



Strengthening youth development

A dialogue between faith-based
and non-faith-based organisations
in the youth development sector



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Introduction

In June 2002, the Youth Development Network hosted a two-day forum to encourage dialogue between faith-based youth development practitioners and those in the broader youth development sector.

The forum aimed to:

- ▲ Explore linkages between faith-based and non-faith-based organisations in the youth development sector;
- ▲ Develop a broader understanding of youth development agendas; and
- ▲ Consider ways to make the most of existing structures and resources.

The resulting dialogue between faith-based and non-faith-based youth development organisations also explored:

- ▲ Different perspectives of youth development;
- ▲ The roles of organisations in developing the potential of young people;
- ▲ The approaches various organisations take and the challenges they face in meeting the needs of youth;
- ▲ Integrated youth development and where spiritual development is located within this model; and
- ▲ Practical tools and resources for using integrated youth development.

This booklet summarises discussions at the forum. It intends to stimulate further dialogue, cooperation and integration between diverse organisations that help young people develop.



Forum participants

Exploring the linkages

Making connections between faith-based organisations and others in the youth development sector

South African organisations committed to meeting the needs of young people have diverse approaches to the challenges of youth development. They play a variety of roles and find different solutions to the problems young people face. By various means, their programmes transfer skills and motivate young people to improve the quality of their own lives and contribute to a better society for all.

Within a dynamic social context and with scarce resources, youth workers and their organisations need to continuously explore new ways of building capacity and increasing the impact of their programmes. Sharing organisational experiences, resources and knowledge can help individuals and groups to better meet the needs of young people in our society.

Faith-based organisations are not a homogenous group. They tend to have regular and long-term contact with young people and are often a safe haven for traumatised youth, but they have a variety of infrastructures, approaches, methodologies and opinions. They often offer both secular and religious activities for young people.

Brian Helsby from Youth For Christ and Sharlene Swartz, a doctoral student at Harvard University, provided valuable insight into faith-based youth development. The development of a healthy concept of self and worth is central to the survival and achievement of young people. Importantly, the faith-based approach to youth development acknowledges and emphasises the spiritual needs of young people. Faith-based organisations seek to develop and enhance a young person's sense of self-awareness, wholeness and well-being through belief in and connection to a higher power. Religious principles help young people find a source of inner strength and also make sense of the world.

Often faith-based youth work is associated with overzealous preaching, narrow teachings and a refusal to cooperate with others because of theological or doctrinal concerns. In reality, this is most often not the case. Usually, faith-based services for young people are offered through relational rather than confrontational means and religious difference is respected, enabling partnerships with a variety of other organisations.

There are therefore many existing linkages between faith-based and other youth development organisations, the most fundamental being a common concern for the well-being and development of young people.

All youth programmes need infrastructure, resources, skilled workers, knowledge, understanding, information, tools, community support and access to the youth with whom they wish to work. There is the potential to strengthen youth development in South Africa through greater cooperation, sharing and insight into the practices and programmes of organisations with different approaches.

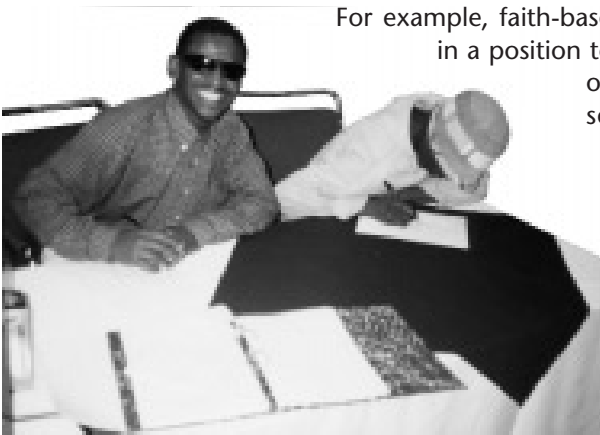
Addressing the spiritual needs of young people

Youth development seeks to address the various needs of young people as whole beings within their communities. While programmes may address specific needs, they should still see the development of individual young persons both holistically and as a continuum.

Life skills are spiritual issues, because behaviour is linked to beliefs and values. The overlap between moral messages and other developmental issues suggests that there is significant potential for faith-based and other youth organisations to work together and more effectively meet a variety of needs.

Faith-based organisations recognise that if high-risk young people are to avoid crime and violence, achieve literacy and access jobs, they must have values that give meaning and purpose in life. Young people in congregations, where questions of meaning are central to community life, can explore these questions in caring and supportive environments.

Communities based in faith offer a moral compass to young people and may thus help them to change their behaviours and circumstances. This process may also allow youth to discover the benefits of service and volunteerism, develop leadership skills and experience personal growth through involvement.



For example, faith-based programmes are often in a position to meet the pastoral needs of youth, such as counselling for dealing with trauma and pain. They can build on the overlap between moral and other developmental messages by integrating the spiritual, mental, physical and social aspects of life orientation.

Using linkages between faith-based and non-faith-based youth development organisations to strengthen capacity

Exploring the linkages between faith-based and non-faith-based youth development organisations provides a point of entry for effective collaboration and joint-venture initiatives between different stakeholders in the sector. By identifying and endorsing each other's roles and strengths, we may better assist young people in their development as whole beings. Working together does not mean there must be consensus on all matters, but rather that dialogue is encouraged on how to comprehensively meet the needs of young people.

The common aim is to help young people prepare for the difficult life choices they must make. The agendas of youth and faith-based organisations are not mutually exclusive, although their philosophies may differ.

Generalisations about faith-based and non faith-based organisational approaches to youth development can be misleading and based on misperceptions. Brian Helsby and Sharlene Swartz noted in their presentations that it is often the way that faith-based and non-faith-based youth development organisations perceive each other that prevents the formation of constructive partnerships for the benefit of young people.

An analysis of the broad characteristics of faith-based and non faith-based youth organisations helps to identify where linkages can be made and collaborations explored. At the forum, this was illustrated by Mokoka Seshabela of the Southern African Association of Youth Clubs. In the following chart he begins to unpack the distinctions between faith-based and non-faith-based youth development approaches.



Non-faith-based Youth Development NGOs	Faith-based Institutions/NGOs
Expedient, “quick-fix” solutions to long-term supportive relationships	Based on principles and the formation of young people’s immediate problems
Special youth category focus (“youth only”)	Continuum view of personal growth (foundations laid in childhood; preparation for adulthood; sustainable)
Context driven	Belief driven
Diverse audience	Specific target (exist for those in the fold)
Funder-dependent and fund-driven (expedient programmes)	Sustainable funding from religious community
Broad contextual view of development	Parochial or simplistic view of development
Often strategic, analytical and political	Mission-based or evangelistic
Works within a context of learning	Works within a context of right and wrong
Good at developing “hard” skills and competencies	Good at developing “soft skills” and psycho-social competencies
Professional, research-based programmes	Pastoral, experienced mentoring, relationship-based
Struggles to achieve impact and lasting outcomes	Outcomes and indicators accepted by the majority (impact = spiritual transformation)

If the skills, knowledge and strengths highlighted in the chart above are combined, a picture emerges of a powerful, integrated youth development sector. Clearly, by moving beyond conventional perspectives, organisations can begin to explore and develop linkages that will more effectively meet the comprehensive needs of young people.

Meeting the challenges

Young people make life choices in a social context and in an increasingly complex world. If programmes are to help them, they must address the broad needs of each young person as part of a community and a member of the broader society.

The complexity and scale of problems young people experience in today's society demand that youth programmes have greater impact and sustainability. Ways of better meeting young people's needs must be continuously explored.

The rapid pace of change and the scale of social and economic challenges mean that organisations must access considerable funding and other resources, particularly if they are to address the causes of problems.

In order to meet the challenges, youth workers in both faith-based and non-faith-based organisations must

- ▲ be committed to holistic (integrated) youth development
- ▲ create learning cultures
- ▲ develop capacity and professionalism
- ▲ learn by talking, exploring and engaging with their worlds
- ▲ communicate with young people, parents, communities, partners and funders
- ▲ share models and resources for youth development
- ▲ be responsible and accountable for funding
- ▲ carefully monitor, measure and evaluate their programmes
- ▲ question their own assumptions and practices
- ▲ be prepared to transform themselves and their programmes
- ▲ acknowledge the role and validity of other practitioners, both specialists and generalists
- ▲ affirm the roles of different organisations
- ▲ draw from complementary efforts
- ▲ form strategic partnerships with other service providers
- ▲ invest time and energy in building capacity and mobilising volunteers
- ▲ recognise weaknesses and capitalise on strengths
- ▲ participate in broader strategic debates to inform thinking and enhance effectiveness
- ▲ remove suspicion and mistrust
- ▲ establish credibility and positive perceptions
- ▲ open up space to learn from the experience of others
- ▲ have patience to find long-term, sustainable solutions
- ▲ be prepared to walk a long journey to wholeness with young individuals
- ▲ dare to move beyond their comfort zones

The experiences and approaches of the following faith-based organisations show how their programmes are meeting the challenges in youth development.

South African YMCA – Better Life Options

Presented by Sibongile Jack

The YMCA is a worldwide, ecumenical* and voluntary movement for women and men, with special emphasis on the involvement of young people. It seeks to share the Christian ideal of building human communities of justice with love, peace, reconciliation and fullness of life for all Creation.

Better Life Options is one of the South African YMCA's six programmes. It has four central areas:

- ▲ Adolescent reproductive health (HIV/AIDS and other STIs)
- ▲ Life skills and sexuality education for peer educators
- ▲ Advocacy and lobbying on gender issues
- ▲ Capacity building for peer educators

The focus of **Better Life Options** is on using peer educators to convey reproductive health messages to youth both in and out of schools. Life skills training – based on self-esteem, positive attitudes and understanding sexuality – is key to educating youth about the risks of early sexual activity. The programme also lobbies for the provision of youth-friendly and accessible reproductive health services.

Better Life Options has eight drop-in centres in various regions that serve as resources for counselling, condom-distribution and meeting places for young people. It has developed a peer educators' training manual and a learners' handbook as resources for participants. While bible studies and religious activities may be included in other YMCA programmes, they are not a part of **Better Life Options**.

Effectively changing youth behaviour is a key challenge for the programme, as are securing programme funding and finding effective ways of measuring success and impact.

Better Life Options also seeks to increase parental and teacher involvement in reproductive health education, but religious affiliations and cultural barriers often make this difficult.

* Unified across denominations on the fundamental issues of Christian belief and worship

Sonlife South Africa – Peer Education in Schools

Presented by Edgar Ramsami

Sonlife South Africa is a non-profit, non-denominational, faith-based organisation that is committed to the development of life skills amongst young people. It seeks to deliver a message of hope in the face of growing pessimism amongst the youth of our nation.

Sonlife's **Siyaka Esikolweni** ("We are building the schools") peer education programme aims to meet the needs of young people by reinforcing positive self-image and self-esteem. It facilitates HIV/AIDS, sexuality and substance abuse education, and strives to be receptive in meeting the broader concerns of youth.

Its approach is to promote balanced development of young people in the physical, mental, social and spiritual aspects of their lives. The life skills programme in schools uses drama, dance, music and workshops as vehicles to develop balanced and mature young people who are capable of fulfilling their roles as active and productive members of society.

Life skills are essential not only in improving the quality of life, but also in preserving life itself. The **Siyaka Esikolweni** programme tries to help young people in making informed decisions about their lives and understanding how their choices affect the extent to which they realise their own potential as human beings.

Peer educators are carefully recruited and trained. They are then equipped with the resources, skills and materials needed to successfully deliver life skills training in the schools. They are also given ongoing support and mentorship while working in the field.

Sonlife sometimes encounters initial resistance to the programme from schools because the organisation is faith-based. **Siyaka Esikolweni** is not evangelistic in its content and approach, but rather seeks to build supportive relationships with learners, teachers and school administrators.



Youth for Christ, KwaZulu Natal – Phakama Gender Empowerment

Presented by Sally Mann

The Phakama (“Rise Up”) gender empowerment programme has two arms. One aims to prevent gender-related problems in society by working with boys and girls in schools. The other intervenes to assist young women in generating income for themselves through self-employment initiatives.

Both programmes have been – and continue to be – shaped by the young participants themselves, and their processes encourage mutual learning.

Phakama recognises that too often in our society the concerns of young women are not given equal value and status as the concerns of young men. The socialisation of young people also means that they have certain understandings of gender-based roles in society and this may inhibit their individual and collective development.

At the same time, their environments challenge young people with issues of exploitation, violence and survival. Teenage pregnancy, rape, HIV/AIDS and unemployment affect both young men and women, but they affect them in different ways. Life skills enable them to address these problems by developing their innate individual strengths and values.

Phakama empowers young people to challenge unequal power relations. By giving young people knowledge and understanding, they can question the way things are and begin to influence positive change in their relationships and in the structures around them.

The programme encounters difficulties in environments where hierarchical, male-dominated systems feel threatened by gender issues. Also, what young people learn from the programme is often not reinforced in their homes, schools, churches or communities, which makes it difficult to sustain the learnings. These challenges highlight the long-term importance of gender-related work with young people.

South African Council of Churches – Affirming Young People

Presented by Gift Moerane

The escalating rate of unemployment, increasing inequalities, falling per capita income and other social ills faced by young people prompted the South African Council of Churches (SACC) to establish its Youth Forum. The Forum aims to bring together young people within member churches and across denominational lines so they can explore strategies to overcome the critical issues facing them.

The initiative has its roots in the Christian faith and the SACC's proud legacy in the liberation struggle. It seeks to consolidate gains that have been made by affirming and uniting young people, and then harnessing their energies towards common goals. By mobilising youth within the faith, young people can respond to socio-economic and political challenges in a way that is appropriate to themselves and for their times.

The Youth Forum initiative is both ecumenical and evangelistic, meaning that it builds both Christian unity and missionary calling to the faith.

The Forum recognises that young people must be empowered to articulate their issues and develop their own responses to today's conditions. By sharing their experiences, young people can develop greater understanding of the nature, extent and causes of their problems. They can then begin to build bridges and use their energy to address them.

The SACC believes that successful youth initiatives rely on the acceptance of young people as an integral part of the problem-solving process. Young people have the potential to find their own principle-based solutions and effectively transform their environments. The role of youth organisations is to provide support and guidance, develop skills and intervene when necessary.

The SACC's approach is to make young participants aware of the important role they have to play in multilevel efforts to resolve conflicts in society. At the same time, it strives to develop greater understanding of the problems affecting young people. Its principles ensure that both the Forum and the broader Council learn from other community actors, and that they work with other constituencies to develop effective intervention strategies.

Integrated Youth Development

Ensuring youth programmes address the needs of young people in communities

Presented by Linda Shange and Samantha Stern

Integrated Youth Development is an approach that takes into account all aspects of a young person's life. This holistic view is concerned with the inter-related social, educational, emotional, spiritual and physical growth of young people. It proposes that all youth development practices strive to achieve sustainable, comprehensive growth for young individuals.

Young people are partners and participants in development; not dependents, nor recipients. The integrated approach acknowledges that each young person has a range of gifts and talents that can be identified and developed. By developing a range of competencies, young people can access more opportunities and gain confidence for their own ongoing growth.

The integrated framework recognises that programmes for young people should be rooted within the broader context. Families, communities and social



structures contribute towards and impact on the lives of young people. The economic and political environments also affect them. Programmes should therefore address a range of issues like HIV/AIDS; unemployment; lack of workplace skills, experience and opportunities; and gender inequalities or gender-specific needs.

Integrated Youth Development does not mean organisations and their programmes must “do everything” in meeting young people’s needs. Rather it means striving to directly or indirectly meet needs that are related to each programme’s core objective. This is where networks and partnerships between organisations with different specialisations become essential in youth development. For example, if one programme doesn’t adequately meet a young person’s spiritual, emotional or social needs for development, he or she can be referred to other organisations that are properly equipped to meet that need. Dialogue and cooperation between various youth development organisations are thus central to the integrated approach.

Life skills and technical skills components should complement each other and reinforce learning and behaviour

Integrated Youth Development does mean that different programme components should be linked to each other. For example, life skills and technical skills components should complement each other and reinforce learning and behaviour. In essence, the development process is made up of parts that affect one another. One part cannot be isolated and fixed while ignoring the rest.

By rooting integrated programmes in communities, youth development organisations can mobilise resources and support. Networking and collaboration between organisations can strengthen programmes by leveraging resources and sharing knowledge. By creating links with organisations that offer complementary services, a programme with limited focus can offer young people opportunities for further development. Together, organisations can better address the causes of young people’s problems, thereby achieving greater, long-term impact.

During the forum, three breakaway sessions explored the practical application of Integrated Youth Development using tools designed for youth workers. The experiential activities allowed participants to engage with issues around HIV/AIDS and employment, gender, and programme assessment. Brief summaries of discussions in these sessions follow.

The practical application of Integrated Youth Development:

Session I: HIV/AIDS and Employment Integrating HIV/AIDS in youth employment and life skills training programmes

Facilitated by Samantha Stern

Young people need to develop skills so they can find employment or create work for themselves. As youth development organisations address this need, they must also recognise that young people will directly or indirectly be affected by HIV/AIDS – in their homes, communities and workplaces. They will need skills and knowledge to deal with its impact.

Young people are most vulnerable to contracting HIV/AIDS. Youth workers must help young individuals develop skills that will enable them to protect themselves and others from the virus.

The Youth Development Network has developed a toolkit to help youth workers integrate HIV/AIDS education into programmes, particularly those that focus on employment skills training. By making connections between



HIV/AIDS, sexual reproductive health, and youth employment and entrepreneurship, youth programmes can better meet the needs of young people.

The toolkit helps youth workers explore issues around HIV/AIDS so they will be better prepared to engage constructively with the youth in their programmes. For example, the toolkit highlights the importance of working with young people in a way that is honest and respectful, and helps them make connections between different aspects of their lives. Youth workers must not only be able and willing to talk to young people about HIV/AIDS, but the information provided must be correct and useful so that youth can make healthy life choices. In particular, youth workers need to:

- ▲ be comfortable talking about sexual matters;
- ▲ have a good understanding of HIV and AIDS;
- ▲ know where to find information;
- ▲ respond appropriately if someone discloses that he or she has HIV/AIDS;
- ▲ be aware of how people living with AIDS can live healthy and productive lives; and
- ▲ know that as youth workers we are not here to moralise or to judge.

The toolkit also includes “The Truth Game”, an experiential activity that allows youth workers to explore whether they are ready to talk honestly and openly about HIV/AIDS with young people in their programmes. By asking very candid questions about sex, money, race, politics, habits and gender, it demonstrates how uncomfortable issues related to HIV/AIDS can make us feel. The game also highlights the importance of being truthful with young people about this life-threatening disease.

Session II: Assessing Impact

Measuring the effectiveness of youth development programmes

Facilitated by Margaret Roper

The importance of programme assessment is widely acknowledged by youth organisations. They regularly use a range of tools and indicators; from surveys, questionnaires and report-backs to observation, peer assessment and attendance monitoring.

The Youth Development Network has developed a tool that offers a structured, planned and scientific method of assessment to help organisations improve impact, accountability and overall programme quality.

The tool, called **Measure it!**, is based on an integrated approach to youth development. Integrated programmes aim to help young participants develop the knowledge, attitudes and skills they need to proactively engage with opportunities and challenges around them. The tool therefore assesses a range of competencies young people require to successfully participate in society.

In particular, **Measure it!** has identified indicators that allow life skills learning to be measured. These indicators allow a programme to measure changes in the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values of young people, which can be used to demonstrate how effective youth programmes are.

Measure it! provides a systematic way of measuring and tracking a young person's growing competencies in various areas. It shows where the young person is in her or his development and how this progresses over time. The tool also helps identify the changing needs of young people.

Youth organisations can use **Measure it!** to enhance programme planning and better address the integrated development of young people within their communities. For example, if a programme focuses on developing a specific skill, **Measure it!** indicates other related competencies required for the young person to use that particular skill more effectively, and develop in a more holistic manner.

Programme assessment is an important component in enhancing our efforts to develop the life skills of young people. Faith-based and non-faith-based organisations may have different roles in what they offer young people, but they all want to be able to determine their effectiveness.

Measure it! provides a mechanism to assess impact for all stakeholders within the youth development sector.



Session III: Gender

Engaging with issues of gender in youth development programmes

Facilitated by Linda Shange

The socially conditioned roles, responsibilities and expectations of young women and men impact on their growth as individuals. Stereotypes or generalisations of the kind of behaviours and characteristics expected from men and women by society often restrict the development of young people. Gender is thus a development issue.

Greater awareness of gender issues allows us to consider ways in which the needs of young women may be different from those of young men. These needs must be catered for when devising programmes for youth development.

Gender presents challenges for youth workers because it is a complex and emotional issue. It involves changing power relationships and therefore often faces significant resistance. It needs to be unpacked in a safe and unthreatening environment and then linked to other youth development issues through an integrated youth development approach.

Addressing issues of gender offers enormous benefits, and presents considerable challenges. Youth workers thus need to develop their own awareness so they can constructively address gender issues with young people.

Simple activities can help groups to explore the differing perspectives of men and women. For example, dividing a group into men and women and asking them to identify and discuss the stereotypes that males and females have of each other reveals interesting gender differences and issues. Similarly, a role-playing scenario in which the participants budget for the use of their stipend, illustrates gender differences in attitudes towards money and the ways in which money is used.

Exploring gender issues is important both in training youth workers and in developing programmes to meet the differing needs of young women and men in society. It should be done in an affirming way to encourage the development of constructive behaviours and qualities.

Programmes must also ensure that young women are enabled to fully participate and benefit from youth development programmes. Unequal power relationships and stereotypes can undermine our attempts to equip young people with life skills, particularly if they reinforce inequality and women's subordination.

Continuing the Dialogue

Youth development organisations face many challenges in their ongoing efforts to address the needs of young people. Integrated Youth Development presents many opportunities to achieve greater effectiveness and to strengthen programmes for young people through information and resource sharing.

The integrated route is not easy. It requires ongoing development of frameworks and knowledge; researching and reflecting on existing practices; creative exploration of better, integrated alternatives; greater resources; skilled and competent staff; time, commitment and energy.

The dialogue at the two-day forum has shown that while faith-based and non-faith-based organisations may have differences, there is considerable potential for both stakeholders to draw from the methods, models, experiences and resources of the other. Participants suggested many ways in which this process could be advanced.

For instance:

- ▲ Establish channels of communication for ongoing dialogue
- ▲ Put differences aside and embrace commonalities
- ▲ Engage in mutual affirmation
- ▲ Build relationships and partnerships based on trust, respect and transparency
- ▲ Identify and tap into the strengths and resources of other organisations
- ▲ Encourage interaction and participation at all levels
- ▲ Initiate exchange programmes and internships
- ▲ Share and develop learning materials
- ▲ Outsource capacity for more effective programmes
- ▲ Collaborate on integrated programme design, planning and implementation
- ▲ Share expertise, perspectives and methodologies
- ▲ Participate in integrated, strategic forums
- ▲ Develop and share materials, mailing lists, databases, web-based resources

Initial dialogue suggests that there are many opportunities for organisations to work together to enhance their efforts in youth development. The challenge is now to ensure that this happens.

For more information about this forum, or detailed write-ups of the presentations discussed above, please contact the YDN directly.



The Youth Development Network (YDN) is a national network of seven youth development organisations in South Africa: Centre for Education and Enterprise Development (CEED), Establishment for Comprehensive Youth Development (ECYD), Junior Achievement South Africa (JASA), Joint Enrichment Project (JEP), Resource Action Group (RAG), Southern African Association of Youth Clubs (SAAFC) and School Leavers Opportunity Training (SLOT). The YDN was formed in July 1998 as a means to increase capacity within the youth sector, share information and best practices and advocate for the interests of young people.



Joint Enrichment Project



School Leavers Opportunity Training



Junior Achievement South Africa



Southern African Association of Youth Clubs



Resource Action Group



The Center for Education and Enterprise Development



Establishment for Comprehensive Youth Development