDP, delivers training and resources to foster care youth in the areas of assessment, communication skills, problem solving, and decision making. Additional training support is provided in areas crucial to youths such as employment, housing, and money management. **PDP**

Creating Youth Partnerships to Enhance the Futures of Foster Care Youth

In New York State many foster care youth have made it their mission to enhance and advance the lives of today's and tomorrow's youth by supporting a sense of self and responsibility. One youth leader commented, "I joined Youth In Progress because I like to help others and thought sharing my experiences in foster care and helping to create solutions to make it a better system for other youth in care would help

Continued on page 3



Youth panelists Carrie Holmes, Carmen Duncan, Isaiah Williams, Hope Albanese, and Sabrina Hawkins at a recent higher education forum.



Annual Forum Provides Opportunity for NYS Foster Care Youth and Caregivers to be Heard

Have you ever felt growing up, that no one listened, no one heard you, or even understood you? Youth in foster care often feel the same way. To address this issue, an annual event “Youth Event and Speak Out,” sponsored by PDP, has been offered for hundreds of youth and their adult caregivers in upstate New York. The events are planned by youth, with workshops delivered by youth. There is also an opportunity for young adults to speak to a panel of state and local policy makers, Family Court judges, and those who directly serve them about their experiences in foster care. The youth’s heartfelt comments express the love they have for their foster parents and caregivers, and the need for the most “normal” experience possible. Youth and adults alike, report that this is the most energizing and motivating event that they have been a part of. Youth have stated that it is refreshing to see adults invested in their future and making practice changes as a result of feedback provided. 2010 marked the twentieth year that PDP has been involved in this powerful event. Now, having the voices of our youth present at every turn when working with the decision makers is not only a commonplace occurrence, but it is expected as part of conducting business related to young adults in foster care. **PDP**



Creating Youth Partnerships to Enhance the Futures of Foster Care Youth: *Continued from page 2*

future kids in foster care.” The work of “Youth In Progress” supports the mission of these foster care youth by offering programs to raise public awareness of the experiences of youth in care; increasing youth involvement in systems that touch their lives; empowering youth through the development of leadership and decision-making skills; improving policies and practices to assist youth transition out of foster care; and increasing awareness, availability, and participation in services provided to youth transitioning out of care.

NY sees the value of partnering with youth to continually improve the systems that serve them. As the coordinator of these efforts, PDP created and maintains formalized opportunities for youth to voice their strengths and concerns regarding their journey through the foster care system. In particular, a youth/adult partnership team was created to provide support to foster care youth. This partnership

allows the youth’s voices to be heard and extracts valuable lessons based on foster care experiences. This team put NYS on the map as a national leader for promoting promising practices and utilizing their powerful, insightful ideas for change.

Youth In Progress (YIP), www.youthinprogress.org, provides leadership opportunities for youth in foster care to serve on youth advisory boards, participate in speaking engagements, and plan regional youth led conferences. YIP youth have assisted with creating and evaluating programs, policies, and practices statewide. These youth leaders, 14 to 21 years of age, also meet regularly with the Commissioner of the NYS Office of Children and Family Services as they are important to the future of NY. Many youth remain involved in the activities of the team even after exiting placement as they feel empowered, valued, and respected. **PDP**

“This event was incredibly moving... Each one of these youth had a powerful message to share. Each young adult had a sense of what they needed, how they could and would help others, and most important, that they were beginning to grasp the power in taking control of the situation in which they find themselves. What I found most compelling was that each young person recognized that they have the ability to determine their own destiny. Each one had a plan, but what they needed was people (agencies, foster parents, case workers, and other resources) to help them handle those things in life that they had yet to experience.”

— Panel Participant Dennis Packard, Commissioner Schenectady County Department of Social Services



At-risk Youth College Challenge Program

The NYS Higher Education Services Corporation and the NYS Office of Children and Family Services have partnered with PDP to help motivate at-risk youth to successfully prepare for and graduate from college. The cornerstone of the program is having youth, previously in foster care or in juvenile justice, share their experiences in applying for and going to college with youth in care, between the ages of 14 and 18, to encourage them to graduate from a higher education institution. To accomplish this, twelve youth are serving as Youth Ambassadors throughout NYS. As ambassadors, they conduct focus groups at local social service districts, voluntary agencies, and OCFS facilities to educate at-risk youth on how best to make college a reality for them. *PDP*

What youth are saying



Brentin I'm a 20 year old college student who has a desire to become a social worker and change the lives of youth and families in such a uniform way.

*Junior, Mercy College
Social Welfare*



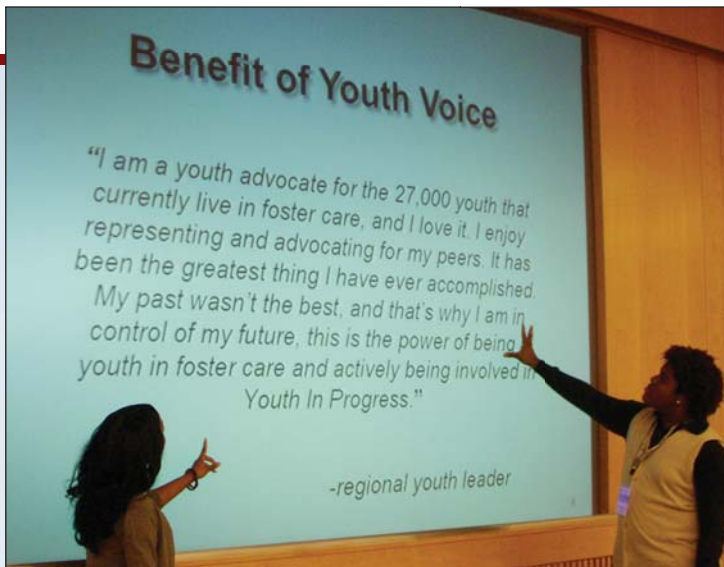
Jessica Going to college was always a plan of mine, but I didn't know if I could afford it. The connections I made while advocating led me to a scholarship that provided tuition, room, and board!

*Graduate Program, Hunter College
Science in Urban Affairs*



Hope During my time in care, the only thing that I had control over was my attitude toward gaining an education. Education was the only thing that was going to save me from a life of poverty. I knew that I was going to go to college at Syracuse University— my mind was made up.

*BS, Syracuse University
Social Work*



A World Fit for Children: Advancing the Global Movement

Engaging and listening to youth is something that needs to be embraced worldwide. As a result of being on the cutting edge of cultivating youth voice and supporting youth partnership, PDP was asked to facilitate a workshop at the November 2010, WorldForum, held at the IBM Learning Center in Palisades, NY. International delegates and child welfare experts gathered for the 21st annual summit of the International Forum for Child Welfare (IFCW). The conference was comprised of 500 delegates from 40 nations taking stock in current successes and obstacles; sharing cutting edge research, innovative solutions, and best practices; and planning for future action.

PDP Training Program Coordinator, Erika Leveillee, co-facilitated a presentation on “Youth Voice: Engaging, Empowering, and Listening to Achieve Partnership and Positive Outcomes” with two of PDP’s Youth Ambassadors, Brentin Brown and Raven Profit. After the presentation, Raven commented:

“My experience at the World Conference was remarkable. I was able to network and socialize with people all the way from Canada to the outskirts of Africa. The environment overall was powerful because of the different cultures and ethnicities, and we were all there for one purpose. We were there to help youth in child welfare, targeting education and more. I was able to build my confidence and communication skills while presenting with Erika and Brentin. Erika moderated the workshop making it easier for me to communicate with the audience. If I were to choose two words to describe my experience, I would say it was educational and motivating. I was honored to be chosen to be one of the Youth Ambassadors presenting at this event.” PDP

Did You Know?

Each year, an estimated 20,000 young people “age out” of the U.S. foster care system. Many are only 18 years old and still need support and services. Several foster care alumni studies show that without a lifelong connection to a caring adult, these older youth are often left vulnerable to a host of adverse situations.

— *Child Welfare League of America*

24,619 children were in foster care in NYS on December 31, 2009, and about 40% were 14 or older.

— *Child Welfare League of America*

Three out of ten of the nation’s homeless adults report a foster care history.

— *NYS Office of Children and Family Services*

New York State continues to be a leader in finding permanent safe and nurturing homes for children. The number of children in foster care in NYS has decreased from 53,902 children in 1995 to 25,878 in 2008, a significant reversal of trends in the 1980s and early 1990s.

— *NYS Office of Children and Family Services*

A national online Harris Poll commissioned by the National Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Association found that most adults know little about foster care or the experience of children in care.

- 11% thought that children were in foster care because of something the children did, although the majority strongly disagreed and tended to blame the biological parents.
- 87% agreed that improving the foster care system should be a national priority.

— www.casaforchildren.org



PDP’s Youth Ambassadors, Raven Profit and Brentin Brown, with Erika Leveillee at World Forum 2010.

The Power of Youth:
Continued from page 1

high-dividend pay-off. As a result of their work and that of others in the field, many youth are working hand-in-hand with adults in communities across the country fostering Youth Voices programs. These programs have been successfully replicated throughout the nation to create positive, effective, and sustainable change in communities, as well as to demonstrate the positive results that can be derived from youth leadership. Many of these programs emphasize leadership principles for youth to model, and have helped foster progressively increasing participation levels and a sense of responsibility that today's youth are demonstrating in community service programs. Another positive outcome of youth involvement in leadership and service programs is their natural tendency to offer a never-ending supply of fresh new ideas and perspectives.

The National Service-Learning Partnership, founded in 2001 with grants from the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, serves as a valuable resource for many service learning programs. With over 10,000 members in 50 states, it helps teachers, education leaders, community partners, and policy makers implement and maintain service learning programs that foster these principles of youth participation and leadership.

As many of us are aware from our own experiences, hearing,

strengthening, and empowering young people are not novel concepts, and for PDP, fostering the involvement of youth in the decision-making process is not new. For more than a quarter of a century through its Adolescent Services Resource Network and other programs, we have built a rich tradition of embracing and empowering this practice. This issue of the *Communiqué* focuses on the many successes PDP has had in advancing youth programs. As Harry Truman said, "I found that the best way to give advice to your children is to find out what they want and then advise them to do it." Youth certainly are our future, and their vitality can also serve as an elixir for our society. Young people have a great deal to teach us if we sponsor and foster programming that advocates including and listening to them. **PDP**

Request an Electronic Version

In an effort to support the University at Albany's mission to "go green," the *Communiqué* is now available via email. Individuals who would prefer to receive this publication in an electronic format can email: newsletter@pdp.albany.edu.



Professional Development Program
Rockefeller College
University Administration Building
1400 Washington Avenue
Albany, New York 12222
p (518) 956-7800; f (518) 956-7865
www.pdp.albany.edu

PDP *Communiqué* is produced by the
Nelson A. Rockefeller College of Public
Affairs and Policy, University at Albany,
State University of New York
Eugene J. Monaco
*Executive Director and
Public Service Professor*
Deanna Cooper
Editor
James Bonville & Maryellen Cox
Associate Editors
Kary Jablonka
Contributing Editor
Ed Kirchgessner
Photographer
Catherine Reynolds
Graphic Designer
No material may be reproduced
in whole or in part from this publication
without permission.
© 2011