

Kari Robideau:

Hello, you are listening to the University of Minnesota Extension Center for Youth Development podcast series. My name is Kari Robideau and I'm a youth development extension educator. Thanks for tuning in today. In today's topic we're going to focus on strategies that will help us to achieve true youth and adult partnerships in our programming. Discussing this with me today are two of my extension educator colleagues, Karen Beranek and Jan Derdowski. Thanks for joining me today, ladies.

Karen Beranek:

Glad to be here.

Jan Derdowski:

Thanks for inviting us, Kari.

Kari Robideau:

Well, and I do like to mention when I have returning or new presenters with me, and today I have both. Karen, you were in episode 29, in which you talked about how to get to the top of the youth voice ladder. And actually that topic relates to what we're communicating about today. And Jan, this is your first time.

Jan Derdowski:

Yes, it is.

Kari Robideau:

And I'm so glad that you are willing to join us. I think you're all really going to enjoy listening to these two. One of the reasons I was super excited to have them on today is because as you'll listen to them talk about their programming and specifically around engaging youth and adults in true partnerships, not only are they wanting to be intentional about working with youth, but also that intentionality is of high quality. So, before we dive in today, let's take a moment for each of you to introduce yourself and tell us about your work and if you could share with us how that work has supported youth and adult partnerships for our organization.

Karen Beranek:

Gladly. This is Karen Beranek and I work with the civic engagement leadership team throughout the entire state of Minnesota. I am based in the Southwest region, but I work both within that region and throughout the state. Thinking about how to really have youth have opportunities to talk about their youth leadership, but then also thinking about who designs those attributes for youth leadership. So like, for example, with the state ambassador program, it's youth designing programs for other youth in conjunction with adults. Where at the local level many times it's youth and adult teams working together to develop their own programming and what they would like to accomplish.

Jan Derdowski:

And so I can jump in. This is Jan Derdowski, and I'm an extension educator at the opposite corner of the state. I'm up in the Northeast region. I work in two areas specifically that relate to this topic. One is quality learning environments where we really look and dig deep into ensuring that all the pieces and elements that make us strong program are present in any of our 4-H programs. And then the other area,

like Karen, is civic engagement and leadership. And my focus has been with both the state and more recently the local ambassador programs. I really like to see or help young people develop their leadership skills, particularly around things that they're really passionate about. And so that's what drives my interest and motivates me in this area.

Kari Robideau:

Now, here at the Center for Youth Development, we often refer to our 4-H youth development program as our learning lab for positive youth development. You two have talked about in your introduction how you support 4-H youth programming, but I know that the information you're sharing today is useful for all of the organizations who work with young people in this way. So you'll be sharing four strategies of youth, adult partnerships, and Karen, you're going to start us off with the first strategy, which is developing positive relationships.

Karen Beranek:

Absolutely. And you think about that with any team of youth and adults or even a group of just youth or a group of just adults, where you want to have a relationship with them before you feel, may be comfortable sharing your thoughts or your opinions. And so, taking the time to develop a really good relationship with that team that are made up of youth and adults prior to and even during the process of making decisions. I've seen it done as simple as maybe you go out for a meal together before your first meeting so you get chance to know each other at a more personal level. So you know that Sam is interested in basketball and that's a commitment for him where Josie is interested in civility and learning about social justice. So, you just get a chance to get to know each other as people.

Kari Robideau:

So share a meal, learn about the young people's interests, develop that relationship even deeper and beyond the programming that you're doing with them.

Karen Beranek:

Absolutely. Recognizing that for both the youth and adults, that you are people outside of your partnership and you bring those skills and those interests to the relationship and the partnership. So how can you build off of those assets and you can't build off of them until you know what they are.

Kari Robideau:

An example of that, that I've seen in our community is when youth workers are all still going to band concerts or choir concerts or to the sporting events or to plays in the community. I can imagine that is a really important aspect of that building those positive relationships with those young people.

Karen Beranek:

Oh, absolutely. And it does take time, invested time, but the dividends pay off greatly.

Kari Robideau:

Okay. So the second strategy that you're talking about today is mutually agreed upon expectations for each other. Jan, what does this mean and how do we build those mutually agreed upon expectations with the young people and the adults in our programs?

Jan Derdowski:

Yeah, and I think I'm going to dovetail on what Karen said about taking the time to do this. Oftentimes, I think we want to jump right into the project. Let's dive into the work and then we may have some difficulties along the way, but by doing exactly as Karen described, slowing that process down a little bit, taking time to develop the relationships and then having conversation about those expectations as we move forward in the project. I always say to young people, I'm the adult and I'm not going to give that role up. And oftentimes for me, that might mean managing the risk. Okay?

Jan Derdowski:

And so, I'm clear about that. And then what other expectations might you have of me and vice versa? And I would even suggest that we write those things down and that we visit them frequently as we start our meetings. Remember, here's what we agreed upon. It may be that as the relationship and the project develops, we need to go back and adapt those expectations for each other. And I think that's all part of the process. And I think you mentioned in the beginning really being authentic and ensuring that we have truly youth adult partnerships and that adults aren't taking over and we need to have those conversations on the front end so that both parties understand how are we going to do this work together? What is this going to look like? Critically important.

Kari Robideau:

What really stands out to me in what you just said, is that you develop those expectations together, that you're asking questions, you're not telling expectations, but you're communicating around those and that's not always easy. How do we make sure that that happens?

Jan Derdowski:

And I think it just really is conversational. And so, I think we can model that with young people by saying, "Here's the part that I know for sure I'm going to do. I'm going to manage the risk. Let's think about what other parts of the work are going to bubble up for us." And it might be throwing out some examples. Who's going to invite people to the meeting? I can do that. A youth might volunteer. Wonderful. And then you start to document those. And oftentimes I'll ask a young person, we talk about the power of the pen. Would you be willing to write this down for us today? Rather than me sharing those roles and thinking about ways that you engage them and it just becomes easy and it's part of our practice in our time together.

Kari Robideau:

Now, the third strategy that you guys are sharing today is helping youth identify and develop their passion. I think that comes nicely after the second one that you just shared.

Jan Derdowski:

Absolutely. And I think this is a key part of the work together is often times the work that Karen and I have been involved in around ambassador programs, both at the local or regional or state level, it's young people who have a passion for the work. There's something there that they are really interested in, either developing a project or a program. And so it's really important that we honor that and we listen to where that's coming from. We don't have to be the experts, but really pose those thoughtful questions that help them draw out their interest or encourage the development of something that they

are already passionate about. So they may say, "You know what? I know a person who knows all about leading projects at the local level. I'd like to invite them to our meeting." They can take the lead on that.

Jan Derdowski:

Or I have some expertise around, I'll use a traditional 4-H program, around livestock. I would like to lead that project area. And rather than me pulling in a colleague who may have that expertise, let them lead that, right? Identify what is it that's important to them and then really draw that out. So it might be their passion, but it might also be a skill set they possess. Maybe somebody really good at organizing or somebody is really good with technology, then let them take the lead in those roles, acknowledge that, and let them run with it.

Kari Robideau:

And do you think as adults, that's hard for us to do? And as you said that-

Jan Derdowski:

... oh my goodness.

Kari Robideau:

We don't have to be the expert. And as soon as you said that, I think it's so easy to say, "Okay, the young people want to do this, but I don't know how to get that organized. I don't know where to start. I don't know anyone who does that."

Jan Derdowski:

Right. I have seen, I'll tell you a beautiful example of this. I was observing a robotics program and I watched this gentleman pose all of these really thoughtful questions to the young people. And I'm like, look at him. Look at how he's doing this. He's totally turning it back to them. And I was so impressed. And then I, after the meeting, I said to him, "Boy, you were really good at that." And he goes, "No, here's the thing is I don't know how to do it. So I had to ask the questions because I didn't have the expertise." So there's one strategy and one way you can think about it, but the challenge and where it can become really difficult is if we share that passion or if we really do have some expertise. And I think it's checking ourselves and really thinking about why am I here, what's the purpose?

Jan Derdowski:

And also I have given young people permission to check me. So if I'm in where I don't belong, you know what you call me on that behavior. And I've had conversations with young people where they, sometimes it's hard for them, but what a growth opportunity when they can be like, "Hey, Jan. We got this." Right? And then for us to honor that. So it takes some practice and also working with a good partner or colleague who can, we keep each other in check. Karen Beranek is good for that and I appreciate that skill of hers as well.

Kari Robideau:

I've heard colleagues say before that if it looks exactly like you as the adult thought it was going to look that it was wrong.

Jan Derdowski:

Yeah, exactly. That's a good measure. Right?

Kari Robideau:

Okay. So our fourth strategy for having true youth adult partnerships is sharing control and engaging youth. And maybe we've touched on this a bit, but Karen, take us another step further in that voice and choice conversation.

Karen Beranek:

Absolutely. And this builds off of the first three points directly is being able to create an environment where the youth feel like they can honestly give their voice. And many times we think about that is the right number of youth at the table? Is there six adults and one youth and you're putting that young person on the spot to represent all young people? I wouldn't want to do that as an adult female, I'm going to represent all adult females. No, we are each unique. So being intentional about making sure you have the right people at the table and that they feel that they can call Jan out when she's stepping on their toes and that they have the respect that they can do that and then move the project and the program forward with that. And this also thinking about what's giving them multiple opportunities to plan and to make decisions.

Karen Beranek:

It's not, you get these two decisions, and then we get all the rest of them as adults. And so then the program will look like the adults thought the program should look. That also directly relates to giving them decisions that really matter. Does it matter what the t-shirts looks like? For some young people, absolutely. That's the one committee they want to be on and they want to design that tee shirt. I was working with a group of camp counselors last year and we were doing a whole day planning retreat.

Karen Beranek:

So we were planning the evening activities, we were planning the educational sessions, we were planning the recreation, we were planning the campfire, and towards the end of the day I asked them about snacks and they looked at me and said, "We don't care." That was not an important decision in their world whatsoever. They're like, you as the adult, you make sure the kids have snacks so they're not crabby, but we don't care. Like, okay, I can go buy snacks, I can do that. And so it was just interesting that they really had a lot of passion around specific activities that would really impact the younger campers and that they didn't have passion on those unimportant decisions.

Kari Robideau:

Yeah. Well, what I'm hearing in that is that they still had choice, right? You asked them, like you know what, on this one, you take it, Karen.

Karen Beranek:

Absolutely. And that is giving them the choices of what would you like to plan and what would you not like to plan. And they were more than willing to understand that I was going to tell them when bedtime was and they could choose what they did until bedtime.

Kari Robideau:

Nice. So parameters around, I mean, I think one of the things I'm hearing from you is that they need to have real choices, authentic choices, that it's adult guided and really within the parameters of where their choice is. So, I think sometimes for adults it's like, well there's just some things they can't decide. You brought up a really good example of bedtime. If the young people decided what time bedtime was, well-

Karen Beranek:

... we might have some really tired kids after the first day and they won't be able to engage in all the other things that the counselors had planned for the kids.

Kari Robideau:

Yeah. So your example of, okay, bedtime is at this time, what do you want to do until then? Love that. I think that's a great example.

Karen Beranek:

Thank you.

Kari Robideau:

Okay, ladies. So your four strategies are developing positive relationships, mutually agreed upon expectations, helping youth identify and develop their passion. And then that shared control and engaging youth in voice and choice. Now, as I'm listening to this, as a youth development professional, working with young people, I put these into place. How do I know? How do I measure that I am authentically engaging youth as a partner in voice and choice?

Karen Beranek:

I think that's a really good question because many of us adults, we want to do this, and we know how to even, but then we get caught up. And so how do we pause and reflect and be like, okay, check-in. Where are we doing right now? So a tool I found super helpful is Hart's ladder, H-A-R-T-S, Hart's ladder. So go ahead and search that. Otherwise, my previous podcast that Carrie mentioned is all about it. But what it is, it's a ladder of eight different ways that youth can be engaged with adults, and so you can find where you are on that stair steps of rings up the ladder. And so, as a group, maybe you've been working on a yearlong project and it's now May, do you need to do a check in?

Karen Beranek:

Where are we at? Are we using youth as tokens or are we a little bit farther up and we're listening to them and then making the decisions without them? Or are we at that top where we're really engaging with them? And that's something you can do as a group of youth and adults. It's not necessarily the adults have to look at this tool, this ladder and be like, this is where we are, ask the kids. They will tell you if you've created a positive experience. If they just say, "We're fine." You maybe need to dig a bit deeper. But I use that as a tool to just check in, where are we at?

Jan Derdowski:

Yes. I also am a fan of Hart's ladder and I like the definitions as we move up the ladder to help people understand what those partnerships really look like and how youth are engaged. A second tool that we

use in the Center for Youth Development is Wickert's Program Quality Assessment. And so if you take a look at that tool or actually Wickert's Pyramid, youth engagement is at the top. And that's all about recognizing young people's voice in choice, giving them opportunity to plan, to lead truly youth, adult partnerships and Wickert has developed a tool with a number of indicators, is what they're called, or behaviors that we can observe in programs.

Jan Derdowski:

And that help us define and know that we really are developing authentic experiences where young people truly are leading. Along with the tool or the way that we can measure this. There's also some toolkits that we've developed within the organization that help us understand or improve our techniques around ensuring that we are providing young people with opportunities to lead, and for our many, many, 4-H volunteers to help develop experiences that truly are youth and adult led. Engage youth in those meaningful partnerships.

Kari Robideau:

Thank you, you guys. Now, before we bring this podcast to a close, after listening to both of your enthusiasm around this topic and I know both of you have a lot of experience in doing this, I want to know the best experience that you have had in terms of that youth adult partnership and where young people were engaged and they were a part of the decision making process of the choices that needed to be made that they felt like they had a voice.

Karen Beranek:

One of my most recent ones was through the Center for Youth Development local ambassador program. I get to train teams of youth and adults on the different opportunities that they could have through the program and then at the end of the training session they get a half an hour to plan and that has been so much fun to listen to them engage in conversation and even talk over each other because they're so excited about what their year could look like and having youth be excited about being asked what they would like for their next year to look like.

Karen Beranek:

And the adults being excited that the kids are excited about learning and leading within their local program. So, that's been super fun. And also knowing that once they are done with that half hour session, they're going home and really putting that into action. So that's that top of that pyramid that Jan was talking about, is giving you the opportunity to plan, and to accomplish their goals.

Kari Robideau:

And both of you have mentioned the ambassador program throughout this podcast. Just what that means in our 4-H youth development program to be an ambassador.

Karen Beranek:

Oh, sure. The easiest explanation I can say is a youth leader, they're youth, grade six or seven and older, and they really take on that leadership role of promoting 4-H, of learning, of leading, many times they are connected to service, whether it's service to 4-H or service to their community. And so it's really the youth leadership of the local program, whether it's at a County or Tribal Nation level. And so that's the

local best program. And then we have a group very similar to that at the state level that represents Minnesota 4-H across Minnesota.

Kari Robideau:

So why you guys are using it as an example, it's kind of the highlight of our program that if you become a youth ambassador, you truly have voice and choice for the organization.

Karen Beranek:

Yes, it's one of the ones we get to help build the most about.

Jan Derdowski:

And I would say, Carrie, that we really try to have youth voice and choice at all levels of our program. We pride ourselves on being an organization that develops lifelong learners and leaders. And so, those opportunities to lead look different depending upon the age and experience of a young person. But ambassadors is, I would, say sort of one of our pinnacle groups and it's something that young people look forward to and really takes that whole leadership thing to another level.

Jan Derdowski:

And then if I can jump in and share my example, I think like Karen, both of us have had many opportunities where we get to really see young people shine and lead. One of probably my favorites and I think one of the best examples that I've had the opportunity to work with is an intense service learning experience that happens up in the Northeast region, where young people come together. First, learn about each other. Just like we said, developing those positive relationships. And then focusing a pretty significant amount of time talking about the things within their community, the needs that they recognize and how that aligns with their passions.

Jan Derdowski:

And then collectively they develop a project to address those needs. And it really truly is driven by those young people. We have an activity and it has looked different depending upon the group, but where they have to come to consensus. Where they first share their passions and so we chart those, and then they have to figure out a way to come to consensus, and that's usually a time when I think about truly letting go is where I will say to them, "I'm going to go down the hall and have a cup of coffee. You guys got to figure this out. And when I come back, my expectation is that you will describe to me the process that you used to reach consensus."

Jan Derdowski:

I don't care what that process looks like so long as it's not Harry saying, "Well, this is what we're doing." But truly engaging all voices and sorting through what makes sense for this group. And I'm always amazed when I come back into the room, their ability to not only have reached consensus, to check in with me, sometimes they'll come out and they'll say, "You know what? We got a question about this." But then clearly described here's what we did, here's how we made this decision together and we're ready to move forward. And I just love hearing their stories and then you know what, we figure out what our next steps are going to be to develop that project.



Kari Robideau:

Both great examples of giving youth the opportunity that they identify a need, that they discuss what that need is, and come to a consensus, and I would say on their own, but as both of you are describing that, you're still there, you're guiding these processes with the young people. And I think that is one of the biggest things that I'm taking from today is that it's youth driven, but adult guided. Having young people in charge or having young people's voices heard doesn't mean that the adults completely step aside and say, figure it out. You have young people who you've helped develop those skills and you let them. Is that, would you say that's true that you let them kind of take more and more responsibility and more and more choice as time goes on?

Karen Beranek:

Oh, absolutely.

Jan Derdowski:

I would agree. And I think it depends upon, like we said, their skillset, their abilities, their confidence, willingness. But it truly, if it's authentic, is a guided experience. The other piece, Carrie, that I'd want to add to this is that this takes a different investment of time. And so, allowing young people the time and the opportunity to do this, to be honest, oftentimes it might be much easier for us to say, "This is what we're doing."

Kari Robideau:

Yeah.

Jan Derdowski:

But in order to truly develop and allow young people to develop those skills, it is about stepping back, letting them even struggle at times, and if things don't work out the way that we hoped, then looking at that as still a learning opportunity and to be able to say, what could we, should we have done differently here? What are the things where we maybe missed a piece of the equation? And so it's about always framing things with a learning lens as we move forward.

Kari Robideau:

Youth and adult partnerships are an investment.

Jan Derdowski:

I would say a huge investment that really plays out big time for communities in the long run. When we can give people, young people, the opportunity to truly lead around the areas that they feel passionate about. We're creating the wonderful leaders of tomorrow. I believe truly an investment and an appreciation of their own communities as well.

Kari Robideau:

Well, Karen and Jan, thank you for sharing your insights, your experience and engaging youth in meaningful ways with us today. And you really showed us how young people can develop skills authentically and feel like they truly have that voice and choice in the programs that we work with. Would you be willing to connect with others who might be listening today who would like to have access

to some of the resources that you talked about or learn more about the programmatic efforts that you've described?

Karen Beranek:

Of course.

Jan Derdowski:

Yes, we would welcome the opportunity to talk about this work. I think I can speak for both of us that we, this is our area of passion. And so, being able to help others or engage others along the way would just be a treat. So, absolutely.

Kari Robideau:

Thank you so much. And as we bring this podcast to a close, I also want to point out our website at [www.extension.umn.edu/youth](http://www.extension.umn.edu/youth). You will learn more about youth and adult partnerships there as you look at information where we have training, educational tools, and also information about our Minnesota 4-H program. So if you're not a part of that, we invite you to take a look. Thanks again for joining me today, Jan and Karen.

Karen Beranek:

Thank you.

Jan Derdowski:

Thank you, Carrie.

Karen Beranek:

This is Kari Robideau from the University of Minnesota Extension Center for Youth Development. Please tune in again soon.