

Ten Commandments For Involving Young People In Community Building

By Jody Kretzman

1. Always start with the gifts, talents, knowledge and skills of young people – never with their needs and problems.
2. Always lift up the unique individual, never the category to which the young person belongs. It is “Frank” who sings so well, or Maria the great soccer; never the “at-risk youth” or the “pregnant teen”.
3. Share the conviction that: (a) Every community is filled with useful opportunities for young people to contribute to the community; and (b) there is no community institution or association that can’t find a useful role for young people.
4. Try to distinguish between real community building work, and games or fakes – because young people know the difference.
5. Fight – in every way you can – age segregation. Work to overcome the isolation of young people.
6. Start to get away from the principal of aggregation of people by their emptiness. Don’t put everyone who can’t read together in the same room. It makes no sense.
7. Move as quickly as possible beyond youth “advisory boards” or councils, especially those boards with only one young person on them.
8. Cultivate many opportunities for young people to teach and to lead.
9. Reward and celebrate every creative effort, every contribution made by young people. Young people can help take the lead here.
10. In every way possible, amplify this message to young people: “*We need you!* Our community cannot be strong and complete without you”