

Supporting the Transformation of Vulnerable Youth: How Community-Based Youth
Projects Assist Youth to Make and Maintain Positive Changes in their Lives

by

Carol A. Sparks

Bachelor of Arts, Trent University, 2001

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
MASTERS OF ARTS
in Dispute Resolution
Faculty of Human and Social Development

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ABSTRACT

In British Columbia, youth are subject to risks that influence their capacity to develop into healthy adults. Community-based youth projects play an important role in supporting youth to develop the motivation, skills and knowledge to overcome challenges in their lives and surroundings. In this grounded theory study I examined how community-based youth projects can assist youth to make and maintain positive changes in their lives. Data were collected from staff as well as from people in the community involved with youth in the projects. The findings demonstrate that adults (staff and people in the community) involved with the projects engage in a process, named in this thesis as “Supporting Transformation”, a process that includes the following categories of action: “Figuring it Out”, “Creating Willingness to Engage”, “Introducing a New Way”, and “Maintaining Willingness to Engage”. By articulating the process of Supporting Transformation, it is hoped that adults will increase their understanding of how to create the conditions that lead to sustainable change in youth.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	iii
Table of Contents	iv
Acknowledgements	vii
Glossary	ix
List of Figures And tables	x
CHAPTER ONE-INTRODUCTION.....	1
Researcher Background	1
Partners in the Research Process.....	2
Introduction to the Research Design and Methodology	4
Thesis Overview	7
CHAPTER 2 – REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE	8
Community-based Youth Projects and the Healthy Development of Youth	8
Various Perspectives on Sustainability	10
CHAPTER 3 – METHODOLOGY	16
Purpose and Questions	16
Research Design.....	17
Theoretical Sensitivity	19
Participant Identification and Recruitment	20
Data Collection	20
Interviews.....	21
Theoretical Sampling	23
Review of Project Evaluation Reports	24

Data Analysis	24
Memoing	28
Ensuring Trustworthiness of the Findings	28
Ethical Considerations	29
Limitations of the Study and Other Issues	30
CHAPTER 4 – FINDINGS.....	32
Supporting Transformation – A Grounded Theory	33
Figuring it out	40
Figuring it out – Summary.....	51
Creating Willingness to Engage.....	52
Creating willingness to engage – Summary.....	64
Introducing a New Way	65
Introducing a new way— Summary	84
Maintaining Willingness to Engage.....	85
Maintaining willingness to engage – Summary.....	94
CHAPTER FIVE – DISCUSSION.....	97
Creating the Conditions that Support Youth to Change	98
Theoretical Approaches that Support Change	98
Conditions that Support Change	101
Conditions that Support the Maintenance of Change	109
Working Towards a New Approach to Supporting the Maintenance of Change	112
Implications for Adults Supporting Youth	115
Implications for community people, organizations, and funding agencies	122

Directions for Future Research	124
Conclusion	126
Bibliography	129
APPENDICES	138
Appendix A- Letter of Information (For persons involved with the YER project) .	139
Appendix B- Letter of Information (For persons involved with the SIL project) ...	141
Appendix C- Participation Consent Form.....	143
Appendix D – Interview Guide (August 2005).....	145
Appendix E – Interview Guide (September 2005)	146
Appendix F – Interview Guide (April 2006)	147

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the many people who have supported me in this journey.

First of all I would like to thank my supervisor and gifted teacher, Dr. Marjorie MacDonald. Your wisdom, ongoing support, and ability to put me at ease have helped me to move beyond my own thinking. In your presence, I always felt calm, ready to tackle the next challenge, and more like a colleague than a student. I would like to thank my committee member and mentor, Dr. Jennifer Mullett. I am in awe of your collaborative approach in the community and ability to bridge the gap between theory and practice. I'm thankful to you for challenging me to think at a higher level and inspiring me to think outside of the box. Marjorie and Jennifer, so much of my learning and my understandings have been nurtured through your gentle, wise, and collaborative approach to teaching and mentoring. You have taught me an important life lesson; to speak confidently about what I know but also, to be comfortable asking questions about what I don't know. As a result of your ongoing support, I never felt left to struggle on my own. I cannot express enough the appreciation I have for you both. I would also like to thank my committee member, Dr. Pat Mackenzie. Your support and comments always seemed to arrive at just the right time. The feedback you provided encouraged me to think critically about what I had written and helped me to produce a document that I can be proud of.

I would like to thank Lois Pegg, the IDR department and graduate secretary. I would not have graduated if it wasn't for your support, compassion, and attention to detail.

I would also like to thank the Grounded Theory Club for your willingness to guide me through this process. My ability to understand and use Grounded Theory was facilitated by your ongoing support.

I would like to acknowledge the passionate, and the committed, staff members and volunteers who work long hours, with limited funding, to support youth to make positive changes in their lives. Thank you for sharing your experiences with me. I would also like to

thank the SIL project coordinator, Lori McKeown and her team. Your patience and understanding enabled me to learn from my mistakes and feel comfortable working in the community.

Wendy Kotilla, the YER project coordinator requires and deserves a special mention. Your commitment to supporting vulnerable youth and love for the natural world motivated me to produce a document that really meant something. Wendy, you challenged me, supported me, and through your actions, constantly reminded me of what is important in life. I am so thankful for our friendship.

I would sincerely like to thank my family and friends who know and support the road I travel. I come from a family of life-long learners, and I am so thankful for that. Dad, I'm thankful that we were able to travel on this journey together. Particularly in the last few weeks, your enthusiasm helped me to understand the value of what I had accomplished. Mom, thank you for encouraging me to finish my thesis and reminding me I would have a life once it was completed. The support you have provided me throughout my life has enabled me to overcome the professional and personal challenges I encountered during this journey. I would like to thank my best friends and brother and sister, Mary and John. Thank you for your love and support. I never worry about overcoming challenges alone with you two in my life. Thank you also to Mike and Heather. Mike, I would have never made it through this journey with a smile on my face, if you hadn't encouraged me to have fun, take a break and go skiing. Heather, you have been my cheerleader and confidant throughout this process. I am so grateful for our friendship.

Finally, I would like to thank the Michael Smith Foundation for Health Research, the BC Medical Services Foundation, and the University of Victoria for providing the financial support that made this research possible.

GLOSSARY

SIL	Supported Independent Living Program
YER	Youth and Ecological Restoration Project
GTC	Grounded Theory Club
JHSNI	John Howard Society of North Island

LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES

Figure 1- An Early Diagram	34
Figure 2- Supporting Transformation: A Grounded Theory	41
Figure 3- Figuring it Out	49
Figure 4- Creating Willingness to Engage	61
Figure 5- Introducing a New Way	74
Figure 6- Maintaining Willingness to Engage	94
Table 1- Supporting Transformation: An Overview of the Categories	45
Table 2- Figuring it Out: An Overview of the Category	49
Table 3- Creating Willingness to Engage: An Overview of the Category	61
Table 4- Introducing a New Way	75
Table 5- Maintaining Willingness to Engage	95

CHAPTER ONE-INTRODUCTION

The ages between 10 and 24 are a critical stage in the development of young people (Goldsmith 1996). During this time “many behaviours that influence well-being in adult life are initiated or firmly set in place” (The McCreary Centre Society 2005, para. 1). Marginalized or vulnerable youth have few mechanisms during this stage that serve to support them effectively in resisting negative influences. This, in turn, affects their ability to achieve and sustain positive changes into adulthood and significantly impacts and determines their well-being as adults (The McCreary Centre Society 2005).

In recent times of fiscal restraint, the responsibility for providing support to vulnerable youth has shifted from the government to the community. In spite of having good intentions and well-devised plans, community-based youth projects are often unable to sustain their initiatives that support youth. Possible reasons for this include short-term funding grants, competing goals within the community, lack of trust within the community, inconsistent volunteer support, and most relevant to this thesis, a confusing array of conceptual and operational definitions of sustainability. Nevertheless, the advantage of these community-based youth projects is their direct connection to the surroundings in which youth live and develop.

Researcher Background

My educational background in several disciplines, including Native Studies, Health Promotion, International Development and Dispute Resolution influenced my interest in examining the ability of community-based youth projects to sustain positive change in the lives of youth. My interest in sustainability originated in a desire to understand the various approaches to supporting people to maintain positive change.

While working on several Aboriginal and Health Promotion research projects, I was exposed to many comprehensive approaches aimed at improving the health and social outcomes of communities. I became aware that the current literature on sustainability lacks a holistic understanding of how to sustain positive change in youth. Through my immersion in the area of International Development, I gained a sense of the difficulties experienced by community-based projects trying to create sustainability. In addition, my course work in Dispute Resolution piqued my interest in understanding the various perspectives from which people approach situations. I learned about the need to create opportunities for people to work effectively within and across diverse perspectives. Finally, my experience working with vulnerable youth in a wilderness setting enabled me to witness directly the important role that community-based projects have in motivating youth to make positive changes in their lives.

Partners in the Research Process

I conducted the research study in collaboration with two community action projects located on Vancouver Island: The Youth Ecological Restoration Project (YER) in Courtenay and the Supported Independent Living Housing Program (SIL) at the John Howard Society in Campbell River. The youth involved in both of these projects are considered “vulnerable” (i.e., experiencing behavioural problems, substance abuse, and mental health difficulties) (MacDonald and Mullett in press). Both projects were funded by short-term grants from the Queen Alexandra Foundation Strategic Investment Initiative Fund (SIIF). The purpose of the grants is to strengthen the capacity of communities to support families and children, reduce the number of children needing to be brought into protective care, and demonstrate innovative child welfare practices

(Queen Alexandra Foundation 2004). The grants support a community-centred approach that considers the contexts of young people's lives. The coordinators of the projects, who agreed to be named in this thesis, and to have the projects identified, are: Wendy Kotilla, the coordinator in Courtenay, and Lori McKeown, the coordinator in Campbell River. Both coordinators have extensive experience working with community-based youth projects and vulnerable youth.

The YER project is designed to connect vulnerable youth with environmental organizations in the Comox Valley. Some youth, who have been convicted of a crime, participate in the project to fulfill the obligation of a mediated agreement between themselves and the community members impacted by the crime. Other youth decide to participate for a variety of reasons, such as to gain work experience. The stated aims of the project are to assist youth to: a) build healthy community relationships, b) gain valued work experience, c) improve knowledge of ecological restoration, d) increase social skills development, and e) enhance communication skills (Kotilla 2006). With support from people and organizations in the community, the coordinator was responsible for designing and implementing the program.

Youth spend a total of 20 hours volunteering with an environmental organization; this includes an oral presentation about ecological restoration and their experience in the project to a community group. Upon completion of the project, youth participants receive a reference letter, a YER crest and a \$50 honorarium. The project has a high completion rate; since the project began, 44 youth have participated in the project, and 40 have completed it. In addition, the relationship between YER and various schools, environmental groups and youth organizations in the community has been strengthened.

The initial five community organizations that partnered with the coordinator on the project are still involved. Twenty additional organizations are now participating in the project. Furthermore, 18 additional organizations have been exposed to the aims of the project through youth making oral presentations.

The other project, the SIL program, provides safe and affordable housing to vulnerable youth. Youth involved in this project make the decision to participate. The aim is to: a) assist youth in their transition to adulthood, b) reduce homelessness, and c) support the development of life and social skills to enable youth to live cooperatively with others (John Howard Society 2007). The program involves youth working one on one with a member of the staff. The staff consists of three youth workers at the John Howard Society of North (Vancouver) Island (JHSNI). The JHSNI is a non-profit organization with a long history of developing services for youth, adults and families. SIL is one of many services provided by the JHSNI. A working committee oversees the project, which includes JHSNI, Ministry of Children and Families, officials from the Ministry of Human Resources and landlords. "Youth-friendly" landlords rent apartments to the JHSNI, and the JHSNI insures the apartments against loss or damage. These apartments are then provided to youth for a set amount of time. The staff members develop independent living agreements with the youth, and the aim of staff members is to support youth as they work towards full independence from the project. Five youth have so far participated in the project.

Introduction to the Research Design and Methodology

I struggled with determining what the focal point of the research should be. This is because of the competing priorities of funding agencies versus community-based youth

projects. Funding agencies tend to focus on fiscal sustainability, whereas the staff members are dedicated to making positive changes in youth. I asked myself: Should I examine the sustainability of the project? Or, should I examine the sustainability of the changes resulting from a young person's participation in the project? I initially decided to examine how sustained change in youth results from their participation in a project from the perspective of adults¹ (staff and community members). The study had two purposes; the first was to explore the various processes that community-based youth projects use to ensure sustainable lifestyle changes in youth. The second was to analyse the challenges and successes experienced by community project workers and to obtain their perspective on how to sustain positive changes beyond project completion.

As the research study evolved, I understood that there were two issues restricting my ability to examine how sustained change results from project participation. First, I was not able to interview the youth; and second, I had a short time frame within which to observe the lifestyle changes that may occur over an extended period of time. In the end, I attempted to find a balance between focusing on the sustainability of the project, and on the ability of youth to maintain positive changes. I found the balance by focusing on the process used by adults to support youth. This enabled these two themes to emerge and interrelate naturally throughout the research.

¹ It is important to point out that throughout this document when I am referring to "adult" or "adults", I am usually referring to people who have been involved in the design and implementation of the project. However, in some cases the term "adult" refers to people within the community who have participated in the project.

This evolution of the research question as the study progresses is common, and expected in grounded theory methodology (Strauss and Corbin 1998). I used grounded theory, developed by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss (1967), as the methodology to examine the social process by which adults support youth. Using grounded theory allowed me the flexibility to progress from my original research question towards exploring the emerging process of adults supporting youth. As defined by Glaser (1978), grounded theory is the “systematic generating of theory from data, that itself is systematically obtained from social research”. In this study my ongoing data collection was directed by the *emerging* theory derived from data grounded in the perceptions and experiences of community members (Glaser 1978). Ultimately, through an iterative process of data collection and analysis, grounded theory method results in the development of a substantive theory that describes a “basic social process”, sometimes referred to as a “core category” which integrates and explains the action in the area under study.

My role in the study was to facilitate the research process, analyze the interviews conducted with adults involved in the projects, and to interpret the findings using the results from the literature and document review. From the data that I gathered and analyzed, I was able to make explicit the implicit knowledge of the community members engaged in supporting youth. I used grounded theory as a way to focus “on the doing” or the “accomplishing” of the community members’ work (Prus 1996) and to describe their own but unnamed “theory of action” by articulating the basic social process of “Supporting Transformation”.

The formation of this research study occurred with the support of my supervisor, committee members, community partners and academics involved with the grounded theory club at the University of Victoria. The staff members from both projects were also involved in most aspects of the research but not to the extent that I had hoped.

Thesis Overview

In this thesis I describe the implicit but previously undocumented process or “theory of action” used by adults involved in community-based projects to support youth. The first chapter provides a description of the topic area, research design and an overview of the thesis. The second chapter reviews the literature on community-based youth projects and the concept of sustainability. In chapter three, I describe: a) methodology, b) purpose, c) research question, d) research design, e) participant recruitment and identification, f) data collection, g) data analysis, h) validity and reliability, i) limitations, and j) ethical considerations. In chapter four, I describe the findings that resulted from the data I have collected and analyzed in this study. I have included a summary of the basic social process as well as a detailed explanation of each category or sub-process in the larger process of Supporting Transformation. Finally, in chapter five, I compare this process with the relevant literature. I also discuss the implications and areas for future research.

CHAPTER 2 – REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

I completed a literature review of multidisciplinary materials that examine community-based youth projects and the various approaches to sustainability. I conducted a computerized and library search using a wide-range of databases including: Health Source - Nursing/Academic Edition, MEDLINE, Social Science Index, ERIC, PsycINFO, and the WHO (World Health Organization). In addition, I completed a document review of the YER and SIL project proposals submitted to the Queen Alexandra Foundation. This enabled me to generate a better understanding of existing approaches to sustainability in the community.

Community-based Youth Projects and the Healthy Development of Youth

In British Columbia, youth are subject to risks that influence their capacity to develop into healthy adults. Such risks include the excessive use of alcohol and drugs, susceptibility to gambling, physical and sexual abuse, harassment and discrimination, obesity and a lack of safety in schools (The McCreary Centre Society 2005). Most youth have the knowledge, skills, motivation and support to overcome challenges in their surroundings and transition successfully into adulthood (The McCreary Centre Society 2006). For some youth, however, the impact of being detached from meaningful relationships in the community and experiencing difficult living situations, leaves them vulnerable and unable to overcome challenges in their surroundings (The McCreary Centre Society 2006). This negatively influences their future health and social outcomes (Breinbauer and Maddaleno 2005).

Until recently, the community, with the immediate and extended family at its core, has been the primary deliverer and supporter of social life (Goldsmith 1996). With

the increase in corporate and government control that began during the Industrial Revolution, the ability of the community to provide for its members has diminished (Goldsmith 1996). This process has been described by Tönnies (1955), cited by Ife (2002), as characteristic of the shift from traditional communities to modern industrial society. Such a shift has significantly altered the way in which human beings interact. Tönnies' analysis, although complex, can be summarized by making a distinction between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*. While the former is characterized by a small number of people who know each other well, and who interact in a variety of different roles, the latter is characterized by a large number of people who do not know each other well, and who communicate and interact with one another in ways that are limited and minimal (Ife 2002). This distinction becomes important when considering that the shift that has taken place in community ideals (from serving the needs of a neighbour to serving the needs of a stranger) has greatly impacted relationships within modern communities. Most significantly, professionals or experts employed by the state care for individuals instead of their families. Once the responsibility of care delivery moved from the domain of the family and the community to that of the government, caring for other individuals became less of a responsibility and more of a personal choice (Ife 2002).

In an attempt to continue to finance social policy and cut expenditures, significant responsibility for the delivery of social services has shifted from the government back to the community. In terms of supporting and creating a positive change in youth, community-based youth projects have become central to this process and have proven themselves, at least in the short term, to be effective (Turner 1999). There is, however, a dilemma. Despite the move to give a certain degree of power over the delivery of

programs back to the community, the ability of the community to directly control the content and longevity of its contributions remains restricted. This is a result of not only the political climate of the federal and provincial governments but also the funding structure of agencies and corporations (Bamberger and Cheema 1990). Community-based youth projects often face insurmountable obstacles, which may include short budget cycles, the lack of long-term funding, considerable start-up costs, a shortage of volunteers, and a limited degree of community support. The monumental effort required by community organizations to overcome these barriers leaves little time for their primary responsibility of supporting the healthy development of youth (Shediak-Rizkallah and Bone 1998).

Various Perspectives on Sustainability

The desire to comprehend the phenomenon of sustainability is evident when we consider the profusion of sustainability-related terminology (Pluye, Potvin, and Denis 2004). The broad perspectives and multiple meanings of sustainability have resulted in a range of definitions that are confusing and easily overstated (Swerissen and Crisp 2004). With such an abundance of definitions, precisely what constitutes positive sustainability outcomes is often determined by certain privileged “interpretations of ‘positive’ progress” (Meppem 1999, 49). Recommendations concerning how best to achieve sustainability are contradictory and, in fact, when it comes right down to it, “little is known about the sustainability process” (Pluye, Potvin, and Denis 2004, 121). Although there is a demand placed on community organizations by funding sources to account for the sustainability of their interventions, community organizations continuously struggle to prove the sustainability of their projects. In light of this situation, sustainable

approaches and operational measures need to be re-examined within the context of community-based youth projects aimed at the healthy development of youth (Shediac-Rizkallah and Bone 1998).

In the eyes of most governments, corporations and funding agencies, sustainability requires an economic rationalist approach. In this approach, sustainability is determined by the ability to gain and demonstrate positive economic indicators and outcomes even if the constraints of the funding do not support it (Falk 1997). The process of evaluating and measuring sustainability is based on the capacity of organizations to demonstrate the sustainability of their project through its' achieved outcomes (Stephenson, Tsui, and Knight 2004). The main objective of this process is to determine the perceived value and effectiveness of a project (Porowski, Burgdorf, and Herrell 2004). This is determined by the funding agency to be the most important element, and is needed to assure them of the "the soundness of the concept" (Porowski, Burgdorf, and Herrell 2004, 197). It is also a requirement of securing post-grant funding (Porowski, Burgdorf, and Herrell 2004). There is a weakness in this approach, however, in that the primary focus is upon determining the project's *immediate* efficiency. Hence the long-term viability of a potentially successful project is dismissed (Porowski, Burgdorf, and Herrell 2004). Another negative side effect results when communities attempt to meet the needs of the stakeholders by way of demonstrating economic indicators and outcomes; communities can feel pressured to "develop their self-image and resulting degree of functionality more on indicators based on economic rationalism than other indicators of community activity such as membership of clubs, volunteer work etc" (Falk 1997, 3). This can be damaging to communities if economic indicators become the only indication

of their success (Falk 1997). Within the supply and demand models created by this rationale there is no space to examine all the processes relevant to the development of sustainability interventions (Sarriot, Winch, Ryan, Bowie et al. 2004). Ensuring sustainable processes and outcomes includes “embracing ambiguity in dealing with an elusive and diverse array of societal values” (Meppem 1999, 48). As Meppem (1999) notes, “any attempt to define sustainability in a positive/normative sense neglects the complexity that sustainability implies” (p. 48).

In response to the funding requirements of governments and funding agencies, the bulk of both national and international community organizations refer to sustainability as the “general phenomenon of program continuation” (Shediak-Rizkallah and Bone 1998, 91). The literature is “fairly consistent in presenting a conceptual view of moving an innovation to practice as part of a process of progressive steps or stages of decisions and actions that are temporal and ordered” (Sarriot, Winch, Ryan, Edison et al. 2004, 36). Community organizations with a project-centred approach to sustainability traditionally use a linear process, referred to as “input-process-output-outcome format” (Sarriot, Winch, Ryan, Edison et al. 2004, 34). Unfortunately, this does not reflect the complexity of the process that generally characterizes sustainability (Sarriot, Winch, Ryan, Edison et al. 2004). Because community-based programs are continuously hampered by short-term funding grants, and organizational challenges, their instability is almost a guarantee (Wickizer, Wagner, and Cheadle 1998). This is particularly evident during periods of resource rationalization when economic conditions are precarious and the availability of funding is diminished (Falk 1997). Sustainability of the project - through the continued support of the stakeholders - becomes solely based on the ability of the project to

demonstrate its' 'efficiency'. This leaves little time and few resources to focus on the long-term viability of those interventions. In turn, this results in a "disconnect between what sustainability should mean for communities and how it can be translated in bureaucratic requirements" (Sarriot, Winch, Ryan, Edison et al. 2004, 10).

Rather than discussing alternative processes to sustainability, the literature consistently focuses on mechanisms that, if considered within the local context, could help communities develop their own theory and process of sustainability (Sarriot, Winch, Ryan, Edison et al. 2004). These mechanisms include taking steps such as involving local people in creating solutions to local problems and setting local norms (Edwards et al. 2000; Karabanow 1999; Wall 1992); sharing and "reconciling different value-sets" to achieve "common purposes" (Falk 1997; Meppem 1999); creating local-adaptive systems (Meppem 1999; Sarriot, Winch, Ryan, Edison et al. 2004); developing relationships in the community (between communities, governments and funding agencies) that are built on trust (Kilpatrick 2000); creating projects, staff and institutional arrangements "that do not stop and start, or chop in and out, but rather evolve and change in a way that builds on the past" (Kilpatrick 2000, 8); incorporating people's experience of family and work relationships, friendship, parenting, leisure, culture and religion into projects; and building capacity in the community (Sarriot, Winch, Ryan, Bowie et al. 2004; Simpson, Wood, and Daws 2003).

Beyond these isolated mechanisms, few alternative approaches to sustainability consider the local context and the needs and values that inform people's actions and interactions. Without taking these local perspectives into account, community-based youth projects will continue to reflect the mainstream approaches to sustainability

(Blackwell and Colmenar 2000; Meppem 1999). An alternative approach presented by Sarriot and colleagues considers sustainability as “a combination of processes and outcomes to which projects can only contribute” (Sarriot, Winch, Ryan, Bowie et al. 2004, 25). In this approach, the needs and values of the community serve as the foundation for the sustainability process. The assumption of Sarriot and colleagues that local communities, organizations and individuals “constitute a local system with their environment” (Sarriot, Winch, Ryan, Edison et al. 2004, 18) requires that the sustainability process involve communities working together to ensure a well-functioning social system; this is established through “coordinated social interactions and efforts based on the understanding of their own health and development” (Sarriot, Winch, Ryan, Bowie et al. 2004, 18). The project may end but once it has become part of the community, change continues to happen within that community. The well-being of young people will be more strongly fostered with an approach that focuses on the continuation of services and support for youth in the community (Stokes and Wyn 1998). Sarriot and colleagues also believe that this approach will better enhance long-term positive outcomes than the concentration on organizational sustainability (Sarriot, Winch, Ryan, Bowie et al. 2004).

The community-based youth projects involved in this research study are constrained by the economic rationalist approach described in this literature review. The approach used, however, by adults involved in these projects attempts to find more comprehensive methods of supporting youth. Within this approach, the needs, values and the role of the community in this process are considered. The process of Supporting

Transformation described in Chapter 4 explores the approach used by adults involved in community-based youth projects.

CHAPTER 3 – METHODOLOGY

Three main themes exist in the literature on sustainability: program continuation, economic rationalism, and mechanisms (key elements) that ensure “sustainability”. The economic rationalist approach is centred on the ability of an organization to gain and demonstrate positive economic indicators and outcomes. In response, community agencies have adopted a project-centred approach to sustainability, focusing primarily on the continuation of the program. These approaches conceptualize sustainability narrowly and do not adequately account for the numerous ways that sustainability happens. In this research, I used the research method of grounded theory to examine the various ways sustainability occurs and to develop an understanding of the process used by adults involved in the project to create sustained change in youth. In general, the process described in this study is from the perspective of adults involved in the project; in some cases, where relevant, the voices of the youth are included from public documents obtained through the YER community-based youth project.

This chapter begins with a description of the purpose and questions used in this study. It is followed by an explanation of the research design and recruitment process. Next, I provide a description of the data collection and analysis techniques used during this study. Finally, I conclude this chapter by discussing ethical issues.

Purpose and Questions

At the outset of this research I had two purposes for this grounded theory study: first, to explore the various processes used by community-based youth projects to ensure sustainable changes in youth; second, to analyse the difficulties, challenges and successes experienced by those community-based youth projects that are trying to increase the

sustainability of these changes. I was guided by four questions: (1) what processes do community-based youth projects use to achieve sustainable changes in youth? (2) what obstacles do those community-based youth projects face? (3) what successes do those community-based youth projects achieve? and (4) what strategies promote sustainable changes in youth?

Research Design

The methodology I chose for this study was grounded theory. Originally developed by Glaser and Strauss in the 1960's, the main component of the grounded theory methodological process is a "general method of comparative analysis" (Glaser and Strauss 1967, 1). Guided only by a general research question and focused on uncovering a process, I collected data. As I coded the data, I was involved in a process of constant comparison. The systematic analytic process gradually advances the data from simple coding to conceptual categories (Harry, Sturges, and Klingner 2005). I then generated theory from the data by working out hypotheses and concepts in relation to the data collected. The objective of grounded theory is to "generate a theory that accounts for a pattern of behaviour which is relevant and problematic for those involved" (Glaser 1978, 93). Grounded theory offers an alternative approach to positivistic quantitative research by providing a "systematic generating of theory from data, that itself is systematically obtained from social research" (Glaser 1978, 21). Although modified and clarified by its originators and other researchers, grounded theory remains an important method for developing new theoretical terms, explicat[ing] the properties of the theoretical categories, and...demonstrating the causes and conditions under which the process emerges and varies, and delineates its consequences (Charmaz 2006, 8).

Grounded theory is comparable to other qualitative methods for several reasons: there are similar methods for collecting data, stakeholders' voices are included in the interpretation and the researcher(s) accept the responsibility for this interpretation. The main difference, however, is grounded theory's concentration on theory development. Researchers generally focus on the development of substantive (real or important) theory. It is not a requirement of grounded theory to develop high-level theory. Theory at any level is possible but most grounded theories are local level theories that explain a phenomenon in context. The aim of this study was to create a substantive theory that would help the staff of community-based youth projects to identify the processes and the conditions required to support youth. The emphasis was not on creating theory for individual actors but more concerned with discovering a process. This study paid particular attention to "the reciprocal changes in patterns of action/interaction"(Strauss and Corbin 1998, 274) and the relationship of these changes to "conditions either internal or external to the process itself" (Strauss and Corbin 1998, 274). The articulation of stages and phases served the analytical purpose of helping to conceptualize what occurs under certain conditions. Although it is possible that theory developed at this level may have general implications and relevance beyond the individual projects and situations, this was not the main focus.

Symbolic interactionism is the conceptual foundation for grounded theory. Based on the work of George Herbert Mead and further developed by Herbert Blumer, the main concern for symbolic interactionism is with "developing an understanding of the ways in which human group life is accomplished from the viewpoint of those engaged in its production (Prus 1996, xviii). The three primary premises of symbolic interactionism, as

described by Blumer (1969), are that: “a) human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that these things have for them, b) the meaning of objects derives from social interaction, and c) meaning is arrived at through an interpretive process” (p.2). These premises of symbolic interactionism form the basis of the emphasis in grounded theory on “discover[ing] and conceptualiz[ing] the essence of complex interactional processes”(MacDonald 2001, 121-122).

I considered grounded theory to be the appropriate methodology because it allows the research question to evolve throughout the research process. Considering the various definitions and approaches to sustainability, I believed this was of particular importance. By allowing the research question to evolve with the “continuous interplay between analysis and data collection” (Strauss and Corbin 1994, 273), I considered various definitions and approaches to sustainability grounded in the perceptions of the community. Using grounded theory also enabled me to develop a list of conditions and key elements that support youth and in addition to that, examine the relationship between these concepts and the conditions under which they exist.

Theoretical Sensitivity

The ability to formulate theory in grounded theory depends on the theoretical sensitivity of the researcher. Strauss and Corbin (1998) describe having sensitivity as “having insight into, and being able to give meaning to, the events and happenings in the data”(p. 46). The more the researchers are able to immerse themselves in the data, the more they will be able to ask questions and gain new insight from the research (Strauss and Corbin 1998, 273). To gain theoretical sensitivity, through the research process, I attempted to examine the data from various perspectives, ensured the constant

comparison of the data (i.e., comparing incident to incident, incident to concept, and concept to concept) (Glaser 1978), and remained open to and able to build on emerging ideas (Charmaz 2006). Throughout the study I lingered in a conversation with the data (Charmaz 2006). Charmaz (2006) suggests, “seeing possibilities, establishing connections, and asking questions” (p. 135). In addition, Charmaz stresses the use of gerunds to foster theoretical sensitivity “because these words nudge us out of static topics and into enacted processes” (p. 136). As a result, I focused on coding my categories as an action by using gerunds.

Participant Identification and Recruitment

To recruit participants for the interviews and focus group, the YER and SIL coordinators contacted the potential participants, read them a description of the research, and asked if I could contact them to discuss the possibility of their participation in this research. The staff chose people most closely associated with the projects that were best able to provide a general overview of the process and identify the changes they had observed. Their names and contact information were released only after the coordinator obtained their permission. Participants did not have to take part in this study if they did not wish to and could choose not to answer any question during the interview or focus group.

Data Collection

Unlike the typical design of a research project, I collected and analyzed the data at the same time. The grounded theory approach “emphasizes creating analyses of action and process” (Charmaz 2006, 20). Collecting and analyzing data iteratively “helps us to keep pursuing these emphases as we shape our data collection to inform our emerging

analysis” (Charmaz 2006, 20). At the same time, the principles of grounded theory also require that I collect the data guided by the emergence of conceptual categories and not preconceived notions or ideas. By entering the field with as “few determined ideas as possible”(Glaser 1978, 3), a specific theoretical framework does not guide the research process. Instead I was directed by *emerging* theory derived from data grounded in the perceptions and experiences of the community (Glaser 1978). This is known as theoretical sampling.

It was my hope that the staff would collaborate in all aspects of my study, from the research design to the collection and analysis of data, as well as the dissemination of information collected during the study. However, due to time constraints of the staff and the study’s methodology, which required a detailed and time consuming analysis of the data, the staff members provided input during and after each phase, but were not involved in all aspects of the research stages. For example, staff did not collect the data but did help to develop the interview questions and decided who should be interviewed. The process of grounded theory involves reviewing emerging theoretical conceptualizations with participants, and thus the staff members were, involved to some extent in the interpretation and validation of the data and findings. This ensured the continuous interaction of the community members with the data and that the emerging theory remained grounded in the data and was informed by the perceptions and local context of the community.

Interviews

The initial interviews were loosely guided by 5 open-ended questions which were formatted and presented in a way that allowed the interviewees to determine the course of

the discussion. These questions, developed in collaboration with the YER and SIL staff, were aimed at exploring the factors that contributed to change in youth, as well as in the community and the project. In addition, questions were asked about the sustainability of these changes. Unstructured interviews were used “to construct records of action-in-process from a variety of people who have likely performed these actions time and time again” (Chenitz and Swanson 1986, 66).

I began by interviewing the coordinator and two staff members with the SIL project. I interviewed each individual separately to enable him or her to speak freely about the process. To enable the interviewees to relax before asking questions directly related to the research, I asked a few warm up questions. During the interviews I asked open-ended questions and I pursued the ideas being discussed by the interviewee by using probes or asking additional questions. This enabled me to “encourage unanticipated statements and stories to emerge” (Charmaz 2006, 29). Each interview was approximately an hour long and tape-recorded. Due to travelling to a distant community to conduct the interviews, these first three interviews were held on the same day. In retrospect, these interviews should have been scheduled on different days to provide time to both rework the interview questions and begin the process of analysis.

The subsequent interviews were scheduled on different days. I restructured the interview questions based on the suggestions made by people involved in the previous interviews and from my personal observations. As categories began to develop, more interviews were scheduled with staff and community members. In keeping with grounded theory principles, I continued to adjust the set of questions to reflect and explore emerging theoretical conceptualizations.

I interviewed each of the seven participants (staff and people in the community) once except for the coordinator and staff who provided further clarification, verified the results and provided input on emerging categories. The coordinators and staff expressed a desire for me to interview the youth. However, for ethical reasons, interviewing the youth was not possible because youth participants were under the age of legal consent and considered vulnerable. In addition, volunteer participation could not be ensured due to several youth being required to complete community services hours. A follow up study that includes the views of youth would serve well as a complement to this research.

Theoretical Sampling

Theoretical sampling, a technique used in grounded theory, can only begin when categories have begun to emerge. The aim of theoretical sampling is to “explore the dimensional range or varied conditions along which the properties of concepts vary” (Strauss and Corbin 1998, 73). Guided by the coding, I sampled additional people in order to find out more about a particular concept in the theory. Theoretical sampling is different from initial sampling. Charmaz (2006) describes the difference as, “initial sampling in grounded theory is where you start whereas theoretical sampling directs you where to go” (p.100). Theoretical sampling does not necessarily refer to sampling individuals, but can refer to sampling incidents and events from the participants. By selecting an initial sample of participants prior to the start of the research process, I was able to gain a general sense of the main issues and establish criteria for the first people to be interviewed. Theoretical sampling, used once the categories had begun to develop, helped to “narrow [the] focus on emerging categories and as a technique to develop and refine them” (Charmaz 2006, 107).

Review of Project Evaluation Reports

The YER project evaluation reports (Kotilla 2006, 2005, 2007) supplied the second source of data. I used these reports specifically to learn about the youths' experiences within the project. Since I was unable to interview the youth as the result of ethical concerns, the reports provided data on the experience of youth in the project as well as specific outcomes resulting from their participation in the project. The direct quotations from youth in the reports were consistent with the perspectives gained from interviewing adults involved in the project. I used direct quotations from youth to provide more detail or to support the comments made by adults involved in the study.

Data Analysis

Analyzing the data began by collecting and transcribing the interviews. I read the transcripts several times as a whole. I took notes on my overall impression of the interview and highlighted themes that stood out. I then attached the interviews as an imported text into NUDIST software. The software facilitated and kept track of coding and category development. Throughout each phase of the research, the analysis of the data collected followed a similar systematic process known as the "general method of comparative analysis" or "constant comparative method of analysis" (Glaser and Strauss 1967). I coded each transcript line by line to generate the initial categories. A line or word that represented an idea was coded. I paid particular attention to specialized terms used by the participant, referred to by grounded theorists as "in vivo" codes (Charmaz 2006). In vivo codes are important to preserve the "participants' meanings of their views and actions in the coding itself" (Charmaz 2006, 55).

To facilitate the generation of codes my supervisor suggested I ask myself questions such as: "What is going on here?" "What is the situation?" "How is this person managing the situation?" and "What categories are suggested by this sentence?" Strauss and Corbin (1998) deem asking questions an important "analytical device used to open up the line of inquiry and direct theoretical sampling" (p.73). As the process progressed, I compared codes with codes, codes with categories, categories with categories and categories with the developing theory. I was involved in a systematic analysis in which I engaged first with the data in a simple coding process, and later in terms of conceptual categories (Harry, Sturges, and Klingner 2005). This was a complicated process that involved reducing 400 codes into 4 categories. Once the categories began to emerge, second level coding involved "the conceptualization of the data into categories and their properties"(Glaser 1998, 136). This time-consuming process required that I remain patient and flexible as I grouped and regrouped categories into new categories. Creating diagrams about the emerging categories facilitated the process. As the categories began to emerge, pictures developed of the conditions, circumstances and strategies required for the category to exist. As I collected new data, I followed the same comparative process. These categories served to develop the basic social process that eventually provided the explication for the adult's "theory of action". At one point, I had two diagrams. One diagram indicated how change happened and the other focused on the maintenance of the change. With the constant comparison of categories, I found a link between the two diagrams with the creation of a new category, facilitating engagement. I created a new

diagram that included both creating and maintaining change.

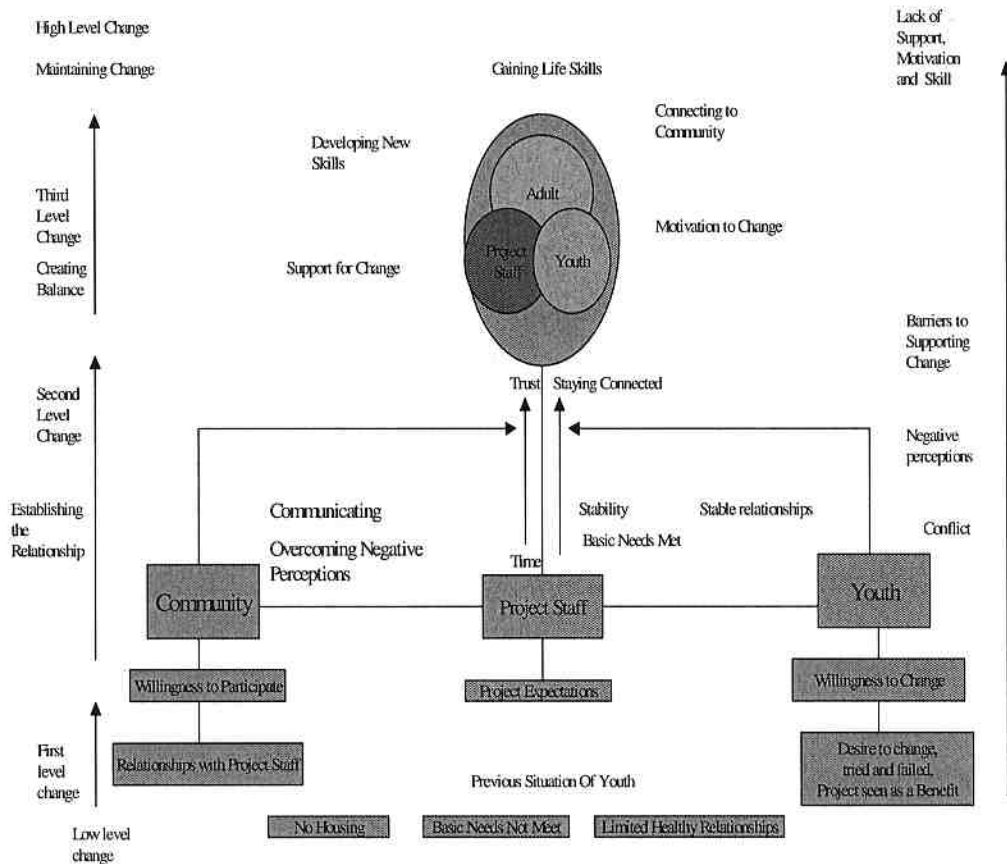


Figure 1- An Early Diagram

The development of a theory revolves around the ability of the core category to “account for most of the variation in a pattern of behaviour” (Glaser 1978, 93). It is the core category that holds the other categories together. Categories that do not relate are not incorporated into the theory. Core categories are “systematically generated, sentence by sentence grounding in its capacity to be relevant and to work” (Glaser 1978, 93). As described by Glaser (1978), a core category must be: a) proven over and over again by its prevalent relationship to other categories, thereby integrating the core category into a whole; b) it must be central; c) it must reoccur frequently in the data; d) it takes more

time to saturate; e) it relates meaningfully and easily with other categories; f) it has clear and grabbing implication for formal theory; g) it has carry-through; h) it is completely variable; i) it constitutes a dimension of the problem; and j) it can be any kind of theoretical code.

Not constrained by one particular theory or conceptual framework, I interpreted the data throughout the entire process by continuously analysing the data and finding “interrelations between themes that builds theory” (Harry, Sturges, and Klingner 2005, 156). I brought the analysis back to the community on several occasions to verify that it fit with their experience. Later in the process, I used theories and models external to the data to examine emerging themes but any insight I gained through this process was re-evaluated within the context of the data collected. This served to limit “the danger that theory and [the] empirical world will mismatch” (Glaser and Strauss 1967, 96). I wrote memos throughout the research and analysis processes. Theory needs to be continually checked “against incoming data” (Strauss and Corbin 1998, 22). The process began to emerge by examining the themes.

As the categories were emerging, there were similarities between the two projects. I integrated the similarities, taking care to ensure that I acknowledged differences. I coded both cases using the same terminology and language where it fit. One process emerged but I maintained space to account for specific differences between the two projects. In general, differences existed in the specific details and not in the process’s larger categories. I continuously asked questions and compared emerging concepts in order to ensure that my assumption that a similar process existed between the two projects did not direct my findings.

Memoing

Writing a memo is “the pivotal intermediate step between data collection and writing drafts of papers” (Charmaz 2006, 72). During the process, I would write memos to assist me to find deeper meaning and work through the concepts and categories. Memos are an essential part of the grounded theory process because “it prompts you to analyze your data and codes early in the research process”(Charmaz 2006). As thoughts emerged about the connections between categories, core categories, and conditions under which categories exist, I wrote about them in memos. I would write freely, paying little attention to grammar or format. Working with the NUDIST software, I was able to keep track of the memos and review them when necessary. I then checked these memos against the data. I was careful to note emerging themes and questions that required further exploration. It was by writing memos that I was able to discover links between emerging categories.

Ensuring Trustworthiness of the Findings

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, the data analysis was discussed at various stages with the staff. This enabled the staff to confirm that the descriptions and interpretations were recognizable to them. To ensure that the process of analysis was not influenced by my biases and assumptions, I continuously memoed throughout the research study. I used open-ended research questions to ensure that the ideas of the interview participants were guiding the process. I also asked additional questions of the interview participants to clarify points made. Once I transcribed the interview, I reviewed them and made corrections while listening to the tape. Finally, I worked closely with experts in grounded theory and my research area. My committee members helped to

guide the research study and provided me with support when required. They ensured that each step of the research study was of a high quality. The grounded theory club (GTC) at the University of Victoria provided me with peer support. The group met once every two weeks to discuss and help problem solve theoretical issues. Through the GTC group, I received supports at each stage of the study, such as assistance developing codes and feedback on the developing process, as well as specific solutions to problems with the use of terminology.

Ethical Considerations

I submitted an application for Ethical Approval to the University of Victoria Human Research Ethics Board and was approved. I followed the procedures and data collection plans set out in the application. I have already described the manner in which the coordinator and myself recruited potential participants in the study. I should also add that participants were initially going to receive the questions in advance. However, because it was sometimes necessary to conduct interviews on short notice, or because interview participants were part of the research team, I did not always send the interview questions in advance. I did provide interview participants time to read the interview questions before I began the interview. I should also emphasize that all participants in and across organizations were considered of equal status to the project coordinator. Participants did not have to take part in this study if they did not wish to and were able to choose not to answer any question during the interview. I also informed them that they could refrain from answering questions at any time. All of the information that participants gave to the research team was kept confidential. I used the information only for the purposes of this study. It was locked in filing cabinets, password-protected on

computers, and only the research team had access to it. In terms of confidentiality, because the YER and SIL projects were named and the projects had very small staff (one and three staff members respectively) it was easy to identify who was part of the study. I discussed this concern with the coordinators and staff of the projects. It was decided, by the coordinator and staff, that all information would be given to the community organizations first before it would be allowed to become public information. I addressed any concerns by incorporating their suggestions into the final product. The participants' names, other than the coordinators, did not appear in any reports or presentations. All data files will be destroyed 5 years after completion of the research.

Limitations of the Study and Other Issues

Because I was unable to interview young persons, a limitation of this study is determining whether the assumptions and beliefs of the staff about "what works" to create positive outcomes reflects the experiences of young persons. However, based on anecdotes and stories from staff who have worked with youth in the community and also on the voices of young persons heard in the YER project reports, I have constructed an explication of how adults contribute to creating positive outcomes for youth by outlining the staff members "theory of action".

Initially, the manner in which I formulated some of the questions reflected my personal confusion about the appropriate terminology to use. For example, some questions included the word sustainability; whereas other questions included the words sustaining change. The use of sustainability or sustaining change seemed to encourage interview participants to answer questions in a particular way; the latter encouraging interview participants to focus on youth and the former, the project. I sought advice from

the GTC to develop more neutral questions. The group suggested I use a less popular word that had approximately the same meaning. In subsequent interviews, using the words “maintain” or “maintaining” helped to bring clarity to the questions being asked. Believing that the confusion about terminology may be an important factor in the process, I began to ask the participants to define sustainability. Changing the terminology and asking the participants to define sustainability better enabled me to explore the various definitions and layers of sustainability. My understanding of sustainability and the research question evolved and shifted to concentrate on both sustaining change and sustainability by examining the role of adults in supporting youth.

CHAPTER 4 – FINDINGS

In this chapter I present my findings on the process used by adults involved in community-based youth project to support youth. These findings are grounded in the data from interviews with staff and community members as well as a review of the YER project evaluation reports. Due to the small size of the community-based youth projects and concern for the confidentiality of the interview participants, prior to submission of the thesis the coordinators reviewed and agreed to the findings and quotations that I have used. They also agreed that their projects could be named in this thesis.

From the analysis of the interviews and project evaluation reports, the supportive role of adults in enhancing the willingness and ability of youth to make and maintain positive changes in their lives began to emerge. The implicit but undocumented “theory of action” described by the interview participants reflected a process of developing meaningful relationships that enable adults, through the community-based youth project, to support youth to develop the motivation, skills, knowledge and the relationships required to make and maintain positive changes in their lives. I have named this process **SUPPORTING TRANSFORMATION.**

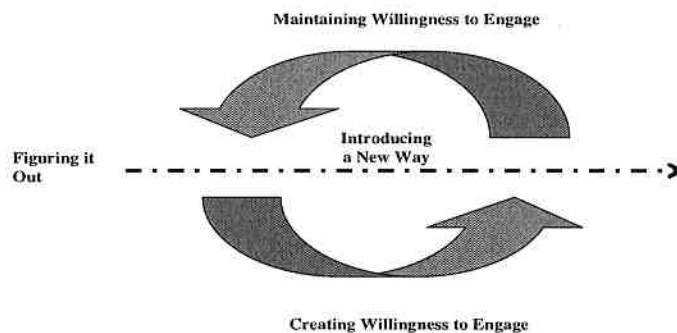


Figure 2- Supporting Transformation: A Grounded Theory

The following quotation illustrates this process:

It's 20 hours to build a relationship with them and to have them trust me and feel comfortable with me and to have them learn about the natural world...It's about...sharing with them my experiences with the natural world and really facilitating and guiding them to build relationships with the natural community and the human community. Because that's what they are doing when they are exposed to the natural world, they build a relationship with it and they gain knowledge. And the same with the community, they spend time around positive community members, they're building relationship so it opens a whole new world for them in both of those categories

SUPPORTING TRANSFORMATION – A GROUNDED THEORY

The basic social process identified in this research study is Supporting Transformation. This includes: Figuring it Out, Creating Willingness to Engage, Introducing a New Way, and Maintaining Willingness to Engage. This section first will provide an overview of the entire process and explain my classificatory mechanism, and then will delve into more depth for each of the categories in the overall process.

Regarding the format of this thesis, I have used various font styles to distinguish the

categories from the concepts. The basic social process, **SUPPORTING TRANSFORMATION**, is identified by bold print, uppercase and underlined. The main categories (e.g., **FIGURING IT OUT**) are identified by bold letters and uppercase. The subcategories (e.g., *Developing the initial idea*) are bold print, italic and capitalized. The strategies used in each of the subcategories (*respecting youth*) are in italics. Quotation marks are used to identify In vivo codes (e.g., “youth-friendly landlords”). Finally, the influences on the various processes are in regular font. To depict a process each category is labelled with gerunds.

Although I describe the thesis in a linear fashion, the process is non-linear. The categories have common characteristics, influence each other, often occur at the same time and are interrelated. The experience and impact of the process on a young person is unique. The willingness of youth to engage and the staff’s approach influence how a young person experiences the process. The process of **SUPPORTING TRANSFORMATION** consists of four main categories. The first main category, **FIGURING IT OUT**, determines how the process will be structured and shaped. The project is designed to encourage youth to be open to change, and empower them to make positive changes. *Developing the initial idea* and *Aligning the project structure with the support required* enables the staff to establish a foundation from which the rest of the process evolves. Important to supporting youth to achieve positive outcomes is the incorporation of philosophies and experiences of the staff that foster the empowerment of youth. Furthermore, the collaboration of the community in the process depends on their willingness to collaborate. The project is continuously being adjusted throughout the process as the staff are *Discovering what works*.

The second main category **CREATING WILLINGNESS TO ENGAGE** is the process through which the staff members encourage youth to be open to engaging in a project that motivates them to make positive changes. During the time that **CREATING WILLINGNESS TO ENGAGE** unfolds, staff members ensure that the project appeals to a young person's interests and attends to their need to feel safe and respected. The second category comprises *Building relationships with youth* and *Connecting youth with their interest*. *Respecting youth* and *spending time with youth* are characteristics of *Building relationships*, which involves encouraging a young person to be open to new ideas and experiences, which provides the basis for *Connecting youth with their interest*. This comprises *presenting youth with options, allowing youth to decide* and *identifying their interests* and involves staff providing a young person with the opportunities to explore and develop a passion in a new or existing interest. The process of **CREATING WILLINGNESS TO ENGAGE** assists in motivating youth to engage in a project that enhances their ability to make positive changes.

The process of **INTRODUCING A NEW WAY** is the third main category. It can occur at the same time as the process of **CREATING WILLINGNESS TO ENGAGE** but is more successful if a young person is willing to be supported. The third category describes the process in which a young person is assisted to engage in a project that enhances their ability to make positive changes. It is characterized by *Linking youth with community*, *Providing an alternative perspective*, *Engaging youth with the environment*, and *Building the self-esteem of youth*. *Overcoming barriers to access* and *engaging youth with the community* characterize *Linking youth with community* which connects a young person with people or organizations in the community who can provide

them with ongoing support. *Providing an alternative perspective* involves exposing a young person to an environment in which adults provide a point of view dissimilar to their usual perspective. This is characterized by *engaging youth in conversation* and *role modeling a different perspective*. *Engaging youth with the environment* presents a young person with the knowledge and the freedom to consider taking a new approach to interacting in relationships and with their surroundings. *Explaining and reinforcing expectations and boundaries* and *providing youth with opportunities to take independent action* characterize this. *Building the self-esteem of youth* involves developing the confidence of a young person to make positive changes by providing positive reinforcement and encouragement while they are engaged in the project. *Providing encouragement* and *ensuring completion of the process* characterize this. The process of **INTRODUCING A NEW WAY** provides a young person with the knowledge, support and confidence to continue to make positive changes once their participation in the process is complete.

The process of **MAINTAINING WILLINGNESS TO ENGAGE** is the final category but occurs at the same time that staff members are **INTRODUCING A NEW WAY**. The final category involves the staff adapting the project to ensure a young person stays open to engaging in a process that supports them to make positive changes in their lives. *Incorporating learning and feedback into the project*, *Balancing the expectations of the project* and *Ensuring a positive experience in the project* characterizes this process. *Incorporating learning and feedback into the project* indicates a continuous adaptation of the project to ensure a young person remains open to engaging in the project. *Modifying the project based on information gathered and experience* is the

characteristic of this process. *Balancing the expectations of the project* involves the staff meeting the expectations of the young persons while at the same time requiring them to commit to the expectations of the project. The characteristics of this subcategory are *explaining* and *committing to the expectations* and *meeting expectations of the youth*. *Ensuring a positive experience in the project* involves assisting a young person to overcome challenges in the project as well as with people and organizations in the community. This subcategory is comprised of *Assisting a young person to overcome issues* and *supporting participating community members to connect with youth*. The process of **MAINTAINING WILLINGNESS TO ENGAGE** enables a young person to enhance their ability to make positive changes by completing the project.

The following table provides an overview of the process **SUPPORTING TRANSFORMATION**. The table identifies the four main categories or first level categories as well as the second, third level categories, and influencing factors and consequences.

Table 1 - Supporting Transformation: An Overview of the Categories

FIGURING IT OUT		
Second Level Categories	Third Level Categories	Influencing Factors and Consequences
Developing the initial idea Aligning the project structure with support required	<u>Strategies</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Formulating ideas about how to engage and support youth ➤ Identifying the supports required ➤ Developing project goals ➤ Connecting youth with support 	<u>Influencing Factors</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Project staff's philosophies and ideas of what works for youth ➤ Willingness of the wider community to contribute information <u>Consequences</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Developing and implementing a project structure that

Discovering what works	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Accessing experts ➤ Learning through experience 	encourages engagement
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CREATING WILLINGNESS TO ENGAGE		
Second Level Categories	Third Level Categories	Influencing Factors and Consequences
Building relationships Connecting youth with their interests	<u>Strategies</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Respecting youth ➤ Spending time with youth <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Presenting youth with options ➤ Allowing youth to decide ➤ Identifying their interests 	<u>Influencing Factors</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Motivation of youth to participate ➤ Past experiences of young people with adults in their families or in their communities ➤ Background and experiences of the project staff ➤ Personalities of the staff and participating adults ➤ Youth believing they will benefit from participating in the project <u>Consequences</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Youth feel respected and secure participating in the project ➤ Youth are interested in participating in the project ➤ Youth are open and willing to participate in the project

INTRODUCING A NEW WAY		
Second Level Categories	Third Level Categories	Influencing Factors and Consequences
Linking youth with community	<u>Strategies</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Overcoming barriers to access ➤ Engaging youth in the community 	<u>Influencing Factors</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Willingness of the community to participate ➤ Skills and behaviours of the staff and participating adults
Providing an alternative perspective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Engaging youth in conversation ➤ Role-modeling different perspectives 	<u>Consequences</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Youth connect with people in the community who are able to support them ➤ Youth are exposed to various options and perspectives ➤ Youth are provided with the opportunity to develop the skills required to interact successfully with the environment ➤ Youth develop the self confidence to take action independent of the project staff
Engaging youth with the environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Explaining and reinforcing expectations and boundaries ➤ Providing youth with opportunities to take independent action 	
Building self-esteem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Providing Encouragement ➤ Ensuring completion of the process 	

MAINTAINING WILLINGNESS TO ENGAGE		
Second Level Categories	Third Level Categories	Influencing Factors and Consequences
Incorporating learning and feedback into the project	<u>Strategies</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Modifying the project based on experience and information gathered from the project and the youth 	<u>Influencing Factors</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Philosophy of the staff on how to support a young person to interact in their relationships and with their surroundings in a healthy way ➤ Relationship between a young person and the staff
Balancing the expectations of the project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Explaining expectations ➤ Committing to the expectations ➤ Meeting expectations of 	

Ensuring a positive experience in the project	<p>the youth</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Assisting a young person to overcome issues ➤ Supporting participating community members to connect with youth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Adaptability of the project <p><u>Consequences</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Youth develop the motivation, confidence, knowledge and the support to interact in their relationships and interact with their surroundings in a healthy way before their participation in the project is complete
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Figuring it out

FIGURING IT OUT is the start of the process of **SUPPORTING TRANSFORMATION**. In this first main category, staff members design the project to encourage youth to be open to change and, empower them to make positive changes. This happens by staff identifying what they think is required to support transformation based on information gathered through contact with people in the community or previous work experience with youth. Once identified, the staff members integrate the information into the developing project structure. The decisions made during this stage help to determine how the rest of the process will be structured and shaped.

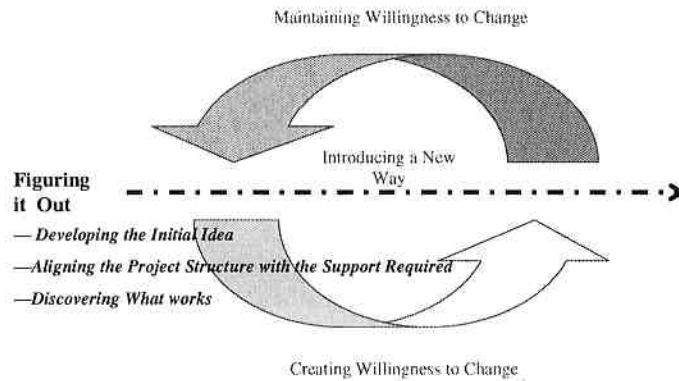


Figure 3 – Figuring it Out

Although this is the starting point of the process, it is non-linear so that each of the subsequent stages feed back into it and impacts on how **FIGURING IT OUT** is ultimately shaped and played out. This category is characterized by: *Developing the initial idea, Aligning the project structure with the support required, and Discovering what works.*

Table 2-Figuring it Out: An Overview of the Category

FIGURING IT OUT		
Second Level Categories	Third Level Categories	Influencing Factors and Consequences

Developing the initial idea	<u>Strategies</u> ➤ Formulating ideas about how to engage and support youth	<u>Influencing Factors</u> ➤ Project staff's philosophies and ideas of what works for youth
Aligning the project structure with support required	➤ Identifying the supports required ➤ Developing project goals ➤ Connecting youth with support	➤ Willingness of the wider community to contribute information <u>Consequences</u> ➤ Developing and implementing a project structure that encourages engagement
Discovering what works	➤ Accessing experts ➤ Learning through experience	

The first sub-category is set in motion by the staff *Developing the initial idea* based on their values and experiences. The initial idea and ultimately the ability of youth to obtain positive outcomes are founded on the experiences and philosophies guiding the staff such as, having a background in approaching and communicating successfully with youth. Because I was unable to interview young persons, a limitation of this study is determining whether the assumptions and beliefs of the staff about “what works” to create positive outcomes reflects the experiences of young persons. However, based on anecdotes and stories from staff members who have worked with youth in the community and also based on the voices of young persons heard in the YER project reports, I have constructed a theoretical explanation about how the staff members contribute to creating positive outcomes for youth.

Developing the initial idea includes the participating adults formulating ideas about how to engage and support youth to be motivated to make positive change. It is these ideas that influence how the process is developed. The YER coordinator and

community volunteers, for example, believe that connecting youth with nature is a fundamental component of creating positive change in youth. A community volunteer describes the impact of connecting youth with nature in this way:

Youth cannot help [but] be positive when they touch nature...the minute they touch it in a meaningful way it has a positive effect on them. I don't think there is anyone that touches nature in a meaningful way that says 'oh my god I'm going to commit suicide'. It does the complete opposite; it makes you want to live.

Therefore, the coordinator determined when *Developing the initial idea* that providing opportunities for youth to engage with nature would be the focal point of the project.

For the YER coordinator, this subcategory was also guided by her belief and experience that engagement of youth in the project is better facilitated when a Restorative Justice philosophy, with its focus on developing partnerships and not on punishment, is followed. A community member interviewed explains the restorative justice philosophy of participating adults in the YER project:

All we can do is give guidance... we don't tell [youth] to go somewhere. It really is for the youth to decide. It's not about punishment. It's about education and learning; really modeling different things and learning different skills. Learning basic skills such as turning up at a set time when they are supposed to. I really like the restorative; it has to be a mutually win/win situation.

The coordinator applied a restorative justice philosophy to the project by emphasizing education and not punishment, providing youth with boundaries and with the tools to live within them, giving youth the choice to participate or not, as well as assisting them to learn from their mistakes.

For the SIL project, their philosophy of how to engage and support is guided by the principles of their parent organization. In general, these principles focus on believing in and assisting people to reach their potential as responsible citizens. To reach their potential, people are assisted to resolve conflicts and develop healthy relationships in the

community and with the law. They are supported to live in a peaceful and safe environment. In addition, each person seeking assistance is treated with respect, compassion, and fairness. Guided by these principles, the approach, and the project, is structured to assist youth in reaching their potential as responsible citizens. The commitment of the staff in assisting youth to reach their potential is clearly shown in the following quotation from a staff member: "We don't give up easily. We don't give up. We don't write off kids".

To assist a youth to reach his or her potential, SIL develops a holistic service plan for each young person. This requires the staff to adapt the service plan to account for the changing needs of youth. The following comment is an example of how staff member adapted the service plan to meet the needs of a youth:

With one youth we are doing something different. We're paying a part of the phone or the hydro. We were looking at weaning her off support but something else came up in her life. Suddenly we had to [adapt the service plan]... We still have the same philosophy throughout the program but we talk about what that youth needs and we change it [the service plan]. And then we will go back to that [service plan] when she gets stabilized.

Integral to SIL and YER philosophies of how to engage and support, is exposing them to new learning environments and helping them to create new connections in the community. SIL and YER assume that youth generate a greater understanding and awareness about themselves and their community when they are exposed to environments and people outside their usual experience. As a result, when *Developing the initial idea* the focus was on providing youth with an opportunity to be exposed to new environments.

This subcategory is influenced by the philosophy of the staff about how best to support and engage youth to be motivated to make positive change. It is the previous

experiences, passions, philosophies and background of the staff that make an impact on how the initial idea develops. For example, in the YER project it is the coordinator's deep commitment and previous experiences of interacting with nature that determines how the process is shaped. As a result of having previous positive experiences interacting with nature and working with youth, the coordinator comes to believe in the importance of having young persons come into relationship with the environment. In this example, the coordinator comments on how her relationship with the environment was a "big factor" in *Developing the initial idea*:

I know how important it is to have a relationship with the natural world and how it can help you. I think that the youth want that too. We all want that. So that was the big factor for me.

SIL believes that it is in providing youth with safe and stable accommodation that enables them to become motivated to make positive change. The staff members make the assumption that instability caused by difficult living conditions impedes a youth's ability to examine and consider healthier living options. As a result, youth are provided with apartments in an attempt to create more stability in their lives.

Aligning the structure with supports required is the second subcategory in **FIGURING IT OUT**. In this process the supports required to assist youth are identified and integrated into the developing project structure. The strategies used to do this are: *Identifying the supports required*, *Developing project goals* and *Connecting youth with support*.

Both SIL and YER recognize that youth face significant challenges in crucial aspects of their life such as school, family, living situation, and relationships with adults. The result is that young people lack basic skills, knowledge and adequate support to live

and operate successfully in society. It is a struggle for most youth to live within societal boundaries and rules, but even more of a challenge for those youth who experience unstable living conditions as a result of their family or financial situation. These young persons frequently have difficulty interacting with adults and lack the skills to make positive choices.

The staff used various strategies to *identify the support required* to assist youth to overcome current challenges in their lives. For example, SIL conducted a needs assessment that determined youth were unable to find affordable housing in the community. Although staff had supported youth in their efforts to live independently in the community, past projects had not included a housing component. As a result of *identifying required support*, finding youth affordable housing became a focal point for a new project. In the following quotation a member of the SIL staff explains how SIL now meets the housing needs of youth:

We didn't have any housing options before. So the youth could go and get an apartment and we would [support them] but they would [be responsible for finding housing]. We might help them by taking them to apartments. Now we actually rent these apartments...we sublet to the youth.

By interacting with youth, staff members were able to identify required supports. For example, a requirement of the SIL project was for staff to meet youth in their apartments. This enabled the staff to observe the living conditions of the youth participating in the project. A staff member commented on what she and her team observed:

[Meeting] with them in the apartment we see that they have no food, that they're having a hard time keeping [the apartment] clean. Sometime the kids haven't been modeled how to clean the place or how to keep things organized

Meeting youth in their apartments provided staff with the opportunity to observe the challenges faced by youth and to *identify the support required* to assist them in living independently. Not having interviewed the youth it is unclear to me how youth respond to the presence of staff in their apartment. There is a general sense from the comments made by the staff, however, that the presence is seen as supportive and not intrusive. It would have been helpful to verify this with the youth.

For YER, the coordinator and participating community members determined, through personal observations, that support was required for youth from agencies outside government social services. It was noticed that youth and families engaged with the project often had a long history of using government social services. Offering youth the opportunity to create new relationships and experiences with agencies and networks outside the government social services system provided them with the opportunity to start making change in a fresh, new environment.

Identifying support also required staff to determine the type of assistance needed. For YER, the coordinator took care in determining the appropriate time commitment required to make a positive impact on youth. Extensive discussions with people and organizations in the community facilitated making this decision. The fear was that providing too much time for youth to participate might hinder their ability or willingness to complete the process. If too little time was provided, the fear was that no positive impact would be made. The confusion around determining the appropriate time commitment to meet the needs of youth is evident in the following quotation:

I also think a 20 hour [time commitment] is kind of a minimum. The [time commitment] should maybe [even] be extended a bit. [At the] same time, to try and get a 20-hour [time] commitment out of kid like that is phenomenal.

After much thought, the coordinator decided that a positive impact could be made in twenty hours without losing the youth's interest in participating.

To meet the goals of both projects and to ensure the positive changes in the lives of youth, staff determined that connections needed to be made with people and organizations in the community that can provide the required support or resources. Making these connections is often a challenge. Amongst other obligations, people and organizations in the community may not be willing to make it a priority to support youth. The YER coordinator connected with an organization that did not make working with youth a priority and gives the following example:

One time, [the representative of the organization] wasn't there when he said he was going to be there. He forgot. There was another time when no one was there. [I connected with another person in the organization] willing to work with me and he ended up not being there. I'm trying to teach kids responsibility and it wasn't working [teaching them about being responsible]. They weren't very good role models for the kids. One day, there was a big company [visiting with the organization] and [the big company and the organization] walked ahead of us and wouldn't wait for us. It wasn't very respectful.

Although the opportunity provided by the organization contributed to youth gaining knowledge and skills about working with the environment, the coordinator felt that other social skills such as, being responsible and respectful were not being reinforced. A decision was made by the coordinator to end the relationship with this organization in favour of creating connections with organizations that share similar philosophies and ideas of working with youth.

By *Developing project goals* the staff aligned the support required with the developing project structure. This helped to ensure that youth participating in the project were able to obtain the support required to make change. For example, the YER developed project goals that support a young person to: a) build healthy community

relationships, b) gain valued work experience, c) improve knowledge of Ecological Restoration, d) increase social skills development, and e) enhance communication skills (Kotilla 2006). These goals target areas that support youth in making positive changes in their lives.

Sharing similar philosophies and ideas with community members and organizations facilitates *Connecting youth with required supports* and resources. For YER, it was the project coordinator's passion and her experience of working with an environmental organization that assisted her in encouraging environmental organizations to participate in the project. As a result, opportunities were provided by the environmental organizations for youth to volunteer for a number of interesting projects.

The third subcategory is *Discover what works*. In this process, *accessing experts learning* and *through experience* assists staff to further identify and integrate the required supports into the project. This can happen at any stage during the project.

Accessing experts in the community provides the staff with the information required to develop a project structure that makes the appropriate support available to youth. For YER, the coordinator had significant experience in planning for the environmental aspects of her project. A deep understanding of planning for the social aspects of working with youth was also required but was not necessarily a strength of the coordinator, as evidenced in her comment: "I know the environmental stuff. I didn't know the social stuff as much". To gain the social perspective, the coordinator had discussions with experts in the community who had significant experience working with this population group. As explained by the coordinator, a probation officer was especially helpful in contributing valuable information to the developing project structure:

I met with [people and organizations in the community], talked with them on the phone and asked them for ideas. Like the probation officer he gave me the idea of [providing youth with a] certificate, crest and 50 [dollars] [for participating]. He was great.

For SIL, the staff sought advice from people and organizations outside the community that had previously implemented a SIL project. They gathered advice about the various methods and strategies of developing a project structure that provides youth with the support required.

Once implementation of the project began, the staff began *learning by experience*. They shifted from formulating educated assumptions of what works to being grounded in what works for youth in practice. For example, in the YER project proposal, youth were required to make an oral presentation about their experience in the project. At first, the coordinator felt overwhelmed by the amount of work required to implement this aspect of the project proposal. In time, however, the coordinator realized how much the oral presentation contributed to youth gaining a sense of accomplishment. The coordinator commented:

The oral presentations were really valuable. [The oral presentations] are sometimes hard to organize and I almost gave up on that piece at the beginning. I thought 'why did I agree to do them'. But you know when [the youth] loosened up... and they're sharing their experiences with other people...and they are awarded, they are honoured, [youth feel] acknowledged...that's a pretty important piece.

Influencing *Discovering what works* is the willingness of the wider community to contribute information. The more willing the community is to contribute information the easier it is for the staff to discover what works. For example, the experience of various community organizations that had attempted similar projects enabled SIL to gain a better understanding of how to develop the project structure to best support youth. In the SIL

process, staff connected with and conducted research about supported independent living projects that had been attempted in similar communities. Some communities contacted by the SIL staff were hesitant to share information, as evidenced by this comment made by a member of the staff, “Last summer, talking to all kind of different agencies, some people were very open to giving information and some were closed”. Community organizations open to sharing information helped SIL to better understand how to develop the project structure to meet the needs of youth. A member of the staff commented:

There was one fellow who I had found a reference [for]...he was great about sending all kinds of stuff. He actually sent us something that served as the basis for our contract agreement for the kids and he volunteered to come up here talk to us if we wanted.

Figuring it out – Summary

FIGURING IT OUT, the first category in the process of **SUPPORTING TRANSFORMATION**, is a process in which the project structure is continuously being evolved to better support a young person to engage in the project and thus achieve positive outcomes such as developing passion to pursue a particular area of interest. For example, a staff member comments: “We are always creating and doing different things. We are always in a constant state of change and being adaptive. Change is the norm.” Important to supporting youth to achieve positive outcomes is the incorporation of philosophies and experiences of the staff that foster the empowerment of youth. Furthermore, the participation of the community in this process depends on their willingness to collaborate.

The non-linear and the continuously changing processes that characterize **FIGURING IT OUT** are: *Developing the initial idea*, *Aligning the structure with the support required*, and *Discovering what works*. Staff *Develop the initial idea* based on

their own philosophies and ideas of what works for youth. At the same time that the initial idea is being developed, staff members seek advice and learn by experience in the subcategory of *Discovering what works*. As the staff *Discover what works*, this knowledge is integrated into the developing project structure and at the same time, assists in *Aligning the structure with the support required*. **FIGURING IT OUT** is the process by which the project structure is developed and implemented to encourage the engagement of youth and community in the process. The next category in the process **CREATING WILLINGNESS TO ENGAGE** is facilitated by staff developing and implementing a project structure that encourages the engagement of youth in the project.

Creating Willingness to Engage

The second major category **CREATING WILLINGNESS TO ENGAGE** is the process through which young persons are encouraged by the staff to engage in the project. This happens when a staff member assists a young person to: a) feel secure and respected in the project and with the participating adults and, b) be interested in participating in the project.

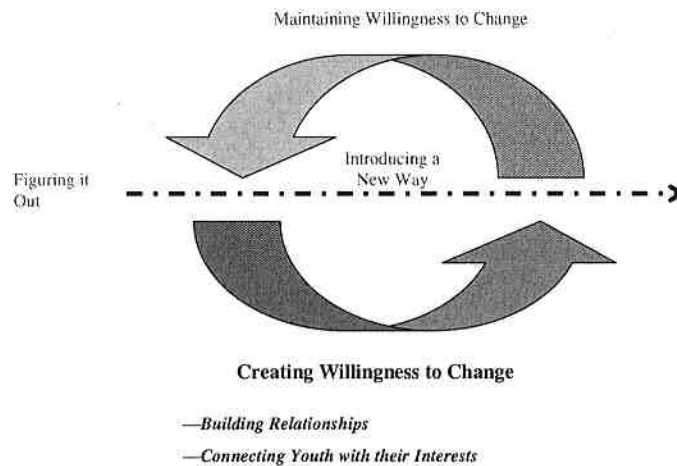


Figure 4 – Creating Willingness to Engage

The impact of **CREATING WILLINGNESS TO ENGAGE** is that young persons are encouraged to engage in a project that supports them to interact in relationships and to interact with their surroundings in a healthy way. This category is dependent on first **FIGURING OUT** a project that is designed to encourage young persons to participate and to be supported when engaging in new relationships. This category is characterized by *Building relationships with youth* and *Connecting youth with their interest*.

Table 3 – Creating Willingness to Engage: An overview of the category

CREATING WILLINGNESS TO ENGAGE		
Second Level Categories	Third Level Categories	Influencing Factors and Consequences
Building relationships	<u>Strategies</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Respecting youth ➤ Spending time with youth 	<u>Influencing Factors</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Motivation of youth to participate ➤ Past experiences of

Connecting youth with their interests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Presenting youth with options ➤ Allowing youth to decide ➤ Identifying their interests 	<p>young people with adults in their families or in their communities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Background and experiences of the project staff ➤ Personalities of the staff and participating adults ➤ Youth believing they will benefit from participating in the project <p><u>Consequences</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Youth feel respected and secure participating in the project ➤ Youth are interested in participating in the project ➤ Youth are open and willing to participate in the project
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CREATING WILLINGNESS TO ENGAGE may be something that happens immediately; youth are exposed to the environment and immediately begin to engage with it. A participating community member provides an example of immediate change in a young person's behaviour when involved in the YER project:

He went from being belligerent and questioning [everything] with body language [that indicated his lack of interest in participating] to being excited and interested...[He was] asking intelligent questions about the watershed, the fish and why the insects were important to the fish.

Or the engagement can happen more slowly; young persons may have to be exposed to various situations or experiences in the project before they are compelled to engage.

Finally, some youth do not become inspired to engage in the project at all. However, the

experience of being supported to interact with the environment in a healthy way may trigger future changes to their lifestyle.

This category is influenced by the motivation of youth to participate. Ultimately it is the decision of the young person to engage that makes the difference. However, several factors can influence their motivation to engage in the project. According to adults involved in the YER and SIL projects, youth will be more likely to want to change when they: a) need assistance, b) lack alternative options and, c) have previously tried unsuccessfully to overcome challenges without support and have failed. In addition, the motivation to change is influenced by a young person becoming mature over a period of time. The consequence is a young person having a better understanding of who they are and what they need. If the young person perceives that her or his needs can be met by participating in the project, the desire to engage will increase. Adults interviewed indicated that change will be less desirable for a young person who is: a) not ready to adopt a healthy lifestyle, b) not open to receiving support, c) not willing to leave their unhealthy environment, d) not willing to follow guidelines set out by the staff or, e) dealing with multiple issues. Furthermore, a young person whose experience with adults has been negative, may not feel safe connecting with adults to make positive changes. For example, if trust is broken with an adult participating in the project, a young person may decide to disassociate him or herself from the project altogether. Certain young people who do not desire change can be encouraged by the staff and participating adults to engage. The ones who are immersed in a complex cycle of self-destruction may be inaccessible to the staff or participating adults. Although staff members make every attempt to engage these youth, there is a general agreement among them that the project

will have a limited impact until there has been a negative or positive change in a young person's situation, and they are then ready to make positive changes.

The first subcategory is *Building relationships with youth*. This involves encouraging a young person to be open to new ideas and experiences. This happens by a young person trusting the staff, people and organizations participating in the project. By building trust with the staff, a young person will begin to feel safe and secure in their relationships in the project. The strategies used by staff are: *respecting youth* and *spending time with youth*.

Relationships develop when staff members cultivate trust by *respecting youth*. This happens by staff adopting a respectful attitude when interacting with youth. As we see in the following quotation, it is the belief of the YER coordinator that young persons benefit from being treated with respect:

Any respect that can be shown him, he would learn more from that. He would benefit more from [being respected] than he would from [someone saying], 'oh you're a little jerk, you're going to get suspended'.

To assume a respectful attitude, a non-judgemental approach is required. The following quotation makes clear the YER coordinator's natural ability to ensure a non-judgemental attitude:

Now what [the coordinator] has in particular is an incredibly non-judgemental attitude and philosophy. She makes no judgements about people at all; it's just easy for her.

And the next quotation shows how the coordinator perceives that when interacting with a young person participating in the project she achieves a non-judgemental attitude: "I valued him for who he was and where he was at this point in his life rather than judging him".

By being accepted for who they are and what they can accomplish, young persons begin to trust they will be treated in a respectful way when engaged in a project. The young person develops confidence in the staff and they perceive themselves to be welcome by the staff and accepted in the project. Here is a young person commenting on his experience of participating in the project: "There were lots of good people and they made you feel welcome...People don't judge you".

To build trust, staff members adopt a respectful approach when interacting with young persons. Reaching out to a young person in a respectful way requires that staff provide instruction and use clear and simple language. In this instance, a participating adult comments on the ability of the YER coordinator to clearly communicate information: "[the coordinator] is able to communicate these things in a non-academic way, a real hands on type of way". To build trust youth are not made to feel incompetent by being asked difficult or tricky questions by the staff.

As well as having a natural ability to communicate with young persons, the YER coordinator draws on her mediation skills to enable her to communicate and listen to a young person effectively. Communicating information in a way that makes it easy to understand not only preserves the dignity of a young person but enables that youth to gain a better grasp on how to engage in the project as well.

Staff who are able to decipher the needs of a young person, have the ability to sense when they need to talk or when they need to be listened to and when the young person needs to be given space to decide whether to engage in a project. The following example shows how the YER coordinator provided space for a young person to open up about his family:

We just started talking about what it's like with his family. I just let him talk and used communication skills to get him to continue talking about his family for 20 minutes.

Respecting the ways in which a young person wants to engage in the project builds trust.

A positive experience with staff and participating adults will encourage a young person to trust that the same experience is possible in the future. Building this trust, however, takes time. This is evident in the comments made by a member of the staff, "I think there are a lot of kids that it takes them a long time to see that you do feel respectful towards them".

An incidental consequence of staff being respectful towards a young person is that the youth, in turn, will respect the people and the surroundings with whom and which they decide to engage. In this example, the YER coordinator deduced that the act of respecting a young person further ensures that the environment will be respected once their participation in the project is complete: "I don't think any of the kids I worked with have gone back and caused vandalism because they are treated respectfully".

On the other hand, there can be negative consequences if a young person is not respected. If a young person feels the staff or participating adults are not respecting them, they may react by putting themselves at a higher social or health risk than they were previously. The following comment made by a member of the staff underscores this point, "If they're not respected they may come [anyway] because they feel they have no other choice [or they] may put themselves at a higher risk than [seek assistance]".

Another member of the staff describes the reason for a young person's resistance to building a relationship with someone who does not respect them:

Lots of times the relationship of youth with each other and most likely their parents...[has] not been a very respectful relationship. They don't need another disrespectful relationship.

It is only the staff and participating adults adopting a respectful attitude and approach to interacting with a young person that ensures that they will be willing to engage in future relationships.

Building a relationship with youth requires that trust be developed by the staff and participating adults *spending time* with them. For this to happen, the staff makes certain that opportunities are created to interact with that young person. It is essential that during the period of **FIGURING IT OUT**, ample opportunities be provided for staff to interact with a young person. The project structure should enable this to happen. The YER project is structured to ensure that a young person spends time with the coordinator by providing opportunities for the two of them to volunteer on an ecological restoration project together. The consequence of *spending time* together is that the staff and young persons have the opportunity and the time to develop trusting relationships. They do this by talking, listening and learning from each other as they go about the project.

In addition to developing trusting relationships, by *spending time* together a young person will often begin to feel more safe and secure. This sense of security arises as the youth takes positive steps while engaging in the project. For example, to obtain the project goal of supporting a young person to live independently, the SIL staff member visits a young person regularly. During these visits, a young person is supported in their efforts to find an apartment, budget for groceries and conduct job searches. A member of the staff describes this process:

So I work with the kids that are in the program. I try and work with them really closely. It could be with finding the apartment, getting it all set up, grocery shopping, budgeting, or looking for work.

By working closely together, a young person develops the sense that they will be supported as they live independently. The consequence is a young person perceives that a supportive environment is there for them to make positive changes and so they decide to engage in the project.

The benefit of *spending time* with a young person is that the staff will be better able to understand how to engage them in the project. By *spending time* with a young person, the staff makes observations about what is required and as trust develops, a young person is often more willing to be open with staff about what they need. In obtaining this information from the youth the staff members are able to work more intensively with a young person and to target their specific needs. It also enables the staff to gain a better understanding of the issues faced by the youth. By meeting with them regularly, the SIL staff share in both the positive and negative aspects of a young person's life. This provides staff with a greater understanding of a young person's personality as well as their needs. This assists them to better understand how to build relationships with a young person and determine what is required to engage them in the project.

Building relationships is influenced by the past experience of young people with adults in their families or in their communities. Young people often come from unstable environments in which they have had negative experiences with adults. As a result of these experiences, trusting adults can be a difficult process. On the other hand, if these past experiences with adults have been positive it will encourage youth to build relationships with adults. The ability to build trusting relationships in a project is dependent on ensuring that when time is spent together the experience is a positive one.

This subcategory is also influenced by the background and experiences of the staff. Adults involved in bureaucratic environments, such as government social services, are often restricted by the rules and regulations that guide their work environment. The strict and often unbending bureaucratic environment may restrict the ability of adults to be flexible and adaptable when it comes to supporting a young person. The consequence is a young person being directed to participate in activities and relationships whether or not they meet their needs. Adults with experience outside of the government social services and not restricted by bureaucratic rules and regulations may be better equipped to establish relationships with young people. This sentiment amongst staff is evident in the following quotation:

[Building a relationship with youth] requires someone that is outside of that system [government social services]. [That] wants to be outside of the systems. [That] has the adaptable and easy going, natural type of personality...I think the key to it is to have people outside of the bureaucratic system. The entire [project] takes the [young person] out of the grind and takes them to a completely different place. – *Participating adult*

Creating opportunities for a young person to engage in relationships with people outside of their everyday experience can encourage them willingly to be supported to make positive change. In addition, it provides them with the opportunity to start afresh by developing relationships without previous history being a factor.

The second set of influences on *Building relationships with youth* is the personalities of the staff and participating adults. The most important factor to engaging successfully with youth in relationships is the ability of the coordinators, the staff, and the people in the community involved with the project to identify with and relate to youth. Certain characteristics encourage a young person to build a relationship with the staff or adults participating in the project. Some of these include having: a sense of humour, an

easygoing attitude, a patient disposition, and an understanding of the issues with which a young person is struggling. The following quotation describes the qualities that the YER coordinator possesses that encourage a young person to build a relationship:

What does [the coordinator] have going for her that these kids specifically warmed up to? Well she jokes a lot and she finds humour in stuff and kids. She is very gentle. In a lot of ways [the coordinator] is different, she a very different kind of person than most people.

In addition to the characteristics described above, the body language of the staff and adults participating in the project, such as being quick to smile, can influence how safe and secure a young person feels when approaching and interacting with them.

The second subcategory of **CREATING WILLINGNESS TO ENGAGE** is *Connecting youth with their interest*. This is the process in which the staff encourages youth to engage in the project by providing them with the opportunity to explore and develop a passion in new or existing areas of interest. This staff member provided an example of this, "It's just trying to find anything that they have had a positive experience in and trying to help them connect in that way with what they are passionate about". The strategies identified in this subcategory are *presenting youth with options, allowing youth to decide* and *identifying their interests*.

The method used to present youth with options is dependent on who is approaching the young person and when. Whereas many community organizations or government social services require youth to participate in a particular project, other groups provide youth with several different options and encourage them to get involved in the project they deem the most interesting. A member of a community organization that refers youth to the YER project describes the process of providing a young person with various options in the community:

We don't tell [a young person] to go somewhere. It really is for the youth to decide that [the YER project] might be a good project for them to participate in... We have a list of options and [YER] is one of them. [The coordinator] wrote a nice little introduction and put a photograph of a stream. Basically, I put a short synopsis of what each placement is about, what they can expect to do and it's for them to decide whether that's an experience they want to have.

It is by presenting a young person with options and *allowing them to decide* that can compel them to participate in the project. A community volunteer describes the importance of providing youth with options and enabling them to decide:

It's like your education. If you are going to pay for it, are you going to attend classes? I think so. But if it's all paid for, well [a young person may say] 'I don't feel like it this morning' [and] 'It doesn't matter what marks I get'... I think it's about ownership. [It is about] empowering the person to make [his or her] own decision. The decision is not being made for them... they decide well I would like to do this. I think [youth develop a sense of] ownership. 'Yeah we really want to do this'. 'We really want to learn because it's for us now'. [There is a change] from being told what to do to wanting to do it. There is a vested interest there.

To develop the interest of a young person in participating in the project, the staff engages them in a conversation to *identify their interest* and to determine how best to connect them with appropriate organizations in the community. For example, if a young person is concerned about gaining employment, the SIL project offers courses focused on developing job readiness and linking them with work placements in the community. The consequence is that a young person becomes excited and passionate about engaging and developing the necessary skills to pursue an area of interest. The following comments by an adult participant reflect the positive impact of young persons developing a passion in a particular area:

Something turned on in him. It was an amazing experience. I think that encapsulates a lot of what I saw happen with those kids.

Her goal initially was to work in the office but she found [by working in other areas] that she has a skill for woodworking. So she is helping out more in the

woodworking area. [Now] she is thinking of going to school in that area because she is quite gifted.

Connecting youth with their interest is influenced by the ability of the staff to *Build relationships with youth*. It is by developing relationships built on trust that the staff can better identify the needs of a young person and connect them with the appropriate community organizations, and environments to engage with.

The subcategory of *Connecting youth with their interest* is also influenced by a young person believing they will benefit from participating in the project. A member of the staff described this as obtaining “buy-in”. Without “buy-in”, the interest of a young person in being supported to make positive change diminishes. The staff member describes “buy-in” this way:

A big [obstacle to ensuring positive changes in a young person] would be if [a young person did] not believe in the program. [The ability of the staff to] really be able to keep their hopes up [requires the young person buys into the project]. [They need to believe] that they can [make positive changes]. That if they allow support in their life and are willing...to make some changes [that positive change is possible]. Because some of these kids have some pretty high-risk lifestyles and [do not have] a really supportive up bringing...[so there] is a real need for them to buy into the program.

Connecting youth with their interests by *presenting them with options, allowing them to decide* and *identifying their needs* facilitates staff and participating adults to encourage a young person to buy into the project.

Creating willingness to engage – Summary

CREATING WILLINGNESS TO ENGAGE is the second major category in the basic social process of **SUPPORTING TRANSFORMATION**. This is the category in which staff members work closely with young persons to encourage them to become willing to engage. This happens by ensuring the youth feel respected and secure engaging

in the project as well as developing their interest in participating. **CREATING WILLINGNESS TO ENGAGE** can be encouraged at any stage of the project but is entirely dependent on a young person making the decision to engage.

This category is characterized by: *Building relationships with youth* and *Connecting youth with their interests*. *Respecting and spending time* assists a young person to trust the staff. This enables a young person to feel safe and secure enough to take the risk of engaging in the project. However, **CREATING WILLINGNESS TO ENGAGE** is not possible unless a young person becomes interested or believes they will benefit from participating in the project. A member of the staff described this as obtaining “buy-in”. **CREATING WILLINGNESS TO ENGAGE** must be an ongoing process. In other words, a young person who has previously tried the project but decided to quit must still be encouraged to engage in it again. The ability of adults to create “buy-in” is enhanced by *presenting them (youth) with options, allowing them to decide* and *identifying their needs*. The impact of this category is a young person being motivated to interact in relationships and with their surroundings in a new way by being supported by the staff to participate in the project. This next category is **INTRODUCING A NEW WAY**. By **CREATING WILLINGNESS TO ENGAGE** staff are better able to support a young person to interact in relationships and with their surroundings in a healthy new way.

Introducing a New Way

The third main category of the basic social process is **INTRODUCING A NEW WAY**. This is the process through which the staff members assist a young person to enhance their ability to make positive changes.

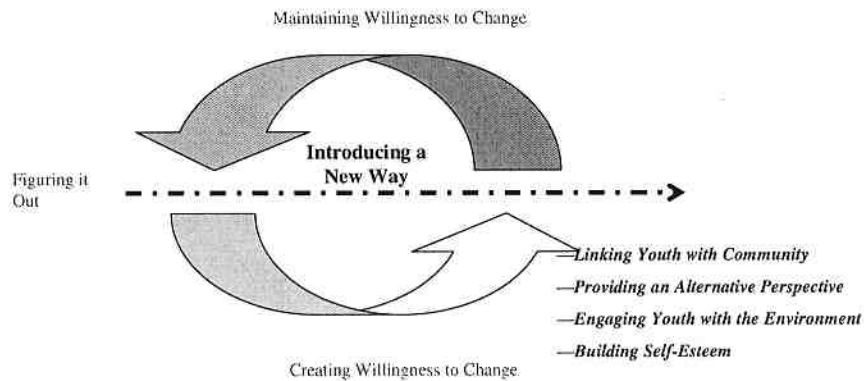


Figure 5 – Introducing a New Way

In this example, a staff member describes her experience of supporting a young woman to successfully live independently in an apartment:

There was a time when she phoned up, particularly in the beginning, [asking] ‘is this normal?’ [and] ‘Is this what happens?’ And I’d say, ‘you might want to look at doing this’ or ‘maybe try doing something else’.

In **INTRODUCING A NEW WAY**, the staff member enhances the ability of a young person to make positive changes by: a) assisting them to connect with people in the community who are able to support them, b) exposing them to various opinions and perspectives, c) enabling them to develop the skills required to interact successfully with the environment, and d) building their self confidence to take action. As a result, the young person has the support and tools required to make positive changes. The process is characterized by: *Linking youth with community, Providing an alternative perspective, Engaging youth with the environment, and Building Self-esteem.*

Table 4 – Introducing a New Way: An overview of the category

INTRODUCING A NEW WAY		
Second Level Categories	Third Level Categories	Influencing Factors and Consequences
Linking youth with community Providing an alternative perspective	<u>Strategies</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Overcoming barriers to access ➤ Engaging youth in the community ➤ Engaging youth in conversation ➤ Role-modeling different perspectives 	<u>Influencing Factors</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Willingness of the community to participate ➤ Skills and behaviours of the staff and participating adults
Engaging youth with the environment Building self-esteem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Explaining and reinforcing expectations and boundaries ➤ Providing youth with opportunities to take independent action ➤ Providing Encouragement ➤ Ensuring completion of the process 	<u>Consequences</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Youth connect with people in the community who are able to support them ➤ Youth are exposed to various options and perspectives ➤ Youth are provided with the opportunity to develop the skills required to interact successfully with the environment ➤ Youth develop the self confidence to take action independent of the project staff

As a result of **CREATING WILLINGNESS TO ENGAGE**, a young person is encouraged to engage in a project that supports them to make positive changes in their lives. The openness and willingness of a young person to engage facilitates the task of

staff **INTRODUCING A NEW WAY**. This is evident in the comments expressed by a participating adult:

In my experience in life there is always a helping hand if you are open to it. There will always be a mentor. There will always be someone who will put out [his or her] hand, somebody who can help you.

If willingness to engage has not been created, a young person may not be open to receiving support from the staff member or be ready to make positive changes.

Successfully **INTRODUCING A NEW WAY** is dependent on first **CREATING WILLINGNESS TO ENGAGE**.

The first subcategory of **INTRODUCING A NEW WAY** is *Linking youth with community*. This process occurs by connecting young persons with people or organizations in the community who can support them to make positive changes.

Connecting youth with people or organizations in the community enhances the ability of a young person to make positive changes by providing them with ongoing assistance in overcoming challenges and making decisions once their participation in the project is completed. Without ongoing support, the ability of a young person to make positive changes will be temporary. A participating community member comments:

For some [young people] they temporarily learn some skills. But if there isn't that other support network and community there for them, they go back to their old ways.

Crucial to this process is the need to connect a young person with people and organizations in the community who they can trust and respect. The following quotation underscores this point:

Sometimes it's a parent. Sometimes it's a friend. Sometimes it can be a counsellor. Sometimes it can be a church leader or a social worker or maybe just be a jolly good friend. Somebody [a young person] really respects and trusts. [A person that] has always been there for [them].

Also necessary is the need to connect a young person with an individual in the community who cares about their well-being. A participating adult in the following quotation illustrates the type of person required:

[A young person needs] somebody who knows them well enough to care to say, 'OK things are going tough. Not going right'. Someone who either [has] good communication [skills] or a good relationship [with the young person], somebody who cares".

It is the responsibility of the staff to link a young person with people and organizations in the community. To accomplish this task, however, a young person must first trust and respect the staff member attempting to connect them. This is facilitated during the previously described subcategory *Building relationships with youth*. Once trust and respect is gained, the staff members are better able to link a young person with people and organizations in the community. This happens by: *overcoming barriers to access and engaging youth with the community*.

Barriers that hinder the ability of a young person to gain access to support exist in the community. *Overcoming these barriers to access* requires that the obstacles be identified and support provided to surmount them. Staff members identify these barriers by: learning from past experiences, making observations when interacting with a young person and, being approached by a young person with concerns. In one instances, a staff member was able to identify that fear was barring a young person from accessing support in the community:

I kept saying, 'but Julie you still have to look for other work because [your current employment will] go [only] until the end of August'. I recommended [an employment centre] and she said, 'oh yeah I'll do that'. She never did. I was getting frustrated. Finally I said let's go over there [together]. So I took her [to the employment centre] and as we were walking to the door she said, 'I have never

been here, I'm nervous'. That's what was preventing her [from accessing the services at the employment centre].

Once the barriers are identified, support is provided to the young person to overcome those barriers. The following quotation describes how a member of the staff encouraged a young person to solve an academic issue by supporting her need to connect with her teacher:

She had a chance of passing [but] figuring out what would she need to do in order to pass wasn't something that she was really comfortable with. But she did [approach the teacher] when I agreed to go with her.

By being assisted to overcome obstacles, this young person was provided with the opportunity to learn how to approach situations in order to achieve positive outcomes. An example is provided by the willingness of a staff member to accompany the young person to an employment centre: "Once we got her in the door, she had her resume updated and she ended up getting herself a job at Dairy Queen."

Engaging youth and community in the project serves to join them together even more. This happens when the staff member provides an opportunity for a young person to interact with people and organizations in the community. For example, in the YER project, young persons and people in the community are encouraged to volunteer on ecological restoration projects together. In the SIL project, young people are placed in apartments where they are required to interact with landlords on a daily basis. By spending time interacting together on these projects, trust and respect develops between a young person and people in the community. Assumptions previously made about each other are overcome. A young person gains a greater sense of the positive impact that people working cooperatively can have in their communities. A youth participant in the YER project describes this:

I thought that it was neat seeing all these people working on their own time together, doing it by their own choice. They weren't doing it for themselves they were doing it for the community's environment. All the volunteers got along because they were all doing the work for the same reason; they were working together on the same thing.

Often, however, young persons do not have the confidence or experience to engage with an adult in the community. This can hinder their ability to effectively interact and communicate with adults participating in the project. The staff provide reassurance and support to the young person when engaging with the community, as we see in the following quotation from a staff member: “[We support the young person by] providing the information with the landlord’s phone number and encouraging her to phone if she's not comfortable”. This enables them to build the confidence required to interact with people in the community. The following quotation from a staff member makes this clear: “She was very anxious at the beginning to talk to the [landlord] but she's quite comfortable [now] and tells him this or that's wrong”.

The people and organizations from the community who are selected to engage with a young person are flexible, adaptable, willing to work closely with a young person and are also able to provide them with the space to make and learn from their mistakes. For example, the SIL staff members connect young people with a *youth friendly-landlord*. A staff member provides an example of a youth friendly-landlord:

He is fairly approachable. [The young person] said at one point ‘well what if he wants to come in my place at night’. I said ‘why would he do that’. He certainly didn't. He was professional.

Establishing adults in the project who are willing to engage with a young person usually leads to positive relationships developing. The outcome is a young person gaining the

sense that someone cares about his or her well-being and is willing to be supportive if their situation changes. This is evident in the following quotation:

There is a huge change. Things have happened to her still but at least she has a home and person [looking out for her]. The landlord is concerned about her. There's a lot of caring.

Engaging with one person in the community can lead a young person to gain skills in a particular area or to connect with other community members willing to support her or him. A staff member illustrates this point:

[The young person] branched off. She is now babysitting this girl's sister's children. She formed a relationship with the girl's mom who is now teaching her to do this and that in a store that she works in. And she has developed a relationship with the people who own the store. And she's branching out to maybe more positive relationships than she's had in the past.

It can also positively change the relationship between a young person and people in the community. Another staff member describes this:

The youth learn to trust the community members more and the community members learn to trust the youth more. They see that they are not [like] some kid they read about in the newspaper that pull these horrific crimes. I think it humanizes it for both the youth and the community members.

The hope of the staff is that by developing relationships, a young person and people in the community will be able to connect with each other in the future without the staff member being required to serve as the link.

Linking youth with community is influenced by the willingness of the community to participate. This would not be possible if people in the community are unwilling to connect and engage with young people. Staff members are often faced with reluctance of the community to engage in projects involving youth. The staff members expressed two primary reasons for this reluctance: first, the previous direct negative

experiences of community members with youth, and second, the negative assumptions made about youth in the community. One project leader explained her experience of attempting to engage community members in the project, "So we went to do a presentation and the majority of landlords were not interested because so many of them had damage to their apartments [from previous youth renters]".

To overcome this reluctance in the community to connect and engage with a young person in the project, staff provide reassurance to the people in the community that the experience will be positive. A staff member explains:

[We let] them know that we're going to be supportive - that we are going to be involved, that we will be in the apartment and that we won't accept certain behaviours and actions in the apartment and that we will ask the kids to leave if it becomes a problem.

In addition, the act of reassuring people in the community requires that the staff and parent organization have a good reputation. The community is more likely to trust that the experience will be positive if the project is part of an established and trusted organization or if the community has already established a trusting relationship with those individuals directly involved in directing and organizing the project. If the project begins to develop a positive track record and is able to demonstrate the positive impacts that can occur when youth partner with their communities, then members of the community may be more inclined to engage.

It will provide further reassurance, if potential participating community members are involved in the selection of the youth to be involved in the project. In the SIL process, landlords are first introduced to their potential renters before a more permanent

agreement is made. The impact of these face-to-face meetings is described by one of the project leaders:

We take youth out to find apartments and we can engage [them] in conversations with individuals [in the community] and [these] individuals are more likely to establish a relationship [with a young person once they have met them].

Meeting and getting to know the youth on a personal level helps to break down some of the fear and assumptions that may be associated with providing a young person with housing.

Overcoming reluctance in the community also requires that the perceived risk involved in participating with young persons be reduced. Some community organizations and members with limited budgets and support are simply not able to take on added responsibility. They fear that interaction with young persons will further contribute to their already overstretched schedules. One community member describes his concern: "Unfortunately people in my position who have perhaps some volunteer opportunities, we can't really baby-sit." And: "Sometimes it might...take some coaxing, some transportation, to get those kids there and the person in my position doesn't have the time to do that."

To ensure that no added burden is placed on the community organization, youth are supported and supervised by the staff. In the YER project, youth are also encouraged to volunteer during the peak seasons when extra hands are required. This creates a situation in which community organizations can usually benefit from the participation of a young person in their programs. A participating adult describes how his organization benefits from working with volunteers on the project:

There is a natural sustainability in terms of all of us working with volunteers. That's how we get our work done in this program. This gives us the opportunity of more volunteers.

Being able to rent directly to the organization and not the youth themselves reduces the risk for landlords. By establishing a rental contract between the landlord and the organization rather than between the landlord and the youth, the responsibility for the youth and any potential damages rest solely with the organization and not the landlord.

The focus, particularly by the media, on the negative actions of a small number of young people in the community serves to perpetuate the existing stereotype of youth as troublemakers. To overcome community reluctance to become involved with such projects as SIL and YER, positive images of youth need to be created. As one project leader explains:

We only deal with a small percentage of youth in the community but people tend to stereotype a lot of youth into that. I think as a community we need to do more than that. If you look at the Relay for Life in CR...these were youth that raised \$100 to participate.

Creating positive images of youth in the community will not only help to encourage the community to engage with a young person but will also assist in developing positive relationships between the community and its youth. It will enable youth and people and organizations to link together without the need for community projects to mediate these relationships.

Providing reassurance, reducing the risk involved in engaging with youth or creating a positive image of youth in the community may encourage community organizations and members to participate. Creating awareness in the community about

the potential for a young person to make positive change and the role of the community in making that happen may encourage engagement by the community.

The second subcategory of **INTRODUCING A NEW WAY** this category is *Providing youth with an alternative perspective*. This occurs by the staff exposing a young person to an environment in which an alternative perspective is communicated both verbally and non-verbally. The consequence of **CREATING WILLINGNESS TO ENGAGE** is that a young person will be open and willing to take on a different perspective. The youth's ability to make positive changes is enhanced when they are able to take on a new outlook in their interactions in relationships and with the environment.

For many young people, it is a challenge to make positive choices in their everyday living and learning environments. A young person participating in the project is often caught up in stressful family and living situations. Role models who demonstrate an appropriate way to behave or act in society have not been a part of their experience. Therefore, their concept of what is appropriate behaviour is often in direct conflict with societal norms and regulations. This is evident in the following comments made by a community participant:

They don't have all those skills. They have huge coping mechanism; huge denial; huge what they think are attitudes, being cool; that violence is acceptable; that abuse is acceptable...because they haven't learnt any other ways of dealing with anger or frustration or aggression or conflict. And they end up going through the justice system.

The strategies used to engage a young person with different perspectives are: *engaging youth in conversation* and *role modeling different perspectives*.

By *engaging youth in conversation* the staff and people in the community are able to provide a young person with suggestions and strategies to work through issues and

problems they may be experiencing. A staff member provides an example of how this is accomplished:

So I think it's about communicating to the kids that there is lots of different options and you try and choose to the best of your ability the one that works. You look at it and do the problem solving. You see what works, what didn't and then you learn from it and you learn for the next time.

Supporting a young person to work through the issues by engaging them in a conversation about solutions enables them to consider how the situation can be approached differently. This is evident in the following quotation from a member of the SIL staff:

[I] suggested we set up a meeting with the teacher because [the young person] wanted to quit [the class]. I [asked the young person] 'Do you know in fact that you're not going to pass?' 'Well no' [the young person responded] 'well why don't you meet with him'. I asked 'can we meet with him...and try and figure out if there is a way that you can pass [the class]' 'Ok' [the young person responded]. I helped her meet with the teacher to identify if she had a chance of passing [the class].

In this situation the staff member was able to suggest alternative options to quitting the class.

Engaging a young person in a conversation also provides them with the opportunity to learn from their mistakes and generates a better understanding of what went wrong. For example, a staff member describes a situation involving two young women who were asked to leave the project:

I think [the young people] were really upset when they got evicted. They were mad at [the project]. However, after we had a meeting with the kids and the social worker both of the girls...they didn't hold on to a grudge at all. They both realized that it was harder [participating in the project] than they thought.

In this situation the young women were able to learn from their mistakes even if they were no longer participating in the project.

Providing an alternative perspective also calls on the staff and participating adults to *role model different perspectives*. This happens when the staff model different ways to communicate, listen, show respect, and resolve issues. Essentially, to role model different perspectives, the staff members ensure that their behaviours match the message they are trying to convey. If the goal is to encourage a young person to be punctual and dependable, the staff member ensures they are on time and never miss an appointment. The consequence is that a young person may contemplate behaving in a new way. A coordinator provides an example of the change in behaviour that is possible:

The first two times I [picked him up I] had to wait for him. The last time I dropped him off he, I said don't make me wait this [long] next time. You know what [the next time I picked him up] I opened the door and he was right there waiting.

The impact of *role modeling different perspectives* is that a young person is exposed to a different approach to living and operating in society. A YER youth participant describes his experience interacting with staff and participating community members: "It was cool, it was fun, different people, different opinions, I can learn from them". Youth engaging in the process may gain a sense that things can be different and make different decisions. This is explained in the following quotations:

...at least she started thinking 'I heard that and I don't want it' but you know she's thinking, 'there's another way'. They gain new insight on how to make decisions and overcome challenges. They take action that may not have been an option in the past.

[youth] see another way that the world works. The world is not just, what they know and whatever that may be in their home life.

This exposure to an alternative perspective allows a young person to gain new insight. A YER youth participant comments: "community work makes our community a nicer,

better looking place. It makes a strong community because people are helping others". Although a participating adult acknowledged that small community projects providing an alternative perspective may not be able to significantly impact each young person, at the very least, she explains, they provide them with the sense that life can be lived differently:

Small project is maybe not going to do it [make positive changes in a young person]. But it's at least [a young person has] been role modeled that things can be different.

The third subcategory **INTRODUCING A NEW WAY** is *Engaging youth with the environment*. In society, people often expect a young person to know what to do and how to act. Many young people, however, do not have the experiences or the knowledge required to engage successfully with their surroundings. A participating community member illustrates this point: "we just expect them somehow to know all this stuff that we know and just do it. We forget we all learnt it somewhere". Engaging youth with the environment provides a young person with the opportunity to apply the information provided by the staff and gain experience interacting in relationships and with their surroundings in a new manner. The strategies used to support youth in engaging with the environment are: *Explaining and reinforcing expectations and boundaries* and *providing youth with opportunities to take independent action*.

Explaining and reinforcing expectations and boundaries provides a young person with the opportunity to better understand what to do, why they are doing it and the limitations of what they can do. A member of the staff explains the value of providing this type of learning:

If kids had some understanding as to why we should do things or why we shouldn't do things then you stand a greater chance for somebody to start learning to reason themselves.

This happens when the staff members support a young person in learning the expectations and boundaries of the project. No assumptions are made about what a young person should know; the staff members clearly explain all expectations and boundaries. In order to provide further opportunities for learning, in a situation in which the acceptable expectations and limits are ignored, the young person is held accountable. They are expected to take responsibility for their actions and learn from their mistakes. A staff member provides an example of this:

The cat [left a mess] and [the young person] needed to clean that up. She was almost throwing up but it [was the] consequence of having the cats...So hopefully [the young person] learned from all of that.

Confronting the young person and making them accountable for their actions, enables them to better understand what acceptable behaviour is. They learn the limits of their actions and how to take responsibility when those limits are exceeded.

Staff members also *provide opportunities for youth to take independent action*.

This happens by providing various opportunities for a young person to take action independent of the staff. A participating community member explains: "they've got to learn to walk about the project then they can start to envision for themselves." Staff members provide a young person with the opportunity to make independent decisions. They give them options and choices, allowing them to decide what works or would be of interest to them. This is reflected in the comments of a member of the staff, "Sometimes you just give them some space. Sometimes you think about...how they might feel...Then sometimes you give them options [and] choices".

Once provided with the information on how to engage with their surroundings, the young person is encouraged to interact independently. Staff members do not force youth to learn and operate in a certain way but rather, provide them with the opportunity to learn independently. The following quotation provides an example of how this is accomplished by the YER coordinator:

We do water quality monitoring on Wednesday morning. We have three sites where we test the quality of the water and two sites where we [test] the water level. I show them how to do it on one [of the] sites and then I [explain that they will be] doing the other two. I make them carry the bag. [I explain to the youth] 'No it's your job. I'm not getting that. It's your job to do it now. I've already showed you once'.

With the guidance of the staff, a young person is provided with the opportunity to learn how to take action independent of the staff.

The YER project provides a young person with further opportunities to learn independently by organizing public presentations. A YER youth participant describes the experience:

The presentation was all right. At the start I was a bit nervous, but once I got into it, it was a bit easier. I used a microphone before with karaoke. The audience learned about the program. They learned about salmon populations going to go back up soon and that it is important for people to volunteer.

By reflecting on their experience in the project a young person gains new knowledge about the project and their role within it. In providing opportunities for a young person to learn independently of the staff, the young person is enabled to understand how to take action differently in the future.

The project adapts to the learning style of a young person. For example, in the SIL project a small group structure is provided if a young person does not feel comfortable interacting in a group. In the YER project, traditional techniques of learning

such as reading and answering questions are replaced by encouraging a more hands on learning approach. Staff members described “a hands on” learning approach as learning by doing. This involves a young person becoming an active participant in the learning process. The following quotation illustrates the benefit of this type of approach to one youth participant:

It is a relaxed way of learning - It's a good way of learning – easier than school where teachers nag and nag and nag. You didn't nag, you asked me something and reviewed it a bit later – it is a more patient and gentler way [of learning]

Matching the project activities to the learning style of a young person may encourage them to engage with the environment.

Engaging youth with the environment is also influenced by the skills and behaviours of the staff and participating community members. Adult skills and behaviours that assist a young person to interact with the environment include: good communication and mediation skills, passion and commitment to the process, and a willingness to share knowledge with a young person. Staff and participating community members assist a young person to interact with their surroundings by being knowledgeable about the area in which they are interested. For the YER project, the coordinator has a deep commitment to and understanding of the environment in which she is engaged. This enables her to provide relevant information in a passionate way. This encourages a young person to become excited about learning.

The fourth subcategory of **INTRODUCING A NEW WAY** is *Building the self-esteem of youth*. This occurs by supporting a young person to develop the confidence to make positive changes. According to adults involved in the projects, participating youth often lack self-confidence. The adults interviewed indicated that this hinders the ability of

youth to make change because they: a) feel unable to complete a task, b) lack motivation and, c) don't have the confidence to seek assistance when dealing with issues. The impact of *Building the self-esteem of youth* is that a young person feels more able and motivated to make healthy change in the future. The strategies used are: *providing encouragement* and *ensuring completion of the process*.

Various strategies are used to *provide youth with encouragement*. For example, when a young person has completed a task the staff member provides her or him with positive feedback and praise. The YER coordinator explains:

I don't tell them that they're not an expert after an hour. What's the point in telling them that, there's no point. [Instead, I say] 'wow you're amazing'. There's no point telling them they did a [bad] job.

Youth are also reminded of what they have accomplished and how far they have come, as well as encouraged to keep going. A participating community person explains:

[It is important to] keep empowering the person [by saying] 'yeah you can do it'. 'You've done this, this and this' and the [young person responds 'oh yes I have'. 'Ok now keep going'. [A young person] needs that affirmation, that acknowledgment, and that support.

In the YER project, the achievements of a young person are acknowledged with an award and a letter of reference. This helps to motivate them to continue to make positive changes.

A staff member also builds confidence in the young people by ensuring that they complete the process. This happens by encouraging a young person to commit to the project and supporting them throughout their participation in it. The impact is a young person feeling a sense of pride in themselves for completing the project, and subsequently being motivated to continue to interact in relationships and with their surroundings in a healthy way. This is reflected in the words of a YER youth participant:

It feels good to accomplish something. It is a step towards something else I can do now. It was a positive experience and different from how community service hours are usually done

By completing the project, a young person gains the skills and confidence to pursue future goals. For example, a staff member comments: “at least [a young person] has something to write on their resume or build their confidence.”

Introducing a new way— Summary

INTRODUCING A NEW WAY is the third subcategory of **SUPPORTING TRANSFORMATION**. This is the process through which the staff members support a young person to interact in relationships with their surroundings in a healthy way through their interactions in the project. The ability of the staff to successfully support engagement is dependent on placing emphasis when **FIGURING IT OUT** on recruiting people in the community to participate in the project, and securing an environment through which a young person can be exposed to and interact with different perspectives.

INTRODUCING A NEW WAY happens by first connecting a young person with supports in the community, then providing them with the tools to engage with their surroundings, and finally, providing them with the opportunity to apply those tools to a practice setting. It is characterized by *Linking youth with community, Providing an alternative perspective, Engaging youth with the environment, and Building self-esteem*. To support a young person to engage in the project requires that staff first **CREATE WILLINGNESS TO ENGAGE**. However, **CREATING WILLINGNESS TO ENGAGE** can often happen at the same time that a young person is being **INTRODUCED TO A NEW WAY**. In other words, while a young person is being

supported to engage in the environment they can become excited about learning and, thus, a willingness to engage can be created.

Overcoming barriers to access and engaging youth with the community provides a young person with the opportunity to build relationships with people in the community who are willing to support them to engage with their surroundings. *Engaging youth in conversation and role modeling different perspectives* provides a young person with the opportunity to consider their previous experience in a new context. *Explaining and reinforcing expectations and boundaries and providing youth with opportunities to take independent action* allows them the opportunity to practice interacting with their surroundings in a healthy way. Finally to ensure their continued motivation, the staff members attempt to build the self-esteem of young people by *providing encouragement and ensuring completion of the process*. Although **INTRODUCING A NEW WAY** can positively impact the way in which a young person interacts in relationships and with their surroundings, a young person must be supported to become motivated, develop the confidence and interact independently in society in a healthy way. This next and final category is **MAINTAINING THE WILLINGNESS TO ENGAGE**. The final process ensures that staff, people and organizations in the community who have connected with a young person can continue to assist them to make positive change.

Maintaining Willingness to Engage

The final main category **MAINTAINING WILLINGNESS TO ENGAGE** is the process through which the staff members adapt the project to ensure a young person is motivated, has the confidence, the knowledge and the support to interact in their

relationships and interact with their surroundings in a healthy way before their participation in the project is completed.

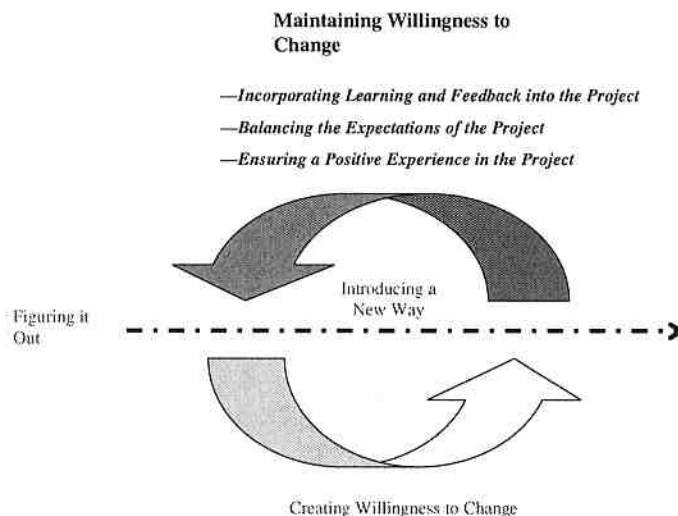


Figure 6 – Maintaining Willingness to Engage

For staff, it is often a struggle to assist youth in overcoming issues; with little warning youth will disengage themselves from participating in the project. For example, a member of the staff comments, “There are occasions where kids disappear a bit and we are trying to get them back and what’s happened is they have lost their willingness to engage”.

The ability to **MAINTAIN WILLINGNESS TO ENGAGE** is an outcome of **CREATING WILLINGNESS TO ENGAGE**. In other words, once a young person is motivated to engage and invested in making positive changes by participating in the project, **MAINTAINING WILLINGNESS TO ENGAGE** becomes possible. This category can happen at the same time as **INTRODUCING A NEW WAY**. This process is characterized by *Incorporating learning and feedback into the project,*

Balancing the expectations of the project, and Ensuring a positive experience in the project.

Table 5 – Maintaining Willingness to Engage: An overview of the category

MAINTAINING WILLINGNESS TO ENGAGE		
Second Level Categories	Third Level Categories	Influencing Factors and Consequences
Incorporating learning and feedback into the project	<u>Strategies</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Modifying the project based on experience and information gathered from the project and the youth 	<u>Influencing Factors</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Philosophy of the staff on how to support a young person to interact in their relationships and with their surroundings in a healthy way
Balancing the expectations of the project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Explaining expectations ➤ Committing to the expectations ➤ Meeting expectations of the youth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Relationship between a young person and the staff ➤ Adaptability of the project
Ensuring a positive experience in the project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Assisting a young person to overcome issues ➤ Supporting participating community members to connect with youth 	<u>Consequences</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Youth develop the motivation, confidence, knowledge and the support to interact in their relationships and interact with their surroundings in a healthy way before their participation in the project is complete

The first subcategory is ***Incorporating learning and feedback into the project.***

This happens by the staff continuously adapting the project to ensure a young person remains inspired to engage in a project that encourages them to take a new approach.

Amending the project in order to maintain engagement, the staff members evaluate the processes used and decisions made throughout a young person's participation. These

evaluations occur through observations made by the staff. For example, changes to the YER project were the result of personal reflections made by the coordinator about what types of environments support a young person to make positive changes. The coordinator below discusses one adjustment made to the project:

In the beginning...I was going to photocopy this package [of information] to hand [to the youth]. And I spent a lot of time [putting together the information package] and [deciding] what [type of information] I should hand them. [In the end] I never did [hand them the information package], I [decided that an information package was] not what they want.

Observing that written instructions reflect the surroundings in which young persons had been previously unsuccessful, the coordinator adjusted the method in which instructions were given in order to mirror the hands-on learning environment that she believes is central to a young person's success in the project.

The project is also evaluated based on the information gathered through listening to concerns and recommendations made by young people participating in the project. In this instance, a staff member explains how a young person identified what type of environment she required to make positive changes:

It was the youth who identified this [apartment] just wasn't working for her and she didn't feel safe. She didn't like [the apartment]...So we decided to move the kid out of there and I think that in itself was a positive change for the program...In fact [she] has moved [out] and [has] done so well.

By valuing and taking a young person's opinion into consideration, the staff members are better able to identify and adapt the project to better suit the needs of the young person. The effect is their continued willingness to interact in relationships and with their surroundings in a healthy way.

Through implementation of the project, the staff members gain pertinent information regarding how to modify it to maintain engagement. At the same time that

the staff take action and reflect on the outcome of the decisions made, they tailor the project to suit the needs of the youth. For example, the SIL staff determined which apartments young people were having the most success living in and future decisions were then based on those successes. A staff member comments: "we looked at the type of apartments where we had success and then we identify that's [the course] we needed to continue [following]". The SIL staff determined that maintaining engagement was better ensured by making apartments available in safe areas of town that provided a young person with some flexibility when they made a mistake.

Once the staff members compile the information, they modify the project accordingly. Staff may implement new strategies or alter the directions being taken. To facilitate this process, colleagues in the project team and parent organization provide support to the staff. For example, the SIL staff members operate as a team to develop solutions and overcome challenges. One staff member believes it is trust that enables them to work as a team. She comments:

There is trust between the three of us. We can have [a] conversation if things are not going well in the apartments or with the landlord. We have that trust to talk and sort it out [together]. I think it keeps the program going.

People in the community also provide support. When situations arise in the project, staff members seek advice from experts in the community who provide them with guidance on how to appropriately modify the project to overcome issues involving young persons. Gathering information from people in the community with experience enhances the ability of the staff to modify the project and encourages the engagement of youth.

The subcategory of *Incorporating learning and feedback into the project* subcategory depends on the adaptability of the project. Modifying the project to meet the needs of participating youth requires that the project structure is adaptable and that the staff members are willing to be flexible. For example, the SIL develops a plan for each young person participating in the project that they can change depending on individual needs. The overall goal of the project to support a young person to be independent is the same for each young person but the plan developed to assist them is structured to meet their individual needs.

Adaptable project structure and flexible staff members facilitate gathering information via personal observations, experience, or feedback. The information is then used to revisit and adjust the project to better meet the needs of a young person. The result is a process that is not stagnant but is instead constantly evolving as the needs of a young person change. The young person therefore maintains a willingness to engage. For example, through experience the YER coordinator gained a better understanding of how to communicate with youth. The coordinator commented:

I found out how to communicate with the youth, how to communicate with them so you don't lose them. I'm pretty good at it now but in the beginning I used to get pissed off with them pretty easily.

Developing better communication skills directly increased her ability to encourage a young person to continue participating in the project.

The second subcategory **MAINTAINING WILLINGNESS TO ENGAGE** is *Balancing the expectations of the project* with the needs and expectations of youth for the project. This occurs by the staff meeting the expectations of young people while at the same time requiring them to commit to the expectations of the staff. A participating

community member comments: "The community has to win, the kids have to win and ultimately the families win". The strategies used are: *explaining* and *committing to the expectations* as well as *meeting expectations of the youth*.

Prior to and during the engagement of a young person in the project, the staff members explain their expectations. Rules such as being respectful and ensuring open communication are explained to a young person. How the expectations are established is influenced by the philosophy of the staff on how to support a young person to interact in their relationships and with their surroundings in a healthy way. For example, the SIL staff members believe that setting high expectations for a young person may ultimately set them up to fail. Conversely, the YER coordinator feared that by setting low expectations a young person might be discouraged from achieving their goals.

Once expectations are identified, the staff members require a young person to commit to following them. In the SIL project, a young person agrees to attend regular meetings with the staff. And in the YER project, a young person commits to spending 20 hours volunteering in the project. Explaining the expectations of the project and requiring them to commit to them results in the youth who are: a) fully aware of what is required of them in the project, b) able to decide if they are capable of following the expectations of the project prior to engaging in it, and c) encouraged to complete the project. A staff member comments: "I think that [it is] very important that [a young person knows] what he was getting into and [that] there [is] an end result". The impact is a young person maintaining their willingness to engage because they have the information required to engage. They have made the decisions for themselves to participate, and they are motivated to complete the project.

To facilitate continued engagement, the staff must also meet the young person's expectations for the project. This happens by the staff continuously identifying and integrating the expectations of a young person into the project. Each young person deciding to engage has certain expectations for the project. For example, certain young people involved in the project do not want to be controlled. A staff member reiterates this point: "the youth that come through this program, there's a reason, they don't want to be totally controlled". A strategy used to meet the desire of a young person not to be controlled is to provide them with space to make independent decisions. If the expectations of a young person are not met, their motivation to engage in the project may decrease.

The third subcategory is *Ensuring a positive experience in the project*. This occurs by the staff providing support to a young person participating in the project as well as assisting them to connect with the wider community. The consequence is the motivation of a young person to maintain their relationship with the project and with participating adults in the community. The strategies used are: *Assisting a young person to overcome issues* and *supporting participating community members to connect with youth*.

To ensure a positive experience for a young person, the staff members *assist them to overcome issues* that arise. This happens by checking in regularly with a young person to monitor their situation and assisting them to solve any issues that may have developed. In addition, the staff members ensure they are available when a young person requires assistance. A staff member comments:

If we can see them, we see them right away. If they phone we get back to them as soon as possible; we don't wait weeks to get a hold of kids or other service

providers. I think that helps to keep [a young person engaged]. They know they can come and get quick services.

Helping to solve problems as soon as they occur has a significant impact on a young person's ability to overcome issues and thus maintain his or her willingness to engage in the project. Staff members also assist young persons to gain the skills themselves that they will require to overcome issues that may occur. The impact is that a young person will have the skills to surmount issues independently in the project, and in the future as well.

Facilitating connections with participating adults is another strategy used to ensure a positive experience for young people in the project. Consequently, young people and participating adults strengthen their relationships. This increases the likelihood that both a young person and participating adult will be willing to continue the relationship once their engagement in the project is completed. This happens by the staff supporting the participating adult to connect with young persons. The staff member illustrates this:

We worked with [the landlords] and made efforts to make sure they knew that we were trying to work with them and address their needs. [Working with the landlord on issues involving one young person] helped the other youth to continue to have good relationships [with their landlords]

They are assisted and supported in overcoming issues with participating adults in the community. These problems are dealt with in a quick and efficient manner. Meetings are scheduled with participating adults to provide them with the opportunity to discuss and address their concerns. In addition, the staff members use their previous experience working with young people to provide participating adults with some context about interacting with young people. A staff member comments:

We have [had the] opportunity to learn so we don't get that freaked out [when issues occur with young people] but not everyone in the community has had that

same [experience]. [With people in the community] sometimes if [a young person] makes a mistake [they're asked to leave]. We really have to work hard at reframing [it for] other community members.

The relationship between a young person and the staff directly influences this process. The subcategory of *Ensuring a positive experience in the project* is dependent on staff establishing good working relationships with participating adults and young people participating in the project. Once good working relationships are established, participating adults and young people will be more willing to open up to each other, knowing they will be supported to prevail over issues that arise. The impact is the improved ability of the staff to ensure a positive experience for young people in the project.

The subcategory of *Ensuring a positive experience in the project* is also dependent on maintaining the willingness of people in the community to engage with a young person. To maintain this willingness, positive experiences had by participating adults must outnumber the negative ones. Staff members need to ensure few incidents of violence or theft when a young person is living or volunteering in the community. This is facilitated by: matching a young person with an appropriate person in the community, ensuring a young person with a history of violence or abuse does not engage in unhealthy activities in the community or is supervised by the staff, and continuous support of a young person in the project by the staff.

Maintaining willingness to engage – Summary

MAINTAINING WILLINGNESS TO ENGAGE is the final category of **SUPPORTING TRANSFORMATION**. This is the category through which the project is adapting to ensure that young people are motivated and capable of interacting in

relationships and interacting with their surroundings in a health way. Initially, **FIGURING OUT** an adaptable project structure and engaging staff willing to be flexible facilitates this process. The final category in the basic social process, however, is possible only after the staff have encouraged a young person to first participate in the project by **CREATING WILLINGNESS TO ENGAGE. INTRODUCING A NEW WAY** and **MAINTAINING WILLINGNESS TO ENGAGE** occur at the same time. In other words, at the same time that a young person is being **INTRODUCED TO A NEW WAY**, the staff member is ensuring a positive experience for them in the project.

The final category is characterized by: *Incorporating learning and feedback into the project, Balancing the expectations of the project, and Ensuring a positive experience in the project.* Strategies used to implement these categories are: *modifying the project based on experience and information gathered from the project and the youth, explaining and committing to the expectations of the project and meeting the expectations of the youth vis-à-vis the project (or youths' expectations of the project.).* Each person engaged in the project has expectations. It is the staff member continuously working to balance those expectations that makes it possible for youth to maintain a willingness to engage. In other words, if the experience in the project has not been positive, a young person and a participating adult will not continue to engage in it. To ensure the experience has been positive, the staff members *assist a young person to overcome issues and support participating community members to connect with youth.* The impact is that a young person develops strong ties with people in the community. These relationships become imperative to the continued motivation of a young person to interact in relationships and interact with their surroundings in a healthy way once their participation

in the project is completed. The impact is that a young person will develop the confidence to continue to interact in healthy ways, even if they return to their previous unhealthy environment. By **MAINTAINING WILLINGNESS TO ENGAGE** a young person develops the motivation, the capacity and the support to take a new approach once their participation in the project is complete.

CHAPTER FIVE – DISCUSSION

In this chapter I map out the implicit but previously undocumented “theory of action” used by adults in the projects to support youth and then proceed to relate this theory of action to existing literature and theories. An important contribution of this study is that the theory of action used by adults in the projects studied in this research, maps very well onto existing theories of youth empowerment, positive youth development, resiliency, and restorative justice.

Based on the findings of this study, creating the conditions that assist youth to make and maintain changes in their lives requires adults to first identify strategies and then develop a project structure that will support and motivate youth. Encouraging youth to participate in the project is the next stage in the process. Once youth are committed to the project, adults engage them in discussions, activities and relationships that enhance their ability to determine how to achieve positive changes. Finally, adults engage with youth and adjust the project structure to maintain the willingness of youth to participate. This is a complex process that is dependent on the motivation of youth and the ability of adults to develop trusting relationships with them.

In this chapter, I will examine the current literature on empowerment, positive youth development, resiliency theory and restorative justice as well as specific case studies that support or contradict the “theory of action”. In this chapter, I pay specific attention to the critical role of adults in developing the relationships that enable youth to gain control over their lives. I also give consideration to the contributions of adults in enhancing the ability of youth to maintain positive changes once their participation in the

project is complete. Finally, I will point to implications for changes in current practice and the need for future research.

Creating the Conditions that Support Youth to Change

The following section describes the theoretical approaches and the conditions that support positive life change in youth. First, I describe these theoretical approaches then later discuss them in relation to the findings of this study.

Theoretical Approaches that Support Change

Empowerment Theory and Positive Youth Development. The theory of empowerment is a mainstay in much of the thinking about how to reduce health inequities among youth (Wallerstein 2006). Empowerment theory serves to shift the prevailing view of youth as a “community problem” to acknowledging them as assets and resources (Holden et al. 2005). The assumption is that “positive youth development emerges through promotion of skills development with greater participation and involvement by youth in the public affairs of their community” (Holden et al. 2005, 265). This concept, within youth development, is widely used as a framework by community interventions to improve the health of youth (Holden et al. 2005).

Empowerment, defined commonly as a “process by which people, organizations and communities gain mastery over issues of concern to them” (Zimmerman 1995, 581), is a concept that evolved initially from the ideas of a prominent Brazilian philosopher, Paulo Freire. It was Freire’s concern with the dependence of marginalized populations on the economic and cultural interests of dominant society that spurred his interest in developing a process that would enable people to assert their voices (Freire 1970). The solution, he proposed, lay in creating access to knowledge through education. With

limited information, he believed, a person could be “likened to an 'object' being acted upon as opposed to the empowered learner who is a 'subject' who can act upon the world” (Xavier 2003, 1). Freire believed in the potential of an individual to orchestrate his or her own empowerment process. By developing a critical mind and acquiring a greater understanding of the world, individuals could form their own political and social frameworks based on a critical analysis of their position in the world.

Since its inception, the concept of empowerment has grown to include various definitions and approaches (Hur 2006). Most research has tended to focus on identifying the outcomes of empowerment; fewer studies focus on describing the process of empowerment (Hur 2006). Integral to theories such as positive youth development (PYD) and resiliency theory is a shared belief in recognizing the potential of youth to positively contribute to their own healthy development as well as those of others.

Similar to empowerment theory, PYD moves away from attempting to “fix” a young person (Zeldin and Price 1995). Youth are instead encouraged to take control and mobilize individual, family and non-familial strengths. This strength-based approach of PYD recognizes the ability of youth to manage and overcome challenges in their lives (Miller 2006).

Resiliency Theory. Bernard (1995) describes resiliency as “a set of qualities that foster a process of successful adaptation and transformation despite risk and adversity” (p. 2). The assumption is that youth have an intrinsic ability for resilience, which enables them to be socially competent, independent, overcome challenges, think critically and set goals. For vulnerable youth, family, school and community environments have certain “protective factors” or “protective processes”. These factors have the potential to

counterbalance negative outcomes and enhance the ability of youth to overcome challenges and be resilient when faced with those challenges (Bernard 1995).

Restorative Justice. Restorative justice has important implications for understanding the underlying approaches used by the projects examined in this study even if the aim focuses on responding to the limitations of the Western legal systems.

Restorative justice can be defined as

An approach to justice that focuses on repairing the harm caused by crime while holding the offender responsible for his or her actions, by providing an opportunity for the parties directly affected by a crime - victim(s), offender and community - to identify and address their needs in the aftermath of a crime, and seek a resolution that affords healing, reparation and reintegration, and prevents future harm (Cormier 2002, para.3).

The initial focus of restorative justice was on handling minor offences, such as burglary and property crimes (Zehr 2002). Restorative justice is now used extensively in the juvenile justice system for more severe crimes. Proponents of restorative justice believe that youth need three things from the justice system: *accountability*, *encouragement to experience personal transformation*, and *encouragement and support for integration into the community* (Zehr 2002). A holistic understanding of a person's wrongdoing is emphasized in this approach. The assumption is that "we are all interconnected" (Zehr 2002, 19) and that each person is connected through their relationships with each other. This implies a collective responsibility and obligation to assist in the healing of others (Zehr 2002).

Conditions that Support Change

Empowerment theory, PYD, resiliency theory and restorative justice depend on the critical role of adults (staff and members of the community) in supporting youth. For example, experiences with adults can enhance the ability of youth to make healthy decisions about work and education (Cargo et al. 2003). Adults can also influence the perspective and values of a young person (Cargo et al. 2003). Contact with adults, particularly those in the community, can contribute to youth having a deepened sense of purpose in life in terms of who they are and where they fit with their environment (Cargo et al. 2003).

Adults support youth to overcome challenges and promote their well-being by providing them with assistance, generating trust, providing youth with knowledge, communicating love, compassion, empathy, and enthusiasm (Laursen and Birmingham 2003; Scales, Benson, and Mannes 2006). The Empowerment, PYD and resiliency literature highlights various dimensions of adult roles that contribute to supporting youth.

Messias (2005) provides one of the few detailed and comprehensive examinations of the adult role in empowering community-based youth interventions. In her study, Messias identifies five aspects of an adult's role. These include: *putting youth first*, *raising the bar for youth performance*, *being in relationships*, *exerting influence*, *authority and control*, and *connecting and communicating*. Each of these features has a prominent role in the basic social process of the grounded theory "Supporting Transformation." For example, Messias (2005) identifies encouraging and maintaining youth participation in the project, recognizing the potential to learn from both positive and negative experiences, providing opportunities for independence, being available to

listen and support youth, advocating for youth in the community, setting up and enforcing boundaries, as aspects of adult roles in the project. Staff members and participating adults identified having similar roles when involved with youth in the projects.

The role of adults as mentors to youth serves as a prominent feature in the PYD literature. Roth and Brooks-Gunn (1998), in their evaluation of 15 community-based projects, found that a significant benefit to adult mentorship lay in its ability to create caring and supportive environments in which youth can develop their identity separate from their families. Other important dimensions of adult roles in providing mentorship included: providing multiple types of support in personal and social situations (Scales, Benson, and Mannes 2006; Zeldin et al. 2005), setting boundaries (Scales, Benson, and Mannes 2006), role modeling appropriate behaviour (Cargo et al. 2003), motivating youth (Cargo et al. 2003), creating a safe environment (Evans, Ulasevich, and Blahut 2004), connecting youth with the community (Cargo et al. 2003) and introducing youth to a different perspective (Halpern 2005) and new knowledge (Cargo et al. 2003; Zimmerman 1995; Halpern 2005; Zeldin et al. 2005). Apparent in the process of Supporting Transformation are these dimensions of adult roles. For example, by providing mentorship and by role modeling appropriate behaviour, youth participating in the project gained new knowledge about how to be respectful when in relationships with others. A young person comments:

You are always supposed to be safe in what you are doing and careful with another person's equipment and respecting other people and their feelings. Relationships with people mean being kind if you are working in a group and not breaking the rules.

In terms of adult roles, however, there is no clear consensus within the literature on the use of control and influence by adults who are attempting to support youth. Some

believe that adult control of and influence over the process is considered to be an essential part of youth success in the project, their relationships and their ability to integrate into the community. For instance, “setting boundaries, monitoring youth behaviour, keeping youth on task, exerting influence, intervening to encourage youth interaction, enforcing discipline, fostering diversity and increasing youth potential” (Messias et al. 2005, 324). An adult participating in the YER project explains her rationale for the use of some control when working with youth in the community:

I think there needs to be guidance. I don't see anything wrong with some of the more youth-led projects but youth need boundaries and guidance. If they didn't they wouldn't be doing this stuff...Unless you have boundaries of how far you can go [and] what's acceptable, how do you find out where you fit in the world? People just flounder. So there [are] good reasons psychologically and socially why we need to do that and have adults around...the youth are very capable and we have some wonderful youth. But they don't just get there being left on their own to find the way.

In contrast, Powers (2003) criticized exerting control as “creat[ing] the illusion of choice” (p.231). From this perspective, the concern is that by assuming the word empowerment, “silences the debates within these discourses regarding ethical implications of coercion” (Powers 2003, 232) and contributes to the acceptability of using control and influence in projects. Labonte (1990) cautions against the use of control, stating, “We are the subject of the action, defining the terms of interaction; those who are getting done to remain our objects. Subjects act; objects are acting upon” (p. 64). It is important to note, however, that both Powers’ (2003) and Labonte’s (1990) perception on exerting control within approaches identified as empowering is informed by an adult perceptive. The experiences of individual youth can be different requiring adults to exert control and influence in order to guide and support youth to become empowered.

Amidst the two arguments, Margaret Cargo (2003) finds a delicate balance by fostering the development of partnerships between youth and adults. This contributes to the development of a more egalitarian approach to youth work. Fostering these partnerships happens by adults entrusting youth to take responsibility for planning and implementation while at the same time maintaining an “active enabling” role in the process. Adults involved in these partnerships provide opportunities for youth to have a voice, make decisions, and take action. These partnerships between youth and adults provide adults with the opportunity to support youth while at the same time not becoming “the ‘well-intentioned practitioner’ doing for youth” (p. 70).

Fostering these partnerships also happens by adults developing relationships with youth over time. Required is “adequate time and energy to form relationships and to ‘transform’ their role from that of an authority figure to one of a partner” (Zeldin et al. 2005, 7). It is only over time “through shared activity and discourse” (Zeldin et al. 2005, 7) that relationships develop between adults and youth. According to the adults involved in the YER and SIL projects, time is required to develop trusting relationships between adult and youth. Once trust is developed, youth feel more comfortable opening up to adults. As a result, adults are better able to identify the needs of youth and target the project to match those needs. Developing partnerships between youth and adults is a “complex, multifaceted phenomenon incorporating the dimensions of voice, emotion, instrumentality and partnership, and once created, they need to be nurtured over time through joint activity and discourse” (Zeldin et al. 2005, 4).

Developing partnerships that provide youth with the ability to have control and make decisions enhances their ability to act independently, overcome challenges, solidify

interests, and increase self confidence in their ability to succeed (Whalen and Wynn 1995). In the process of Supporting Transformation, although adults acknowledge and integrate the input of youth into the project structure, in practice youth have a limited role in the planning and implementation of project activities. Instead, adults encourage youth to be engaged in programmed activities. Nevertheless, these programmed activities have their function in supporting youth. Programmed activities serve to initiate youth into “cultures of intentionality”(Whalen and Wynn 1995, 92). By participating in these activities, youth are provided with experiences that encourage them to be independent, make commitments, and contribute to society (Whalen and Wynn 1995). Those programmed activities that enable youth to contribute to change in their community are particularly important. Even though youth know the activities are designed to encourage learning, “they also know that their energies and skills play a valued role in the accomplishments of their organizations” (Whalen and Wynn 1995, 92). Fundamental to the process of Supporting Transformation for youth participants in the YER project were programmed activities in the natural environment. These experiences contributed to the ability of youth to make positive changes. A youth participant describes how interaction with the environment enables them to feel good about themselves:

It feels pretty good, knowing that you are doing things for the good of the Earth instead of just for yourself. It takes you outside yourself.

Successfully providing any type of support, however, is dependent on adults possessing certain characteristics. A fundamental characteristic is that adults have an *ethic of caring*. Bernard (1995) describes this as “not a ‘program’ or ‘strategy’ per se, but rather a way of being in the world, a way of relating to youth, their families, and each other that conveys compassion, understanding, respect and interest” (p. 3). Laursen and

Birmingham (2003) describe *Caring adults* as having seven characteristics: trust (youth trusting adults), attention, empathy, availability, affirmation, respect and virtue. These characteristics “suggests a pattern of behaviour and beliefs that appear to make an adult worthy of the trust of a young person” (Laursen and Birmingham 2003, 243). The characteristic of trust in adults maximizes the potential for relationships to develop and enhances the ability of adults to: a) encourage participation, b) develop the skills and knowledge required to make positive changes and, c) create links to supportive networks in the community (Roth and Brooks-Gunn 2003). The youth participating in the process of Supporting Transformation provide examples of “caring adults”. One youth commented that sharing the same sense of humour enabled her to open up and relate to an adult participating in the project. She explains:

Old guys can be funny, not like my Grandpa. Some old guys can tell really good jokes and make people laugh. It felt good to be with old guys like that because I can get some humour. It allows me to open up and tell jokes and laugh, too.

According to the data collected, youth will more easily perceive an adult as caring if they can relate to the adult through a shared sense of humour.

In addition to this *ethic of caring*, the literature stresses the need for adults to have high expectations when engaged with youth (Denner, Meyer, and Bean 2005; Messias et al. 2005; Child and Youth Officer for British Columbia 2006; Laursen and Birmingham 2003). The literature stresses that high expectations for youth in the project “reflect a philosophical stance of valuing and acknowledging youth” (Messias et al. 2005, 334). Adults having high expectations for youth ensures that the approaches and strategies used in the project provide youth with the opportunity to be independent, make decisions, be creative and take responsibility for their actions (Messias et al. 2005). The impact of

having high expectations for youth in the project increases the possibility that youth will begin to believe in their ability to make positive changes in their lives (Bernard 1995).

This literature lacks any discussion of how or whether these high expectations, communicated either verbally or non-verbally, can be a barrier to encouraging and maintaining participation in the project. A SIL staff member describes how the inability for youth to continue to meet the high expectations set by the project or adults participating in the project, deters some youth from continuing to participate:

They have chosen to take some steps and they have been really good and then it's almost like they don't want to disappoint us. They don't want to engage with us because they are making some poor choices and then they are really reluctant because they know they're involved with [a] drug dealer and they know that's not a good thing.

The process of Support Transformation attempts to overcome this barrier by balancing the needs of the youth with the high expectations of the adults involved in the project. This happens by: identifying the expectations of youth, integrating them with the expectations and approach used by the adults participating in the project, jointly committing to the expectations, and re-evaluating them as the project progresses.

Another condition that supports youth to make positive changes in their lives is the type of physical and social environment to which the project introduces a youth. The YER project immerses youth in nature. In terms of building relationships and developing a “sense of spirituality and purpose” these types of environments are favoured (Ungar, Dumond, and McDonald 2005, 319). A youth participant explains:

I feel good and proud of myself because I helped the forest and endangered species. When more people come and do it, it gets to be a bigger thing and it goes quite fast. When one person does a little bit and another person does a little bit, it helps a lot more.

These experiences enable youth to become aware of their relationships with the environment as well as with other people in the community. Youth are exposed to the unfamiliar and “in the process encouraged to question accepted beliefs and practices” (Ungar, Dumond, and McDonald 2005, 332). A YER youth participant explains:

I don't hang out with the best people to hang out with and do the wrong things. They seem to like crime a lot and that is the reason why I'm here, cause of that. Like stealing, a lot of people do that and I've stolen bikes. I learned from my mistake and [I] have to do all this. Taking responsibility, it was not great.

Important in both projects is creating a physical and social environment in which youth can disengage themselves from inflexible bureaucratic systems (school and social services). Whalen and Wynn (1995) characterize these inflexible bureaucratic systems as being unable to meet the multiple needs and aspirations of youth. They identify community-based youth projects as the preferred alternative to programs delivered by government social services. These projects are described as being “determinedly anti-bureaucratic” with the ability to change and adjust to meet the needs of youth. In addition, community-based youth projects are able to provide youth with more options (Whalen and Wynn 1995, 93). Adults involved in the process of Supporting Transformation identified that an important aspect of the process for youth was withdrawing from familiar surroundings and experiences and being introduced to something new. Crucial to the design of the project was the ability to adapt surroundings and activities to the changing needs of youth. In the following comment, a young person describes how being able to travel to several different locations contributed to his or her positive experience in the project:

I liked the variety. I got to move around, help other people and didn't have to stay in one place. Help other people out and I got to go to other places to help

them out. Instead of being stuck at one place helping one person, I helped a whole bunch of people.

The physical and social space created by community-based youth projects also enables youth to connect and work with people and organizations in the community that can contribute to their ability to make positive changes in their lives. By participating in the projects, youth are provided with the opportunity to work with people connected, both to resources in the community and to people who understand and are empathetic to a young person's perspective (Whalen and Wynn 1995). Once engaged in settings together, youth are exposed to "caring adults who empower and challenge them, encourage them to participate in positive experiences, and respect their opinions" (Miller, Mullett, and VanSant 2006, 59). Although the previous negative experiences of vulnerable youth can never be completely erased, these "positive social relationships" contribute to the ability of a young person to achieve positive changes (Clark 2002, 225).

Conditions that Support the Maintenance of Change

The ability to maintain the conditions that support change in youth is dependent on several factors. For Connell, Gambone and Smith (2006), the success of youth in adulthood is dependent on them attaining the "developmental outcomes that will most likely lead to adult success" (p.287). These include: *learning to be productive*, *learning to connect* and *learning to navigate-chart a safe course*. Connell believes it is by achieving these outcomes that the capacity of a young person to be successful as an adult improves dramatically (Connell, Gambone, and Smith 2006).

The first outcome, *learning to be productive*, is characterized by a youth achieving good results in school, gaining basic skills and pursuing positive interests. Adults participating in the YER and SIL projects understand that supporting youth to

gain basic skills, which will enable them to explore new opportunities and new ways to interact in society, is a requirement of long-term success. A staff member comments:

[It is] about giving them skill, organizational skills, life skills such as, [getting] up in the morning [and getting] to where they need to be.

The second outcome, *learning to connect*, includes youth developing relationships with family and non-family adults, relating to peers in a positive way and connecting with themselves either at a religious or civic level. Adults participating in the project commented that youth are supported in their understanding of how to act appropriately in relationships. They are also encouraged to use these skills to develop relationships with people or organizations in the community. For one youth, the development of relationships with adults led to a positive change in behaviour and a fresh perspective on how to interact successfully in society. The YER participant comments:

Friendly people [participating in the project] helped me to be more friendly. That is what most owners and managers of jobs are looking for these days. Hard working people, kind people, people that won't screw up and make a mess of the place. [People who] can be trusted, can be honest, and can be reliable, responsible and not disrespectful.

It is by becoming more accountable and responsible to themselves and their community that enables youth to interact more successfully with others.

The third outcome, *learning to navigate-chart a safe course*, includes youth shifting from caring only for themselves to caring for others, and learning to circumvent unhealthy behaviour or unfair treatment (Connell, Gambone, and Smith 2006). Through the process of Supporting Transformation, youth gain a different perspective and capacity for living successfully in society. They begin to recognize the benefit of following the rules and living within the limits set by society. This can lead to a significant change in

the way in which a young person lives their life once their participation in the project is complete. A staff member comments:

I think she truly is more independent. Where before she just wanted to visit with friends and family now she is starting to fit [more] into her day. Before she would sleep until 10 every morning and [she would] say she didn't have time to look for a job...now she has got a second job.

Although not a central focus of discussions by Connell et al., the contribution of these outcomes (*learning to be productive, learning to connect and learning to navigate-chart a safe course*) to long-term success is also dependent on the individual motivation of the participating youth. Cargo (2003) identifies having motivation as “a necessary condition for empowerment” (p. 73). Without motivation, youth are unable to meaningfully engage or successfully be supported in the project. Several factors may influence the motivation of youth, including: previous experiences (Halpern 2005), sense of purpose and belonging (Bernard 1995), openness and readiness to change (Bernard 1995), access to caring relationships (Bernard 1995), as well as other life transition issues. Supporting Transformation describes lack of motivation as youth not being ready to change. A participating adult in the YER project also points to young people returning to surroundings in which they were previously engaged in unhealthy behaviour as a hindrance to making positive changes in their lives:

All of those things are still waiting for them at the end of [their] 20 hour [commitment to the project]. And that's the biggest obstacle that any of these kids have.

Maintaining the motivation of youth to make positive change is dependent, to a large part, on community support and participation in the lives of youth.

The commitment of participating adults to assist youth to achieve positive changes is integral to the process of Supporting Transformation. It is this commitment by

adults to creating the conditions that motivate and provide youth with skills and knowledge that the adult participants believe will contribute to long-term positive change. Although it is evident that adults involved in the YER and SIL projects are committed to supporting youth, this obligation ends once a young person has completed the project. Limited time, funding, support and competing demands restrict the ability of the adults to support youth beyond the project. A staff member explains:

I think it's true that the project engages youth and community in a process of developing new perspectives and building new relationships with each other and their environment enabling them to be ready to make change. Sustainable change...I don't know because I only have them a short period of time. There are certain kids that I know. I don't know if I told you about the kid I ran into this summer. Well he was in my program and had anxiety and was working with a bunch of different people. I ended up running into him at [a] festival, he was volunteering, so that in it self was really good...I gave him hug and he almost cried and then his mom and dad showed up. [I] gave her a hug and she just about cried. She ended up telling me that he had applied...to go to North Island College to be a marine biologist because of my program. So for that young person it's yes but you know what I mean. I don't know what happens after I'm finished with them...Motivated I guess. Because a lot of time you just plant the seed, right.

Working Towards a New Approach to Supporting the Maintenance of Change

It is a constant concern of adults involved in the short-term projects that the gains made during the project lead to long-term change in the lives of youth. A staff member comments: "If these kids learn skills [by participating in the project] how do we not let that be one little blip in their life that has [little impact]".

The current approach to providing community services is to focus on the long-term maintenance of a program or project (Shediac-Rizkallah and Bone 1998). Funding agencies and policy-makers assume that by maintaining the program or project structure, positive outcomes will result. The by-product of this approach is pressure on community-based staff to demonstrate and ensure the sustainability of the program or project. This

serves to shift attention from creating the conditions that support youth beyond the program to ensuring the continued existence of the project structure and obtaining positive outcomes.

When asked to describe sustainability, adults associated with the projects provided these definitions:

Sustainability is everything: how you feel emotionally, intellectually, spiritually, in your community, physically, your environment around you. Maybe it has something to do with relationships. Living your life in a healthy way that's good for you and good for what's around you.

Youth are very stigmatized in our society and so maybe sustainability is that more people will be open to youth and that they can change and that there are positive aspects and that by building relationships with youth...

I think it's hard, on grants they always ask about sustainability and how you're going to sustain this project and that's always a challenge. But I kind of think of sustainability can be seen as what you're giving the youth, you might only have a term project but the sustainability lies in if you can give the youth skills that they can use on and on...I was thinking the project has to go on and on. Ideally if the project goes on and on then you can have more kids that will have sustainable...that would be the hope.

It means being able to keep something, being able to be self fulfilled and built on itself to keep going.

[There's the] program itself, which is sustained through funding and [then] there's the sustainability of the change in the kids.

In these descriptions of sustainability, a holistic approach to maintaining positive changes in youth begins to emerge. Sustainability is not simply about ensuring the continued existence of a project structure but integrating the needs of individuals and communities into the process. Sarriot and colleagues (2004), concerned with sustainability, reflects this holistic approach. He suggests that the

...development of the conditions enabling individuals, communities, and local organizations to express their potential, improve local functionality, develop

mutual relationships of support and accountability, and decrease dependency on insecure resources (financial, human, technical, informational), in order for local stakeholders to negotiate their respective roles in the pursuit of health and development, beyond a project intervention (p. 24).

The current approaches to sustainability focus on maintaining the program or project and do not adequately reflect or focus on the multiple and changing needs of youth. Community-based youth projects are only one input into the overall process of supporting youth to change. The development of individual projects does not often adequately meet the variety of youth needs; instead, a more comprehensive approach to sustainability needs to be developed. The result would be a “combination of processes and outcomes to which projects can only contribute” (Sarriot, Winch, Ryan, Bowie et al. 2004, 24). More holistic approaches to the treatment of issues are supported in the empowerment (Cargo et al. 2003), PYD (Miller 2006), resiliency (Bernard 1995), and restorative justice (Zehr 2002) philosophies.

People and organizations in the community have a critical role in helping to maintain the conditions that support youth to make positive changes in their lives. Bopp and Bopp (2001) refer to community as “any grouping of human beings who enter into a sustained relationship with each other for the purpose of improving themselves and the world in which they live” (p. 13). Creating relationships in which youth and adults develop positive relationships within the community contributes to the integration of youth. Zeldin (2004) describes community interventions as a unique setting in which youth and adults can enter into relationships that are sustained and meaningful.

Participating together in community-based youth projects contributes to a reduction in the

“psychological and spatial isolation that many adults have with non-familial youth” (Zeldin 2004, 633). It enables adults to connect with “images and situations where youth are involved (in positive activities such as sports, performing arts or community service) and could be the basis for successful reframes of youth” (Zeldin 2004, 633). For instance, the process of Supporting Transformation provides examples of how working alongside youth helped to shift the adults’ perspectives from viewing youth as troublemakers, to viewing them as contributing members of society. By working together, adults and youth begin to share the common community space (Zeldin 2004).

The process of Supporting Transformation contributes to developing an understanding of how lasting connections between youth and community can be created. Adults participating in the SIL project identified the steps required to create sustainable connections with people and organizations in the community. The steps included: a) matching youth with caring adults, b) providing support, training and supervising the interactions, c) availability to mediate and overcome challenges in the relationship as they developed, d) having a plan to ensure the experience for both adults and youth was positive even if the relationship was unsuccessful and, e) providing the time and space for trust to develop.

Implications for Adults Supporting Youth

The results of this study demonstrate that young people taking responsibility for their own healthy development can motivate them to make and maintain positive changes in their lives. The research and findings, however, demonstrates that adults have a critical role in supporting a young person to take responsibility for their health. The literature describes adults as being able to encourage youth to participate and meaningfully engage

them in the project. The potential outcome is that a young person will have the support, motivation, knowledge and skill and so choose to live their life differently. Maintaining the approaches used in a time-limited project over time can lead to long-term healthy gains for youth. Hamburg and Takanishi (1996) explain:

If the approaches are sustained over a period of years, they can offset the negative effects of low self-respect, underdeveloped social and decision making skills, indifference to learning, lack of information about health-enhancing practices, low perceptions of opportunities, and limited incentives for delaying immediate gratification and investing in their long term future (p. 384).

The findings from this research have important implications for adults developing, implementing and participating in community-based youth projects. The implications are that several factors are required to support youth to successfully achieve and sustain positive changes. These include: 1) ensuring the presence of caring adults, 2) integrating clear expectations for the project, 3) developing partnerships between youth and adults, 4) encouraging youth to set goals, 5) ensuring a physical and social environment that supports youth, 6) considering how the behavior of participating adults, project design, and programmed activities impact on the success of youth in the project, 7) developing the role of staff as a catalyst for the development of a comprehensive approach, and 8) encouraging ongoing community support for youth once the project is complete.

The first factor supports the principle that the presence of caring adults in community-based youth projects contributes significantly to a young person's success in the project. With the presence of adults who care, young people feel comfortable

developing a relationship and opening up to them. This caring factor enables adults to better target the project to meet a young person's needs. As well, caring relationships with adults assist the youth to establish social networks with people in the community. For caring adults to be able to meet the changing needs of youth, the adults need to have multiple roles, thus providing youth with different types of support. To take advantage of opportunities in the project, caring adults must provide "emotional support and affirmation, strategic support and guidance, and motivational support and standards" (Zeldin and Price 1995, 9). It requires adults who are willing to enter into partnerships with youth and to provide them with guidance and opportunities but not to control the process. Adults need to be compassionate, trustworthy, good role models, have empathy for a young person's situation, and be approachable. In addition, through intuition and experience, adults need to be able to know when to actively support youth and when to provide youth with space to be independent.

The second factor is balancing the high expectations of adults involved in the project with the expectations and ability of youth to contribute to the process. The adults interviewed provided an example of the process used to balance these expectations. This happens by: identifying the expectations of youth, integrating them with the expectations and approach used by the adults participating in the project, and as the project progresses, by jointly committing to the expectations and re-evaluating them. Fundamental both to youth expressing their expectations and to the staff being able to identify those expectations, is the need for youth to develop trusting relationships in safe surroundings. By adults considering the expectations of youth for the project, they assist youth in maintaining their willingness to engage.

The third factor is developing partnerships between youth and adults. Adults supporting youth to pursue specific interests, providing them with opportunities to complete tasks independently, supporting them to take independent action, and enabling them to leave the project at anytime facilitates the development of these partnerships. The ability of project coordinators to design a project that enables youth to take independent action while at the same time, providing them with activities that support their ability to make positive change is key to successfully developing these partnerships. Adults need to be open to listening to what the young person has to say and incorporating their input into programmatic goals. Cargo (2003) suggests asking open-ended questions, setting priorities, developing action plans, and reflecting on key incidents. The adult should also trust the ability of the youth to take independent action.

The fourth factor is the need for adults involved in the project to encourage youth to set goals and to support them in their efforts to achieve those goals. Being aware of these goals ensures the personal needs of youth are not lost within the structured activities. These “concrete goals and steps grounded in informed but accessible understandings of personal development...help youth to focus their attention and clarify aspirations” (Whalen and Wynn 1995, 91). SIL stressed that, in the hierarchy of programmed activities, those that enable the basic needs of youth to be fulfilled, such as shelter, stability, health and nutrition, are required before youth can be successful in obtaining other goals. Zeldin and Price (1995) explain that shelter, high quality instruction, and accessible health and social services are prerequisites for development.

The fifth factor is the need for adults to introduce youth to an environment that supports positive transformations. In the literature, community-based youth projects were

specifically mentioned as environments that provided the flexibility required to support youth. Also important was the need to provide environments that enabled youth to contribute to social change. It was necessary that youth have an opportunity to start fresh. Involving youth in collaborative work may also help to reduce isolation and broaden their perspectives (Zeldin 2004).

The sixth factor is the need for staff to consider how the behaviour of participating adults in the project design and programmed activities impact the ability of youth to maintain positive changes. Positive behaviours by participating adults will better ensure that the project has a significant positive long-term impact in the lives of youth by being a role model.

It is essential that staff set up the conditions that enable youth to continue to practice the skills they have learned during their participation in the project. A participating community member explains how maintaining positive change is only possible if opportunities are created that enable youth to continue to act positively:

It's like [when] you go to school and you learn math. We don't sustain [those math skills] unless we have [a] use for that in our lives and we continue to do it somehow. It doesn't mean you have to do it everyday. [But] it's like anything; you have to put it into practice.

Ensuring the existence of an extended social network for youth in the community can facilitate this process. An extended social network in the community provides youth with the opportunity to access multiple resources and supports “able to keep pace” with the needs of youth that extend beyond the boundaries of the project (Cargo et al. 2003; Whalen and Wynn 1995). In addition, these social networks provide the ongoing support “necessary for the incorporation of knowledge and skills into the youth’s repertoire” (Cargo et al. 2003). To maintain change in even the most resilient youth, “multiple

sources of opportunities and support that are mutually reinforcing and that are able to keep pace with shifting demands”(Whalen and Wynn 1995, 95) are required. One community-based youth project cannot do it all and requires a collaborative effort on behalf of the community to support youth to continue to make positive changes.

The seventh factor is the recognition that adults who are developing, implementing and participating in community-based youth projects have an important role, not only in creating the conditions that support youth, but also in acting as a catalyst for future collaborative community efforts to create long-term change in youth. When community organizations and members engage with youth through community projects, there is the potential to develop a connection with other organizations. Participants in one project highlighted this after observing that communication between community organizations had increased as a result of participating in the community project. In the YER project, community organizations were initially brought together with the common task of working with youth on environmental projects. However, this led to further discussions amongst community organizations about their common interests and opened up the possibility for future collaborations. A member of the community explains, "There is a common interest maybe in the youth. So there is some growth that happens within communities - more groups realizing they have more in common than not in common".

To meet the ongoing needs of youth, collaborative efforts between people and organizations in the community are required. Whalen and Wynn (1995) believe the lack of collaboration between people and organizations in the community “undermines the transmission of valuable local knowledge and know how among youth workers and may contribute to burnout and the demise of otherwise promising local programs”(p. 93) .

The eighth factor is the need for staff to encourage ongoing community support for youth once the project is complete. For youth, “empowerment outcomes are not static and may be transferable to other contexts” (Wallerstein 2006, 20). Ongoing support of adults in the community is required to ensure youth maintain the positive changes that have resulted from their participation in the project.

Connell et al. lists several conditions required for youth to be successful in the long-term. These include: access to basic needs (shelter, food and health), various types of personal support, opportunities to gain skills, meaningful engagement and membership in groups and community, and physically and emotionally safe environments.

The steps identified by adults participating in the SIL project to create sustainable connections with people and organizations in the community include: a) matching youth with caring adults, b) providing support, training and supervising the interactions, c) being available to mediate and overcome challenges in the relationship as they developed, d) a plan to ensure that the experience for both adults and youth was positive even if the relationship was unsuccessful and, e) providing the time and space for trust to develop. During the project, it is essential that adults introduce and connect youth with people and organizations in the community as well as developing their confidence to make these connections once their participation in the project is complete. The young person therefore understands where they can access support and becomes comfortable connecting with adults. Developing a young person’s trust in adults can encourage them to connect with other adults in the future.

One of the SIL staff identified connecting with the media as an effective strategy for reducing the negative stereotypes of youth in the community. The staff also suggested

that ensuring a positive experience of adults and youth, interest might be generated through word of mouth. From this could follow a change in the community's perceptions of youth and lead to ongoing support for youth in the community.

The results of this study demonstrate that young people taking responsibility for their own healthy development can motivate them to make and maintain positive changes in their lives. The research and findings demonstrate, however, that adults have a critical role in supporting a young person to take responsibility for their health. The literature describes adults as being able to encourage youth to participate and meaningfully engage them in the project. The potential outcome is that a young person will have the support, motivation, knowledge and skill and so choose to live their life differently. Maintaining the approaches used in a time-limited project over time can lead to long-term healthy gains for youth. Hamburg and Takanishi (1996) explain:

If the approaches are sustained over a period of years, they can offset the negative effects of low self-respect, underdeveloped social and decision making skills, indifference to learning, lack of information about health-enhancing practices, low perceptions of opportunities, and limited incentives for delaying immediate gratification and investing in their long term future (p. 384).

Implications for community people, organizations, and funding agencies

People and organizations in the community, policy makers and funding agencies have an important role in supporting adults involved in community-based youth projects to create the conditions that assist youth. Through collaborative efforts from staff, people and organizations in the community and support from funding agencies, the needs of

youth are better met. The research study suggested several strategies to create the conditions that support youth.

The first strategy is for people and organizations to meet the needs of youth. This happens by the community identifying and creatively adapting to the changing situation and needs of youth. Support from funding agencies supports the implementation of this strategy. For example, if youth have an interest in a particular area, staff working collaboratively with other community organizations can create opportunities to explore that interest. More flexible funding could enable staff to target particular areas in which youth need support.

The second strategy is to create access to supports in the community once a young person's participation in the project is completed. For instance, adults participating in the project provide youth with the opportunity to continue to volunteer with their organizations once their participation in the project is complete. However, financial and logistical challenges hinder the ability to maintain this connection. To encourage a continued connection with supports in the community, funding agencies could provide flexible funding that would allow staff to create incentives, such as ongoing support for community volunteers working with youth or bus passes to enable youth to access organizations.

The third strategy is to create follow-up projects that provide youth with continuous, structured support. One suggestion made by the YER coordinator was the need for a follow-up project to maintain the positive gains that were made during the project.

The fourth strategy is to transfer the responsibility for providing ongoing support for youth to people and organizations in the community. The implementation of this strategy is influenced by the motivation of people and organizations in the community to create new opportunities for young people, such as developing new projects or volunteer opportunities. Essential to this process is having a person or group who is motivated and able to empower others. Community-based youth projects can facilitate this process. By people and organizations in the community engaging in a project together, communication and greater understanding of each other's common interests increases. As a result, the willingness of community organizations and members to partner, work and communicate with each other in a new processes increases. A participating community member explains the benefit of people or organizations joining together to create opportunities for young people: "I think [the coordinator] said she had about 10 different groups involved but if there was one big umbrella they could really [make a difference]". This strategy is also influenced by funding agencies providing flexible funding to facilitate the transfer of responsibility from staff to people and organizations in the community.

Directions for Future Research

This research is only an initial study in how to support youth to maintain the positive changes that have resulted from their participation in community-based youth projects. This study suggests that community-based youth projects have an important role in supporting vulnerable youth to develop the motivation, skills and knowledge to make positive changes in their lives. However, further research in several areas would enhance the ability of staff to support youth.

Further studies are required to:

- Detail the essential elements required to balance a programmatic approach with a youth-controlled process and identify the strategies required by adults to create this balance.
- Understand whether and how the high expectations of adults involved in the project impact the willingness of youth to participate and maintain their engagement in the project.
- Determine if the effectiveness of communicating these expectations either verbally or non-verbally can be a barrier to encouraging and maintaining participation in the project.
- Develop strategies about how to re-engage a youth following a decision to leave the project.
- Develop strategies to identify and integrate the various expectations of adults and youth into the project design.

The research agenda, described below, points to important studies required to enhance the ability of youth to sustain the positive changes that have resulted from their participation in the project. Long-term studies that include the views of youth, staff, community members and organizations, could contribute greatly to gaining a comprehensive picture of how community-based youth projects contribute to sustainable change in youth.

- Conduct interviews or focus groups with youth that have participated in community-based youth projects in the past. Examine the current situation of youth and how participating in the projects has impacted them. Discuss what

type of assistance supported them or would have been required to support them to transition successfully into adulthood.

- Conduct interviews and focus groups with people and organizations in the community that have connected with youth through community-based youth projects in the past. Examine what contributed or did not contribute to their ability to maintain connections with young people.
- Examine the extent that changes in the funding structure or youth policies would contribute to the support of youth attempting to maintain the changes that have resulted from their participation in the project.
- Examine how perceptions of sustainability impact the ability of staff to create the conditions to support and maintain positive changes in youth.
- Examine how community-based youth staff could act as a catalyst for creating collaborative and comprehensive approaches to supporting youth.

Conclusion

This grounded theory study uncovered the implicit but undocumented process that staff, people and organizations in the community engage in to support youth. This complex and non-linear process assists adults involved in the project to support youth to transition from being involved in unhealthy behaviour to engaging in a process of achieving positive changes. Adults encourage and support youth to develop the motivation, skills and the knowledge required to make those positive changes.

The findings demonstrate that Supporting Transformation is an effective strategy for assisting youth to transition through a series of transformation cycles. The process highlighted that an adult developing trusting relationships with youth is essential to

engaging youth meaningfully in the project. The process of Supporting Transformation is congruent with theories that describe processes as empowering for youth. An important implication of the grounded theory of Supporting Transformation is that it points to the need to consider further the merit of balancing programmatic with youth controlled approaches and creating comprehensive approaches to supporting the transitional needs of youth.

This research has provided me with a greater understanding of the critical role of adults in contributing to positive changes in youth. I also gained a better understanding for the need to provide ongoing support for youth once a project is complete.

From the point of view of the two community-based youth projects in this study, the broad perspectives and multiple meanings of sustainability make it difficult to define and, more importantly, to demonstrate sustainability. With the continued demand from funding sources to account for the sustainability of interventions, understanding and demonstrating sustainability is of particular importance. By articulating a process based on the perceptions and experiences of local agencies and communities about sustainability, their working knowledge of how to sustain and demonstrate change increased. Grounded theory methodology allowed for the development of a theoretical explication of the conditions and key elements that supported change in youth. It also allowed for an examination of the relationship between the theoretical concepts and the conditions under which the concepts exist. Supporting Transformation creates a picture of how community-based youth projects contribute to assisting youth to achieve and sustain positive changes. Further research in this area is required to develop a more comprehensive understanding of how sustainability occurs. Generating theory through

research that was grounded in the local perceptions and experiences of the community ensured that new knowledge was created (Glaser and Strauss 1967). By specifying strategies that promoted sustainability, this process also enhanced the ability of the community to make choices that will ultimately contribute to sustain the well-being of its youth.

Although the findings from this study are not conclusive in terms of demonstrating that these projects enhance the ability to make long-term positive changes in youth, they do indicate that the projects have an essential role in providing a platform upon which youth can build. The findings also indicate that steps can be taken during short-term projects that contribute to the ability of a young person to be supported to make long-term changes in their life once the project is complete.

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APPENDICES

- Appendix A – Letter of Information (For persons involved with the YER project)
- Appendix B – Letter of Information (For persons involved with the SIL project)
- Appendix C – Consent (For coordinators, staff and people in the community)
- Appendix D – Interview Guide (August 2005)
- Appendix E – Interview Guide (September 2005)
- Appendix F – Interview Guide (April 2006)
- Appendix G – Interview Guide (May 2006)
- Appendix H – University of Victoria Ethics Approval

Appendix A- Letter of Information (For persons involved with the YER project)

Carol Sparks

Graduate Student, University of Victoria

Date

Re: Sustaining Change: A study on the required elements to sustain change and the barriers to sustainability

To whom it may concern,

You are being invited to participate in a study that is part of a graduate thesis that will examine how and in what ways community action projects create sustainable change and the difficulties experienced by community agencies trying to build sustainability. Carol Sparks, a graduate student in the Dispute Resolution program at the University of Victoria will work in partnership with Wendy Kotilla, project manager of the Youth Ecological Restoration Project to examine these issues. Carol is required to conduct research as part of the requirements for a Master's degree in Dispute Resolution.

You are being asked to participate in this study because your knowledge and experience are especially relevant to this research. Your participation will help us enhance the understanding of the required elements to sustain the changes resulting from this community action project and the barriers to sustainability. Community members themselves have identified a strong need to enhance their understanding of the influences on sustainability and your participation will help to build that understanding.

Taking part in the study will involve a 45-60 minute face-to-face interview with a trained interviewer. The interview would be at a location convenient for you, such as your home or a coffee shop. You will be asked some questions about the important elements, strategies, and supports to influence the sustainability of changes resulting from the community action project in your community. With your consent, the interview will be audiotaped.

You do not have to take part in this study if you do not want to. You may choose not to answer any question during the interview. You may also stop at any time without any consequences. If possible, you may have us erase all your answers.

Any information that you give to us will not be given to anyone else. The information will only be used for the purposes of this study. Only the research team will have access to the information; these will be stored in locked filing cabinets, or be password-protected on computers. Your name will not appear in any reports or presentations from this study. The data may be used for additional analyses up to five years after the initial study. All electronic files will be destroyed 5 years after the completion of the research. All names, identifying information, audiotapes and paper transcripts will be destroyed at the completion of the research.

If you have any questions or are interested in taking part in this study, please contact Carol Sparks by email, X or by phone, X (Victoria) or X (Comox Valley). You will first be asked if you have any questions or concerns about the research project. If you agree, an interview will be arranged. The research questions will be sent by e-mail or by mail prior to the interview. At the time of the interview you will be asked to sign a consent form; one copy will be for your records, and another will be for our records.

If you have any questions about this study, you may also contact Dr. Marjorie MacDonald at X. If you wish to verify the ethical approval of this study, or if you have any concerns about your treatment or rights as a participant in this study, please contact the Associate Vice President of Research at the University of Victoria at X. Thank you for your time and support.

Sincerely,

Carol Sparks
Graduate Student in Dispute Resolution
Faculty of Human and Social Development

Appendix B- Letter of Information (For persons involved with the SIL project)**Carol Sparks**

Graduate Student, University of Victoria

Date

Tel: X

Re: Sustaining Change: A study on the required elements to sustain change and the barriers to sustainability

To whom it may concern,

You are being invited to participate in a study that is part of a graduate thesis that will examine how and in what ways community action projects create sustainable change and the difficulties experienced by community agencies trying to build sustainability. Carol Sparks, a graduate student in the Dispute Resolution program at the University of Victoria will work in partnership with Lori McKeown, project manager of the Supported Independent Living Program to examine these issues. Carol is required to conduct research as part of the requirements for a Master's degree in Dispute Resolution.

You are being asked to participate in this study because your knowledge and experience are especially relevant to this research. Your participation will help us enhance the understanding of the required elements to sustain the changes resulting from this community action project and the barriers to sustainability. Community members themselves have identified a strong need to enhance their understanding of the influences on sustainability and your participation will help to build that understanding.

Taking part in the study will involve a 45-60 minute face-to-face interview with a trained interviewer. The interview would be at a location convenient for you, such as your home or a coffee shop. You will be asked some questions about the important elements, strategies, and supports to influence the sustainability of changes resulting from the community action project in your community. With your consent, the interview will be audiotaped.

You do not have to take part in this study if you do not want to. You may choose not to answer any question during the interview. You may also stop at any time without any consequences. If possible, you may have us erase all your answers.

Any information that you give to us will not be given to anyone else. The information will only be used for the purposes of this study. Only the research team will have access to the information; these will be stored in locked filing cabinets, or be password-protected on computers. Your name will not appear in any reports or presentations from this study. The data may be used for additional analyses up to five years after the initial study. All electronic files will be destroyed 5 years after the completion of the research. All names, identifying information, audiotapes and paper transcripts will be destroyed at the completion of the research.

If you have any questions or are interested in taking part in this study, please contact Carol Sparks by email, X or by phone, X (Victoria) or X (Comox Valley). You will first be asked if you have any questions or concerns about the research project. If you agree, an interview will be arranged. The research questions will be sent by e-mail

or by mail prior to the interview. At the time of the interview you will be asked to sign a consent form; one copy will be for your records, and another will be for our records.

If you have any questions about this study, you may also contact Dr. Marjorie MacDonald at X. If you wish to verify the ethical approval of this study, or if you have any concerns about your treatment or rights as a participant in this study, please contact the Associate Vice President of Research at the University of Victoria at X. Thank you for your time and support.

Sincerely,

Carol Sparks
Graduate Student in Dispute Resolution
Faculty of Human and Social Development

Appendix C- Participation Consent Form

Sustaining Change: A study on the required elements to sustain change and the barriers to sustainability

Project coordinators, staff, and community members-Interview

You are being invited to participate in a study that is part of a graduate thesis that will examine how and in what ways community action projects create sustainable change and the difficulties experienced by community agencies trying to build sustainability. Carol Sparks, a graduate student in the Dispute Resolution program at the University of Victoria will work in partnership with Wendy Kotilla, project manager of the Youth Ecological Restoration Project and Lori McKeown, project manager of the Supported Independent Living Housing Program to examine these issues. Carol is required to conduct research as part of the requirements for a Master's degree in Dispute Resolution. If you have any questions or concerns you may contact Carol by email at X or her graduate supervisor, Dr. Marjorie MacDonald at X.

You are being asked to participate in this study because your knowledge and experience are especially relevant to this research. Your participation in this study will help us to enhance the understanding of the required elements to sustain the changes resulting from these community action projects as well as the barriers to sustainability. The communities themselves have identified a strong need to enhance their understanding of the influences on sustainability and your participation will help to build that understanding.

If you agree to voluntarily participate in this research, you will be interviewed individually. With your permission, the interview will be audiotaped and subsequently transcribed. The interview will involve a time commitment of 45-60 minutes and you will be asked some questions about the important elements, strategies, and supports to influence the sustainability of changes resulting from the specific community action project with which you are associated.

Apart from the commitment of time, there are no known or anticipated risks or inconveniences to you by participating in this research. You are asked to inform the interviewer if you anticipate any problems, risks or inconveniences associated with your participation of which the interviewer is unaware. Steps will be taken to deal with problems, risks, or inconveniences. If this isn't possible, the interview will not proceed.

The potential benefits of your participation in this research include an opportunity for you to reflect on your everyday professional experience in a supportive environment. In addition, your participation will help to enhance the understanding about creating sustainable change as well as the barriers to sustainability. You will have access to the findings of the research and any informational resources developed from the research. Copies of the research findings and any information resources developed will be left with the project managers of the community action project.

Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you do decide to participate, you may withdraw or decline to answer a question at any time without any consequences or any explanation. If you decide to stop the interview, you may decide to have the audiotape erased or you may allow us to use the information you have provided. The small token of appreciation offered to participants will not be withdrawn if you decide not to participate. It is important for you to know that it is unethical to provide undue compensation or inducements to research participants and, if you agree to participate in this study, this form of compensation to you must not be coercive. If you would not otherwise choose to participate if the compensation was not offered, then you should decline.

To protect your anonymity and confidentiality, a substitute for your name will be written on all materials that you have provided and any descriptive particulars that might identify you will be changed. No names or identifying information will be used in either the analysis or the write-up of the research results.

At the end of the project, all names and identifying information will be eliminated from the data. To protect your confidentiality, all interview data will be kept secure at all times by locking it in a filing cabinet and by protecting electronic files with a password. All audiotapes, transcribed interviews and electronic files will be retained for the duration of the research, but audiotapes and paper transcripts will be destroyed at the completion of the research. The data may be use for additional analyses for up to five years after the initial study. All electronic files will be destroyed after five years. Access to the data will be limited and those individuals with access will sign an agreement of confidentiality.

It is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared with other researchers, community organizations and policy makers. It might also be used in presentations, conferences, scholarly and policy papers.

If you have any questions about the ethical approval of this study or wish to raise any concerns that you might have, you can contact the Associate Vice President of Research at the University of Victoria at X. If you have any questions about the project itself please contact Carol Sparks at X or raise any concerns you might have with Dr. Marjorie MacDonald at X.

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researchers.

Name of Participant

Signature

Date

A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher

Appendix D – Interview Guide (August 2005)

1. Tell me about your experience in/with project?
2. What are the changes taking place (for youth, project, or community) as a result of the project?
 - a. The successes?
3. How does the project create sustainability?
 - a. What are the strategies or supports used to create sustainable change in youth?
4. What factors are important in ensuring that change is sustainable?
 - a. The essential elements
 - b. Important
 - c. What actions need to be taken to ensure the changes are sustainable?
5. What are the obstacles to sustainability? What actions have been necessary in achieving the sustainability of changes?

Appendix E – Interview Guide (September 2005)

1. Tell me about your experience with the community action project?
2. What are the changes taking place?
 - a. What kind of changes did the project achieve?
 - b. What about the staff?
 - c. What about the parents?
 - d. What about the youth?
 - e. What about the community?
 - f. How do you think that happened?
 - g. Who was instrumental in the process?
3. Is this what you anticipated? Were there any surprises?
4. Will the changes be maintained?
 - a. How will they be maintained?
 - b. What do you think made a difference in maintaining the changes?
 - c. Is there anything else you think the project could do to maintain the changes?
5. What are the challenges to maintaining these changes?
 - a. What do you think that's all about?

Appendix F – Interview Guide (April 2006)

1. Tell me about your experience with the community action project?
 - a. Need to understand the changes that are taking place
 - b. To understand the changes happening because of the project

2. What are the changes taking place?
 - a. What kind of changes did the project achieve?
 - b. What about the staff?
 - c. What about the parents?
 - d. What about the youth?
 - e. What about the community?

3. Have you run into clients that have participated in the project? Is there anything different?

4. How do you think that happened?
 - a. What were the factors that contributed to the change taking place?
 - b. Who was instrumental in the process?

5. What are the challenges to maintaining these changes?
 - a. What do you think that's all about?

6. Can you think of a time when the project did not work well for a youth? What were the factors that contributed to it?
 - a. Are there any youth that would not be successful in the project? Or have not been successful in the project? Why?

7. What guides your work? Why are you passionate about?

8. What does sustainability mean to you?
 - a. How do you think about it?

 - b. What influences how you think about it?

Appendix G – Interview Guide (May 2006)

Specific questions will be asked about the themes emerging from the previous six interviews.

1. Briefly, tell me about your experience with the project?
2. In general, how do small community project create change in youth?
 - a. What is the role of community projects in helping youth to maintain these changes?
 - b. How do community projects create long-term change in youth?
3. How does the YER project motivate youth to make a positive change? Strategies?
 - a. What needs to be in place so that youth are motivated to make positive changes?
 - b. What can the project do to help maintain the motivation to change?
 - c. What is the impact of motivating youth to maintain a positive change?
4. What strategies does the project use to connect youth with the community?
 - a. What needs to be in place so that youth connected with the community?
 - b. What needs to be in place so that youth stay connected with the community?
 - c. What is the impact of connecting youth with the community?
5. By participating in the project, what type of life skills/skills can be gained?
 - a. What needs to be in place so that youth maintain or continue to build on those skills?
 - b. What is the impact on youth that maintain these skills?
6. What is the impact of exposing youth to a different experience/perceptive?
 - a. What strategies does the project use to expose youth to a different experience?
 - b. How can the project encourage youth to consider these experiences/perspectives when making future decisions?
7. How does the project empower youth to take action?
 - a. What is the impact of empowering youth to take action?
 - b. What needs to be in place so that youth feel empowered to take action?
 - c. What needs to be in place so that youth feel empowered to take future action?
8. How do you encourage youth to participate in the project?
 - a. How do you encourage youth to engage in the process?
 - b. What is the impact of engaging youth in the process?
 - c. How does building a relationships with an adult lead to increase in trust?