

# Peer Support Tip Sheet: Youth Engagement

*This tip sheet is a very brief introduction to youth engagement. To learn more about meaningfully engaging young people in organizations, give us a call. PeerNetBC's Kinex Youth Initiative offers training sessions throughout the year and customizes youth engagement training for many groups.*

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## What is youth engagement?

Youth engagement “is the meaningful participation and sustained involvement of a young person in an activity with a focus outside of him or herself.”<sup>1</sup>

## Why is youth engagement important?

It's a human right! Canada signed on to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of the Child. The Declaration states that youth have the right to participate in decisions that affect them. And engaging youth in community processes supports the development of resilient youth who are less likely to participate in risky behaviour.

When we ask young people ahead of time what services they need and how they want them delivered, youth programs are more effective. Youth directly involved in planning and implementing programs will buy in. And they'll invite their friends along, too! Youth will bring energy, enthusiasm and fresh ideas to your organization.

## What does youth engagement look like?

The term 'youth engagement' has been in heavy rotation in recent years but many people aren't sure what it actually means. Some are simply told that it's a good idea to engage young people or asked to make their workplace more youth-friendly. Simply put, youth engagement means making a typically adult environment more welcoming and accessible to young people in order to encourage involvement.

We suggest a few simple youth-friendly actions:

- hold meetings after school hours and make sure there's food
- offer youth bus tickets to get to and from events
- use email to communicate and get familiar with text messaging and micro-blogging
- introduce youth to *everyone* in the organization and explain all staff and volunteer roles

Some other actions take more work and resources but are well worth the effort:

- set up a youth advisory council and *really* use the feedback
- create a peer welcoming committee (youth who welcome and orient new youth)
- arrange high school credits for volunteer time
- hire a youth outreach worker

Remember – you don't have to *act* young. Just be your friendly and conscientious self!

**Be an ally to youth and create a youth-friendly organization!**

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<sup>1</sup> The Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement in Toronto <http://www.engagementcentre.ca/>