



*Promoting Participation of Older Youth in Out-of-School Time  
Programs and Opportunities*

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## Introduction

### *The work of Dr. Gisela Konopka*

Among the early, unheralded pioneers of the powerful paradigm shift from a problem-focus to a more strengths-based perspective of adolescent development that has come to be known as the field of “youth development” is Dr. Gisela Konopka (1910-2003). In the late 1970’s Dr. Konopka became director of the Center for Youth Development and Research (CYDR), School of Social Work at the University of Minnesota. The CYDR appears to be the first formal usage of the term or phrase, “youth development” in the title of an organization. Of course, when asked about whether she knew if this was the first formal use of the phrase<sup>1</sup> she scoffed and said she could care less about such things! What she really cared about was whether young people were given the respect and opportunities they need to succeed, and her work, her philosophy permeates the people, the programs, the experiences and data described in this analysis of MN youth engagement and participation. In fact it provides the very theoretical foundation for a field.

In her landmark article, *Requirements For Healthy Development of Adolescent Youth* Konopka (1973) describes eight conditions that must be provided for the healthy development of young people. These fundamental conditions are as relevant and needed today, 35 years later, as they were when they were first published.

The eight requirements or conditions for healthy youth development are that young people have opportunities to:

1. Participate as citizens, as members of a household, as workers, as responsible members of society;

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<sup>1</sup> Note: From personal conversations with Dr. Konopka at her home in Minneapolis, MN 1984-2003.

2. Gain experience in decision making;
3. Interact with peers and acquire a sense of belonging;
4. Reflect on self in relation to others and to discover self by looking outward as well as inward;
5. Discuss conflicting values and formulate their own value system;
6. Experiment with their own identity, with relationships to other people, with ideas; to try out various roles without having to commit themselves irrevocably;
7. Develop a feeling of accountability in the context of a relationship among equals;
8. Cultivate a capacity to enjoy life.

### ***Opportunity-Rich and Opportunity-Depleted Communities***

Fundamental to the healthy development of young people are enriching experiences, opportunities, programs, and supports. Konopka (1973) talks about the lack of opportunities for healthy development, the lack of real options and access to multiple opportunities, as “denial of equal participation to youth [and that] in almost every aspect of society—family, school, civic organizations, political groups, social and religious groups—youth are usually not permitted equal participation. ...Unless real options are available, choice-making becomes an empty phrase.” (p.12)

Joan Wynn (1988) and her colleagues at the Chapin Hall Center for Children compared two communities in terms of reciprocal supports for youth, looking at such things as parks, libraries, and youth programs, and found different kinds and levels of community supports for youth development in an urban and suburban community. And in the 1990’s, Search Institute’s 40 Development Assets (Benson, 2006) provided both a framework and community-level data and training about internal and external assets, which acted like an inoculation for preventing negative outcomes and promoting positive ones. Saito (2004) began looking at communities in

terms of whether they were opportunity-depleted (i.e., virtually no youth development programs or activities available), school-based opportunity-rich (i.e., the majority of youth programs and activities co-located in school buildings after the school day ends), or school- and community-based opportunity-rich and found several school-based opportunity-rich communities (especially in greater MN) and several opportunity-depleted communities among the nine Minnesota communities in her study.

Many of these enriching experiences can and do occur under the auspices of out-of-school (OST) youth development programs. OST youth programs include organized activities, clubs, groups, gatherings, etc. that occur outside of the regular school day--in the after-school hours, evening, weekends and summer. They occur in many places, including public parks, schools, and libraries; non-profit organizations; creative and cultural organizations; youth leadership and engagement opportunities; neighborhood and civic action organizations; and faith-based organizations. They are called many things, occur in many places, and focus on different outcomes but they have as their common denominator, that they provide positive, intentional, developmentally appropriate opportunities for young people to grow and develop that occur outside the formal school day (Blyth, 2006; Walker, 2006).

### ***Youth Participation and Engagement***

Konopka (1973) describes criteria for effective youth programs in this way:

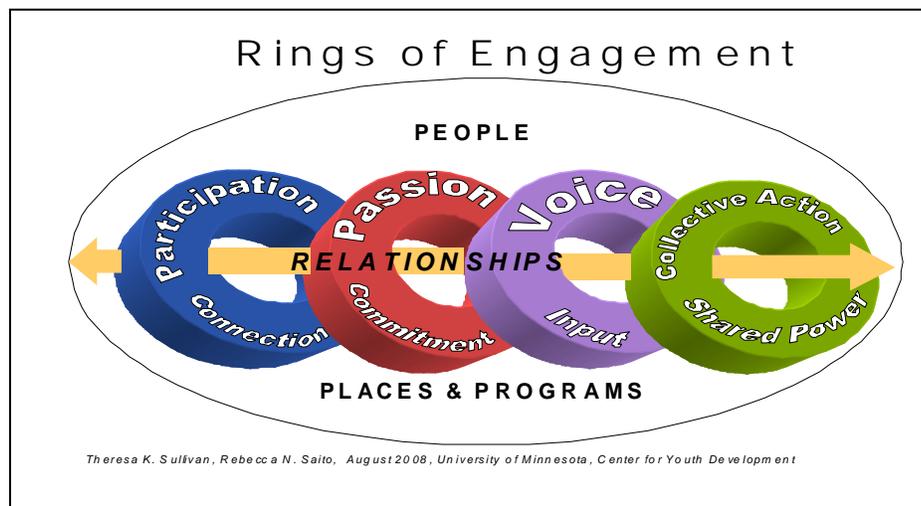
*The effectiveness of programs and systems serving youth can be judged by the opportunities they offer youth and the credibility they enjoy. We believe those which merit support are distinguished by:*

- *Provision of opportunity for youth to have experience in (1) making choices; (2) making commitments; (3) experimenting with a variety of roles to “try out” the choices and commitments they make.*
- *Credibility: validity of the program in the eyes of those served. (p.14)*

The core conditions for healthy development and criteria for effectiveness that Konopka describes in 1973 are re-captured and reflected in the Rings of Engagement framework, depicted in Figure 1, created 35 years later by Sullivan and Saito (2008), at the Center for Youth Development, University of Minnesota Extension. The Rings of Engagement is a framework for thinking about myriad types of youth engagement, including youth program participation and community connections, passion, choice and commitment, as well as voice and shared leadership.

As Sullivan (2009) argues, a healthy, strong community needs all types of youth engagement opportunities in order to provide the widest range of relationships, programs, and opportunities that can cast the widest net of engagement.

**Figure 1: The Rings of Engagement Framework**



### ***Benefits of Participation in Youth Development Programs and Opportunities***

Youth development programs and opportunities, or OST youth programs, play an important, for some perhaps essential role in providing the relationships, supports and connections, experiences, programs and opportunities that young people need to succeed.

*Impact of Youth Programs.* There is strong evidence to support the value of youth participation in youth development programs and opportunities, as participation is associated with myriad pro-social skills, attitudes and behaviors including academic achievement, psycho-social development, and other positive outcomes for youth, along with reduction in risk behaviors, (Quinn, 1999; Scales, Benson, Leffert, and Blyth, 2000; Simpkins, 2003; Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak, and Hawkins, 2004; Mahoney, Larson, Eccles, and Lord, 2005; Roth and Brooks-Gunn, 2007). For the most recent extensive review of the literature related to outcomes of youth engagement endeavors, see Sullivan (2009). For ongoing access to the most up-to-date information on the impact of OST youth programs, get connected to Weiss and her colleagues at the Harvard Family Research Project (HFRP),<sup>2</sup> which provides regular updates on the latest research and findings from their national database of evaluations of youth programs.

### ***Who is missing out? Older Youth Engagement***

There is a growing awareness and evidence that rates of participation in youth development programs and opportunities drops around ages 12 or 13 and remains low (Sipe and Ma, 1998; Herrera and Arbreton, 2003; Duffett and Johnson, 2004; Lauver, Little, and Weiss, 2004; Simpkins, Little, and Weiss, 2004; Yohalem, Wilson-Ahlstrom, and Pittman, 2004, Farrell, 2008). Participation rates are especially low for youth who come from families and communities with lower incomes and opportunities (Littel and Wynn, 1989; Saito, Benson,

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<sup>2</sup> Note. For more information about the Harvard Family Research Project go to <http://hfrp.org/>

Blyth, and Sharma, 1995; Pittman, Wilson-Ahlstrom, and Yohalem, 2003; Lochner, Allen, and Blyth, 2008).

As a nation and as a field, we invested well in early childhood education (e.g., Success by 6 by United Way, Federal Headstart program) and moved on to supporting after-school programming (e.g., Beacons by Youth Development Institute, Federal 21<sup>st</sup> Century After-School Learning), predominately for youth 12 and under. What conditions and opportunities are available for young teen-agers in Minnesota and communities throughout the country--those youth 13 and older who are too young to drive or find work but too old to attend programs for younger children? What's available to our young people and what responsibility does a community have for ensuring that youth are provided access to the kinds of opportunities and relationships and experiences they need to succeed?

In a newly published article, "Highlights from the Out-of-School Time Database" Harris (2008) says:

*Until recently, much OST programming and related research has focused on serving elementary school-age children, with less attention paid to middle and high school-age youth...*

*At an age when they are beginning to become more independent, teens still need to have some structure and guidance, even as they gain greater independence. Increasingly, stakeholders in the OST arena are coming to see after school programs as an underutilized asset to improve outcomes for older youth... (p.4)*

Many in the field of youth development are focusing on delineating elements or features of program quality and staff training—things that happen inside the program or organization-- that lead to better outcomes for youth who participate and remain engaged (Blazevski and Smith, 2007; Granger, Durlak, Yohalem, and Reisner, 2007; Vandell, Reisner, and Pierce, 2007; Kahn, Bronte-Tinkew, and Theokas, 2008). Far less is known about (a) who does and does not have

access to and remain involved in youth development programs (Noam, 2005; Weiss, Little, and Bouffard, 2005), let alone about, (b) how we ensure that *all* young people have real options and choice.

### ***Marketing and Attracting Older Youth***

As children become adolescents around age 12 or so, they often begin to want increasing levels of choice and authority in determining how they will spend their time outside of school, and don't want to attend the same programs that are for younger children. Given the nature of adolescence, as described by Bronfenbrenner (1979) as ever-widening waves of an ecosystem, from self, to family, and into programs and community, and as a time of increasing levels of exploration of new roles and identities and desire for autonomy (Erickson, 1950; Konopka, 1973; Quinn, 1999), this change in decision-making roles and responsibilities is normative, to be expected, even required for healthy youth development.

*Who decides?* Parents of elementary school children are more likely to decide what their children are going to do after-school, whereas teens themselves are more likely to have a larger say in how they spend their time outside of school (Herrera and Arbreton, 2003; Noam, 2005; Marczak, Dworkin, Skuza, and Beyer, 2006). These natural internal and external developmental characteristics of adolescence have implications for how we approach the issue of increasing the engagement of teen-agers.

*What promotes older youth participation and engagement?* In a recent *Research Update* from the Harvard Family Research Project (HFRP) Harris (2008) includes a section on OST benefits and needs for older youth, in which it is argued that the types of programs and opportunities that are attractive to older youth have developmental opportunities for leadership, voice, choice, academic success, and workforce readiness. Similarly, a new report by the

National Institute for Out-of-School Time (NIOST, 2008) at Wellesley College asserts that in order to attract and retain participation of older young people, programs need to offer programs that are of high interest to youth and employ staff that can work well with this age group. They list four key components of high quality programs for older youth: 1) allowing middle-school youth to be creators of their own afterschool experiences; 2) quality standards that are asset-based; 3) staff who are credible and trained to work with middle school youth; and 4) programs that balance a connection to and are independent from school and maintain family connections. (p.4)

### ***Summary***

What can we learn about how to ensure that adolescents, specifically those 13 years of age and above, that may be too young or inexperienced to find work but too old to attend programs designed for younger children, become engaged in quality, age-appropriate and beneficial youth programs and opportunities? After all, if youth don't participate or remain engaged in the program or opportunity they cannot reap the benefits of participation (Herrera and Arbretton, 2003; Kennedy, Wilson, Valladares, and Bronte-Tinkew, 2007).

The intent of this analysis is to bring attention to an area of inquiry which is critical to the well-being of young people and our communities: the engagement of typically under-represented and under-served teen-agers, 13 years of age and older, in engaging and beneficial programs and opportunities that help them thrive.

These research questions guide this analysis: Do youth in MN, ages 12 and above, participate less than younger children? If so, what factors appear to play a role in this drop in participation among teens? What types of youth programs and opportunities are of most interest to teens and what is the best way to market to them? And, what can the MN Youth Engagement

Statewide Initiative (YESI)<sup>3</sup> learn from these data that will help them work to ensure that disengaged teens are provided good access to engaging experiences, relationships, programs, and opportunities in their community?

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<sup>3</sup> *Note.* For more information about the Youth Engagement Statewide Initiative (YESI) go to <http://www.YouthEngagement.umn.edu>

## Method

### *Youth Program Participation in Minnesota*

In addition to conducting an extensive literature search and review about what is known about older youth participation in out-of-school time (OST) programs, and developmental or age-related needs and barriers, much of which is summarized in the Introduction, three studies relating to youth participation in Minnesota spanning 15 years are analyzed herein to learn more about older youth participation differences and needs in OST programs in Minnesota. Data from three existing studies of Minnesota youth OST program participation are included in this analysis.

*Places to Grow.* The first study, conducted in 1993 by Search Institute, a Minneapolis-based non-profit adolescent development research firm, for the City of Minneapolis Youth Coordinating Board, is called “Places to grow: Perspectives on Youth Development Opportunities for Seven- to 14-Year-Old Minneapolis Youth” (Saito et al., 1995). This study includes survey data from 600 Minneapolis youth in third, fifth, seventh, and eighth grade, which was collected during 1993 in 33 classrooms in 19 schools throughout Minneapolis, three alternative schools, and youth from juvenile detention. Schools were selected to ensure geographic representation. The study also includes data from a survey mailed to a random sample of 1,500 parents of third-, fifth-, and seventh-grade public school students. Youth and parent data collection methods and tools were approved by both Search Institute’s and the Minneapolis public school’s internal review process. All identifying data were stripped from the dataset prior to Search Institute’s analysis. Since the questions did not include individual level psycho-social information, only passive consent was required and requested.

Of particular note for our purposes are questions related to the percentage of youth who report being involved in at least one after-school youth program a week, youths' interests, and barriers to participation, by grade level.

*Youth Action Crew.* The second data set is from a convenience sample of interviews by and of approximately 1,500 Minneapolis youth, ages 12 to 21. These interviews were conducted by young people who were participating in the Minneapolis Youth Action Crew (YAC) project sponsored by The Minneapolis Youth Coordinating Board in partnership with the Center for Youth Development at the University of Minnesota Extension (Saito, 2008). Youth were trained to conduct man-on-the street interviews using a semi-structured interview protocol. No identifying information was requested or recorded.

YAC members interviewed other youth in dozens of neighborhoods throughout Minneapolis during the summers of 2005, 2006, and 2007. Data from the initial pilot (2004-05) are described in an article in *New Directions for Youth Development* called, "Beyond access and supply: Youth-led strategies to captivate young people's interest in and demand for programs and opportunities," (Saito, 2006). New data from 2006-07 have been aggregated with the earlier data, where possible. Not all questions were identical across the years (Harris et al., 2007).

Ultimately, YACs interviewed over 1500 young people ages 12 and up who either lived in, or went to school, worked, or for some other reason spent large amounts of time in, 15 different neighborhoods throughout Minneapolis. Neighborhoods were chosen because they had high numbers and percentages of children and youth, and had families with lower than average incomes.

The original YAC program design included youth intercept surveying in which teams of youth would go to places in their neighborhood where they knew youth congregated, including

as young people got off their school buses, in parks and youth programs, and favorite neighborhood hang-out spots especially for young people who interviewers felt were least likely to participate in youth programs and opportunities. During the summer of 2006, as YAC crews were preparing to go out and interview youth, several young people were shot in drive-by shootings a few blocks from their north Minneapolis youth center. Dozens of people were murdered on the north side over the course of that summer. As a result, YAC crews were not permitted to do on-the-street youth intercept surveys. Instead, a van was rented and they interviewed youth only inside buildings, mostly youth programs, parks, some businesses, churches, etc. This forced change in design most certainly resulted in higher participation percentages for this neighborhood, which has the highest number and proportion of children and youth residents in Minneapolis.

The interview protocol asks youth whether they have ever participated in a youth program and whether they are currently participating in a youth program, as well as about their interests, barriers to participation, community supports, and some marketing questions.

These data are an aggregate of data collected in 2005, 2006 and 2007. The interview protocol changed somewhat from year to year, although the core questions about current and previous participation in youth program remain fundamentally the same across all three years. The net result is that some questions reported in this analysis were asked only in certain years; these will be so noted, along with changes in sample size.

*The Gaps Analysis Study.* The third dataset is from a statewide telephone survey conducted by Wilder Research for the University of Minnesota Extension, of 1,487 Minnesota parents and 808 young people (Lochner et al, 2008). These data provide information about OST

time use, wants and needs, community satisfaction, barriers, and perceptions of supply and demand of OST programs and opportunities.

In an effort to make data more comparable across all three data sets, only data from youth who live in the Twin Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul ( $n=140$ ) are included in this analysis of the Gap Study.

In order to get a representative sample of Minnesota households, Wilder Research purchased phone-number-only random digit dial listings from a non-profit company that specialized in survey sampling. The Out of School Time Study Methodology Report (MartinRogers and Simpson, 2008) provides in-depth information about the research questions, sample, surveys, data collection protocol, weighting issues, and other detailed information.

### ***Methods Summary***

Alone, each of these datasets gives a snapshot in time of a particular group of young people on a particular day and place. Taken together, they provide a chronological moving-picture of young people in the Twin Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul, with combined population of over three-quarter of a million people. These data provide a unique vehicle to gain a deeper understanding of the participation rates, interests, and barriers of Twin Cities teenagers, with regard to a fundamental element in their successful transition from childhood, through adolescence, and into adulthood: their full engagement and participation in high quality OST programs, activities and opportunities.

## Results

### *Introduction*

A general summary of the results from these three data sets are summarized across three variables: levels of participation; barriers and interests related to participation; and information about young people's preferred methods of receiving information about what programs and opportunities are available to them. Following the results from survey data, a figure showing the distribution of programs in Minneapolis from 1995 to 2007 is included.

### *Levels of Participation*

As show in Table 1, youth participation in OST programs and opportunities drops as children reach 12 years old, and remains low (i.e., less than half report being involved or actively involved) through high school, across all three data sets.

*Places to Grow.* Data from this study conducted in 1993 of third, fifth, seventh, and eighth graders in Minneapolis show the percentage of youth who participate in a youth program at least once a week increases slightly from third to fifth grade (51% to 57%), then drops to 44% and 46% for seventh and eighth graders, respectively.

*Youth Action Crew.* These data were collected ten years after the Places to Grow study, during 2005, 2006 and 2007 from youth in over a dozen neighborhoods with high proportions of children and youth from middle- to lower-income families. Youth were asked both whether they are currently participating and whether they have ever participated in a youth program. Overall, less than half (40%) of youth were currently participating in a youth program or activity at the time of data collection. About two-thirds have at some time participated in an after-school program and activity; a full third however, have never participated in a youth program. It should

be noted that due to safety concerns in neighborhoods, in addition to on-the-street interview with youth, data were also collected from youth who were participating in youth programs, which may well lead to inflated percentages of participation. As age increases, participation in youth programs decreases from 51% for 12 to 14 year-olds, to 38% for 15 to 17 year-olds.

*Gap Analysis Study.* A recent study of MN youth participation has been conducted by Wilder Research for the Center for Youth Development at the University of Minnesota Extension. Data from youth in Minneapolis and St. Paul (n=140) also show a dramatic decrease in the percentage of youth who were very active or active in organized activities, groups, and programs: from 45% in seventh grade to 29% in eighth.

<b>Table 1: Out-of-School Program Participation across Three Studies of Minnesota Youth</b>								
Places to Grow (1995) <sup>a</sup> (n=600)	Grade							
	3rd	5th	7th	8th	Total			
% involved in at least one youth program a week	51%	57%	44%	46%	49%			
YAC (2007) <sup>b</sup> (n=1501)	Age Group							
	9 to 11	12 to 14	15 to 17	18 to 20	21+	Total		
% Currently participating in a youth program	47%	51%	38%	33%	19%	40%		
% Have ever participated in a youth program	76%	68%	67%	64%	52%	67%		
Gap Study (2008) <sup>c</sup> (n=140)	Grade							
	Overall, how active and involved are you in organized activities, groups, and programs?		7th	8th	9th	10th	11th	12th
% Very active and active		45%	29%	27%	33%	36%	36%	35%

<sup>a</sup> *Places to Grow (Saito et al., 1995)*

<sup>b</sup> *Youth Action Crew (Harris et al, 2007)*

<sup>c</sup> *The Gaps Study Analysis (Lochner et al., 2008)*

### ***Barriers to Participation***

In order to increase participation we need to know why young people don't participate. In this section we review what these three datasets, summarized in Table 2, tell us about barriers to or reasons why young people don't participate.

*Places to Grow.* In this study, questions about barriers to participation were asked of the older seventh- and eighth-graders only. For these young people, the top three barriers to participation were: 1) Nothing interests me; Transportation problems; Don't know about what programs exist.

Parents' top three barriers were: 1) program costs (58%); 2) Don't know what programs exist or are available (53%); and 3) Transportation problems (51%).

In terms of whether there were enough programs available for young people in Minneapolis, about half of all parents and youth surveyed said there were not enough programs available especially during the school year. Families with lower incomes were least satisfied with the amount of available programs; families with the highest incomes were most satisfied.

*Youth Action Crew.* The top three reasons given by Minneapolis youth for why they did not participate in youth programs were: 1) Don't know what's available; 2) Transportation; and 3) Have other responsibilities at home, jobs, caring for siblings, etc.

In general, the percentage of youth who see something as a barrier to participation decreases with age except, "Don't know what's available" which remains first across all age groups.

*Gaps Analysis Study.* In this study, seventh through twelfth grade Minnesota youth were asked to conjecture why young people don't participate. There was fairly strong consensus around reasons for lack of participation. These include, in rank order: they are already too busy with jobs, homework, and other responsibilities, and this, as we might expect, increases with age; they are not motivated to join programs, which increases dramatically with age; and they don't know what's available and are not interested in what's available.

<b>Table 2: Barriers to Participation as Reported in Three Studies of Twin Cities, MN Youth</b>	
<b>Places to Grow<sup>a</sup> (n=600)</b>	
	%
Nothing interests me	51
Transportation	42
Don't know about what programs exist	40
<b>Youth Action Crew<sup>b</sup> (n=1501)</b>	
Don't know what's available	44
Transportation	33
Have other responsibilities at home, jobs, caring for siblings, etc.	33
<b>Gap Study<sup>c</sup> (n=140)</b>	
They are already too busy with jobs, homework, and other responsibilities?	44
They are not motivated to join programs?	41
They don't know what's available?	36
They are just not interested in what is available?	36

<sup>a</sup> *Places to Grow (Saito et al., 1995)*

<sup>b</sup> *Youth Action Crew (Harris et al, 2007)*

<sup>c</sup> *The Gaps Study Analysis (Lochner et al., 2008)*

There is remarkable consensus across these three studies in terms of the biggest barriers to participation. A lack of knowledge of what's available and what exists in their neighborhood

is the one barrier that is within the top three barriers across all three studies spanning nearly 15 years. All of the other barriers (not interested or motivated, transportation, have other responsibilities) were cited in two of the three studies.

### ***Youth Interests***

Not only do we want to know what keeps youth from participating, we also want know what would attract them, what kinds of things young people say they would like to do or find interesting. While the specific rank order and percentages of interests varied from year to year, what did not change was that the majority of young people said they wanted and were likely to participate in almost any kind of program or activity.

In the Places to Grow study (Saito et al., 1995), 11 out of the 14 listed activities were indicated by 50% or more of respondents as something in which they would likely participate. In YAC (Harris et al., 2007), out of the 16 listed activities, 13 were indicated by 40% or more of respondents as something in which they were very likely to participate.

### ***Reaching Young People***

One of the biggest reasons young people give for not participating is because they don't know what's available. This is particularly important as youth organizations struggle to attract teenage participants (Farrell, 2008). This section looks at data related to how best to get information about available programs to young people.

*Preferred Method of Accessing Information.* Table 3 compares young people's preferences with regard to methods of receiving information about programs, from the earliest study conducted in 1993 to the latest in 2008. These data remind us that the methods and

mediums for advertising various programs and opportunities to youth are going to be specific to particular points in time, regions, and neighborhoods.

	1993 Find Helpful <sup>a</sup> <i>n=600</i>	2005-2007 Very likely to Use <sup>b</sup> <i>n=1501</i>	2008 Very Likely to Use <sup>c</sup> <i>n=140</i>
Telephone hotline	58%	31%	7%
Printed Directory	37%		
Activity Fair	33%		
Web page on the Internet	21%	57%	41%
Posters/Flyer in the Neighborhood		41%	
Local Newspaper			16%
Computerized Kiosks		36%	
Local Radio Stations		58%	

<sup>a</sup> *Places to Grow* (Saito et al., 1995)

<sup>b</sup> *Youth Action Crew* (Harris et al, 2007)

<sup>c</sup> *The Gaps Study Analysis* (Lochner et al., 2008)

In the *Places to Grow* study, marketing related questions were asked of only the middle school youth. The sources of information that they would find most helpful were, in rank order: telephone hotline; printed directory; activity fair; and on-line through a computer.

For youth interviewed 10 years later through YAC, the top three sources or ways of finding out about various programs and activities are: local radio stations; web page/Internet; and poster/flyers in the neighborhood. There do not appear to be any clear age trends in terms of source of information; the top three are the same across all age groupings.

In the very recent Gap study, young people were asked several questions that relate to who decides what they will do, and their preferred method for finding out information about programs and opportunities. In general, youth and parents decide together, although the percentage steadily decreases with age, and while the sample size is small, there appears to be a marked jump in the percentage of young people who decide on their own from seventh to eighth grade.

In terms of the method or how youth in the Gap study want to receive information about activities, a web page was first and a telephone hotline was last.

***Internet and Cell Phone Access***

In terms of good Internet access at home, data in Table 4 suggests that overall, more than half have regular access at home. Of worthy note however, is that at least 10% don't have Internet at home. This was not asked in the *Places to Grow* study.

<b>Table 4: Percentage of Youth with Regular Home Internet Access</b>		
	YAC <sup>a</sup> <i>n=1501</i>	GAP <sup>b</sup> <i>n=140</i>
% Almost always or always have Internet access at home	55%	66%
% Never	17%	11%

<sup>a</sup> *Youth Action Crew (Harris et al, 2007)*

<sup>b</sup> *The Gaps Study Analysis (Lochner et al., 2008)*

***Comparison of number and location of youth programs from 1995 to 2007***

As of the end of 2007, approximately 15 neighborhoods had been mapped by YAC members with data from over 1500 young people ages 12 and up. Over 300 youth development program sites were identified. These data resulted in a map (see right side of Figure 2) indicating

location, geographic distribution and type of youth development program or opportunity in the city of Minneapolis in 2007.

Also calculated was the number and percentage of residents in a given neighborhood that were children and youth under the age of 21. In the map of Minneapolis on the right side of Figure 2, the darker the neighborhood<sup>4</sup> the higher the percentage of children and youth that reside in that neighborhood. The percentage of residents that were children and youth ranged from 12% in some neighborhoods, to 44% of the residents being children and youth younger than 21. In the earlier survey of 600 Minneapolis young people (Saito et al., 1995) conducted by Search Institute, over 500 youth programs and opportunities at 352 sites were identified, as indicated in the map on the left side of Figure 2. This represents a decrease in number of youth program sites of 14%. The basic distribution of programs throughout Minneapolis does not appear to have changed substantially from 1995 to 2007.

**Figure 2: Maps of Minneapolis Youth Programs and Opportunities, 1995 and 2007**

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<sup>4</sup> *Note.*: If you are viewing this in color, the darker the orange, the greater the number and percentage of children and youth.



## Summary of Key Findings

As we look across these three studies (Saito et al., 2005, Harris et al., 2007, and Lochner et al., 2008) of Minneapolis and St. Paul young people, spanning nearly 15 years in terms of when the data were collected, what have we learned about youth participation and engagement?

1. Across all three studies, participation decreases with age, and drop markedly for seventh- and eight-graders (more than 10%) and remains low with substantially fewer than half of teenagers participating in a youth development program of any kind.
2. There is amazing overlap and consistency in terms of the top barriers across the years.

The top reasons remain:

- Don't know what exists, what's available
- Transportation
- Not interested or motivated
- Too busy, have other responsibilities

The only barrier cited across all three datasets is “Don't know what's available.” The remaining reasons why youth don't participate were listed by youth in two of the three studies.

3. And, while “not interested or motivated” is also among the top barriers, when given various long lists of activities, youth say they are interested and likely to participate in almost everything. In general, as age increases, interest decreases.
4. There have been interesting changes over the past 15 years in terms of preferences for methods or ways of receiving information about programs. In 1993, when data were collected for *Places to Grow*, “telephone hotline” was the highest rated source of

information and “web page on the Internet” was rated as the least helpful source.

Currently, “web page” is number one for the *Gap Study* but note that the highest for YAC was “local radio stations” (which was not asked about in either of the other studies), followed closely by “web page.”

5. While most youth in both the YAC and the Gap study, 55% and 66% respectively, have regular internet access at home and cell phones, there also are some young people who don't. There were between 11% and 17% of youth in the YAC and Gap studies respectively, who do not have Internet access at home.
6. The number of youth development programs and opportunities identified in Minneapolis in 2007 (approximately 300 unique locations) was slightly lower than in 1995 (500 different youth programs and activities at 352 sites), a decrease of 14%.

## Discussion

### *Limitations*

The three primary sources of data for this analysis of age-related differences in participation in OST programs and opportunities are descriptive snapshots in time. Although a stratified random sample was used in the Gaps Analysis Study (Lochner et al., 2008), the sampling procedures for the Places to Grow (Saito et al., 1995) and Youth Action Crew (Harris, 2007) studies, purposive and convenience, respectively, prevent generalizing from these data. Nonetheless, all three data sources show a substantial drop in participation rates as children become adolescents, with participation rates remaining low (i.e., less than half) through middle and high school for young people in the Twin Cities metropolitan area. Triangulation of data, i.e., when multiple sources report on the same thing, improves our ability and willingness to believe that these might be generally representative of teen-agers in this urban area.

### *Rings of Engagement*

The Rings of Engagement provides a useful, unifying framework for thinking about promoting and increasing youth participation and connections with people, places and programs. And, it is a practical vehicle for thinking about how to attract and sustain the engagement of older youth who typically don't participate. We must recognize that older youth have much more say about how they spend their time, and in order to create opportunities that are engaging to them, we must offer opportunities for leadership, voice, passion, creating their own stuff—all the many inter-locking rings of participation and engagement, and the conditions for healthy youth development.

*YAC: A Deeper Look*

In 2004, my husband, R. Delroy Calhoun who runs a community center in our neighborhood, and I were named Howland Endowed Chairs in Youth Leadership Development at the University of Minnesota Extension, and had the opportunity to study and learn about young people in our own south Minneapolis neighborhood called Whittier<sup>5</sup>. From our own experiences in youth work spanning over two decades for each of us, we knew that (a) young people do better when they participate in youth engagement programs and opportunities; and (b) too many teenagers in our inner-core urban neighborhood weren't engaged in any youth development programs or opportunities.

Therefore, with the foundational flint and sparks from the Howland Family Endowment<sup>6</sup>, the Minneapolis Youth Coordinating Board, and The McKnight Foundation, we co-created with our neighborhood youth, a summer-long youth engagement project designed to increase awareness of, and participation in, youth programs, called the Youth Action Crew (YAC).<sup>7</sup> This group of five young people, ages 12 to 16, who either lived in the Whittier neighborhood or spent significant amounts of time in it, and who themselves were not involved in any youth programs, met about three times a week over the summer and fall of 2005. We facilitated a process that provided training and on-going coaching, and together the Whittier YAC members accomplished the following results over the course of the pilot:

- Interviewed other youth about youth program participation and interests;
- Interviewed youth program providers;

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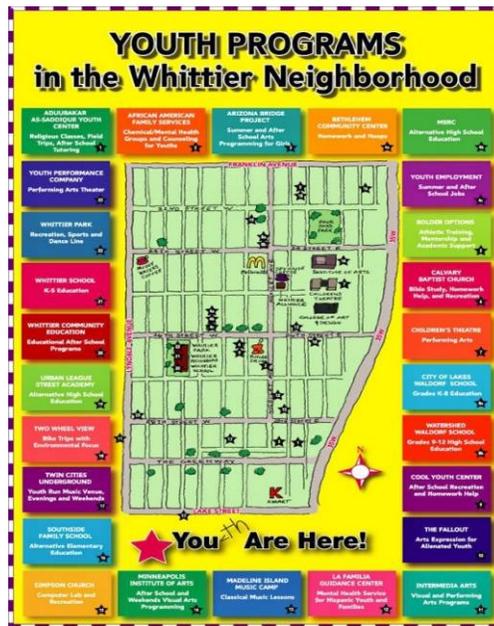
<sup>5</sup> Note: Whittier is about a 10 block by 10 block neighborhood just south of downtown Minneapolis, MN bordered by Interstate 35-W along its eastern edge. There are about 15,000 residents according to the 2000 Census.

<sup>6</sup> Note. For more information about the Howland Family Endowment go to <http://www.extension.umn.edu/youth/Howland/>

<sup>7</sup> Note. For more detailed information about the Youth Action Crew go to <http://www.extension.umn.edu/YouthWorkInstitute/YouthEngagement/YouthActionCrew.pdf>

- Created and disseminated a map (Figure 3) that shows program location and information;
- Disseminated outdoor You<sup>th</sup> are Here sign (Figure 4) and logo to indicate youth-friendly programs and places;
- Shared information with decision-makers for planning and funding;
- Worked to increase the awareness of, engagement in, and number of accessible youth development programs and opportunities.

**Figure 3: Whittier Youth Action Crew Map of Youth Programs and Opportunities**



**Figure 4: You<sup>th</sup> are Here Sign and Logo**



*Process.* We distributed applications for youth to our neighbors, neighborhood association, youth organizations and programs, the faith community, the Whittier provider network in our neighborhood, and through word of mouth. The only major requirements for participation were that they were able to commit to working toward the success of the project, had spent significant amounts of time in the neighborhood, and represent the diversity for which Whittier is known.

*The YAC curriculum.* We began each meeting by having a sit-down meal together, with no other agenda than to find out what's on each other's minds. Then we'd review where we've been, a reminder of where we're going (that is, what we're trying to accomplish and why), and what we're going to do that day.

We trained them in how to: (a) conduct face-to-face intercept interviews using a semi-structured interview protocol; (b) look up census information on the Internet and calculate the percentage of residents that are children and youth by block groupings in Whittier; and, (c) calculate frequencies and percentages by hand-tallying data from the interviews. We trained them in community organizing tips and precautions (e.g., rattle a gate before opening so you don't startle someone or a dog).

The crew worked with a professional graphic designer to create their maps, and in the fall of 2005, together, always in teams of two or three youth and adult teams, we went door-to-door during daylight, in the parts of the neighborhood that were most heavily populated with children and youth, and gave away free maps of youth programs and opportunities in the neighborhood that they could post on their refrigerator.

There are stories to be told about the methodology, the data collection and dissemination process, in a project like YAC. For instance, when we were posting our maps in the Whittier

neighborhood (see Figure 3), we crossed paths with another street-walker, a prostitute, well-known by those who live in the neighborhood. She said, “What you got there?” I told her this was a map of youth programs to encourage youth to go to them and she said, “Girl, ain’t no children in this neighborhood. This here’s a crack neighborhood.” Just then, a young Hispanic mother with two children in tow walked behind her and into the apartment building on her corner. The street worker grabbed a map and my tape and said, “Here, give me that map. I know the busy corners,” and began posting our YAC maps.

*You<sup>th</sup> Are Here Buses.* After reviewing the YAC citywide map of youth program distribution (see Figure 2), it was obvious that there were huge areas of the city in which there were large numbers and percentages of children and youth residing, with no or very few accessible youth development programs and opportunities. As a result, the City of Minneapolis allocated funds to create the You<sup>th</sup> Are Here (YAH) buses—one on the north side and one on the south side—that stopped at scheduled stops from Noon to 8 p.m. The ridership for the summer pilot was over 5,000. The key to the success of this initiative was that it was based on data from real youth, not just adult policy-makers, and that the bus had a full-time youth-worker onboard. Young people would ride the bus for hours at a time just hanging out. Staff from programs would take their youth for a field trip on the bus and stop to visit the programs along the route. In essence, the YAH buses became opportunities for mobile youth development stripped down to its core: the relationships between youth and adults.

### ***Conclusions and Implications***

*The logic is simple.* If (a) regular participation or engagement in a positive youth development program or opportunity can lead to better outcomes for youth, organizations and community; and (b) less than half of Twin Cities teen-agers are participating in youth programs after-school; then,

(c) we need to figure out a way to increase older youths' involvement in these growth-enhancing opportunities.

*The data are there.* These three studies of youth program participation of Minneapolis and St. Paul span nearly 15 years (1993 to 2008). Patterns related to youth program participation, barriers and interests across all these years remain remarkably unchanged, including:

- ⇒ Participation rates drop as children become teenagers resulting in far too many teenagers not receiving the positive developmental programs, experiences, relationships, and opportunities they deserve, that they have a right to (Konopka, 1973), and that they need to succeed.
- ⇒ There is amazing overlap in the barriers to participation across all three datasets: don't know what's available or exists is the most frequently cited barrier, followed by transportation; not interested or motivated; and too busy, have other responsibilities.
- ⇒ Contrary to the image of teens not wanting to do anything, in fact, young people are interested in doing just about everything.
- ⇒ The number and distribution patterns of youth programs in Minneapolis changed relatively little from 1993 to 2007.

One thing that did change over time was the method or way that young people want to find out about programs, events, activities and opportunities. During the early 1990's when *Places to Grow* (Saito et al., 1995) was conducted, personal computer usage was just beginning to spread and therefore accessing the Internet through a computer was still rather novel. Therefore, "web page on the Internet" and "Computerized Kiosks" were rated the least likely methods for finding out about youth programs and opportunities and "Telephone hotline" was

the most preferred method in 1993 when these data were collected. In contrast, the Gaps Study Analysis (Lochner, et al, 2008) indicates that young people today are most likely to use the Internet to find out what's happening and least likely to use a telephone hotline.

### ***The Unwavering Call for Opportunities and Information.***

Across 15 years and three studies teen-agers have told us that they want to be involved in youth engagement programs and opportunities, where they have voice and choice, and can do things and change things, and that can help them get a job so they can be successful. And, they have told us again and again, that one of the biggest barriers is a lack of information about what exists in their own neighborhood.

Recognizing that youth have more say as they get older about what they do in their leisure time, we need to learn more about what attracts and interests them (Lauver et al., 2004; Weiss et al., 2005; Marczak et al., 2006; Saito, 2006) if we are to build engaging programs and opportunities. We also need to find effective ways of marketing these developmental opportunities to and with them.

### ***Looking Forward***

In addition to data regarding participation rates, barriers, and marketing-related questions, the YAC project demonstrates how one youth engagement spark can be fanned by many foundational funding partners including the Minneapolis Youth Coordinating Board<sup>8</sup> and the City of Minneapolis, the Howland Family Endowment in Youth Leadership Development at the Center for Youth Development, University of Minnesota Extension,<sup>9</sup> The McKnight

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<sup>8</sup> Note: For more information about YCB <http://ycb.org/>

<sup>9</sup> Note: For more information about the Howland Family Endowment go to <http://www.extension.umn.edu/Youth/Howland/#howlandsympo>

Foundation,<sup>10</sup> and the MN Department of Education, and explode into a citywide initiative that resulted in a truly innovative transportation initiative, the You<sup>^</sup>th Are Here buses, and newly appropriated funds for youth engagement programming by the McKnight Foundation in 2008.<sup>11</sup>

These data, these experiences, these opportunities and relationships, from the early 1980's working at the first Center for Youth Development and Research in the School of Social Work with Drs. Konopka and Hedin; to the late 1980's at the University of Chicago with Dr. Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi as my faculty advisor<sup>12</sup>, and working on the ethnographic data collection with Joan Wynn at Chapin Hall—driving through the streets of Chicago neighborhoods for the first study on reciprocal supports; to figuring out how to build developmental assets in communities with Search Institute through the 1990's, and then back to the future to return to the Center for Youth Development, this time at the University of MN Extension—these engaging, enriching experiences have culminated in a major statewide initiative to promote and support youth engagement (YESI) throughout Minnesota.<sup>13</sup>

These data tell us what YESI needs to strive for and pay attention to:

- I. ***More quality youth engagement programs and opportunities.*** We need to figure out how to provide young people, especially older youth in lower-income communities, with captivating programs and opportunities. We simply need more interesting, engaging, high quality programs and opportunities directed at and with older youth so that they can grow, learn, explore, and succeed.

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<sup>10</sup> *Note:* For more information about the McKnight Foundation go to <http://www.mcknight.org>

<sup>11</sup> *Note.* From personal communication with Ganzlin and Miller at The McKnight Foundation.

<sup>12</sup> *Note.* On occasional exams, Dr. Csikszentmihalyi would ask us to spell his full name for which he would give us a point. I use it here to show him we still remember.

<sup>13</sup> *Note.* For more information about the Youth Engagement Statewide Initiative (YESI) go to <http://www.youthengagement.umn.edu>

II. *Find out what is available and then get the information out in youth-friendly ways.*

The one relatively easy actionable barrier is “lack of knowledge about what’s available” for older youth to do. Recognizing that marketing information is specific to time, place, community demographics, etc., utilize youth-driven ways to find out what’s available in communities throughout the state, like the Youth Action Crew model.

III. Clearly, we need *a Web-based database, searchable to the neighborhood level, accessible by phone, and text-message-friendly*, created by and with youth and adults.

IV. Increase participation by *marketing with young people verses marketing to them.*

*Involve young people in figuring out how to increase participation, and enable young people to create their own programs and activities*, market them, and evaluate them.

Who better?

V. Remember, however, that *not all young people have easy access to the Internet*. A persistent 10-17% of these urban young people do not. In the YAC study, local radio stations were preferred source of information about local events, programs and activities.

Whether these data, spanning 15 years tell us to go “back to the future” or that “some things never change,” what they fundamentally tell us, again and again it seems, is that we still have a very long way to go until our young people are afforded the roles, opportunities, programs, and responsibilities—the “conditions” that Dr. Konopka talked about well over 35 years ago.

As a society, as a community of affinity or geography, we fail to provide programs and opportunities that are the requirements for healthy youth development so well articulated by Konopka and others so long ago. For these young teen-agers, we stop providing the fundamental developmental building blocks right at a time when some might say they need them the most.

One hopes the amplification inherent in echoes of engagement finds open ears, and hands and feet and voices to engage young people in daily life and ensure they have the relationships, programs and opportunities they need to succeed.

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