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'If you're the Alliance for Children and Youth, where are all the children and youth'?' How the Alliance for Children and Youth of Waterloo Region can help advance youth engagement

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"IF YOU'RE THE ALLIANCE FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH, WHERE ARE ALL THE CHILDREN AND YOUTH?"
HOW THE ALLIANCE FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH OF WATERLOO REGION CAN HELP ADVANCE YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

by

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Abstract

Youth engagement (the meaningful participation and sustained involvement of a young person in an activity outside of him or herself; CEYE, 2003), in particular with organizations that affect young people's lives, has positive effects on both youth and organizations (Driscoll, 2002; Hart, 1992; Zeldin, McDaniel, Topitzes, & Calvert, 2000). Research on youth engagement has identified that successful and sustainable youth engagement requires a combination of local, interagency, and political level structures (Caputo, 2000). Waterloo Region (Ontario, Canada) has isolated pockets of youth engaged in decision-making; however, no regional youth engagement initiative exists at the interagency and political levels. Regional efforts to improve the lives of young people do exist, however. One such initiative, the Alliance for Children and Youth of Waterloo Region, has made a commitment to youth engagement and strengthening youth voice. Using a collaborative ethnography approach, the current study works within pre-existing organizational structures of the Alliance to develop a youth engagement strategy. Using participant-observation and interviews with Alliance member representatives, this study examines how member organizations define youth engagement, explores the unique opportunities and barriers associated with youth engagement within the Alliance context, and articulates a vision for how the Alliance can advance youth engagement in Waterloo Region. Findings from this study have implications for how the Alliance can develop a youth engagement strategy. Additional insights around organizational development are explored.

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I owe a debt of gratitude to my community partners at the Alliance for Children and Youth of Waterloo Region, in particular the members of the Prevention-Promotion Working Group, interview participants, and Christiane Sadeler (Chair of the Alliance). Thanks especially to Marla Pender who has coached me through this process with her words of wisdom and experience, and Christine Bird who has been an amazing role model, colleague, and friend throughout this research. Last but not least, thanks to my family and loved ones for their patience and encouragement.

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Preface

I find community psychology appealing because of its collaborative and participatory approach. The value of collaboration is reinforced in all of our graduate courses, with key theorists and respected practitioners repeating the message; participation and citizen engagement is essential to good community psychology. Since the researcher standpoint allows for the acknowledgment of my student status, I would like to indulge by stretching those limits and linger back in my memory to grade nine, when I was a budding young social activist. I'm about to share with you my own personal experience of how youth involvement can feel from the youth side of the equation, with the intention of exploring the complicated dimensions of collaborative and participatory research. I will share how my community's experiment with youth engagement, used without careful consideration and sufficient preparation, served to silence rather than magnify my voice.

As a student of community psychology, I have been proud of the efforts made by our discipline to empower and work in partnership with the people. The fundamental shift from "researching on" to "researching with" is one of the reasons I am proud of our field. It is important, however, that students of Community Psychology are made aware of the inherent challenges and risks posed by collaborative and participatory research, and are trained to employ these methods effectively and critically. Many times I have heard students in my program (myself included), starry-eyed and enamoured with the ideals of Participatory Action Research, simply state that they intend to use PAR, without a critical approach to thinking through the process and logistics. What follows is a cautionary tale of how youth empowerment can be a challenge for youth and adults alike.

I grew up in a small town in rural Atlantic Canada. I was a very active and socially engaged young person. As such, when a coalition composed of health care and human service professionals in my region was looking to add youth voice to their table; several youth were invited to participate. I agreed to attend monthly meetings to address issues of how agencies and government could better serve youth. I wasn't fully clear on what I was agreeing to, nor would I ever fully understand what was expected of me throughout the process. Looking back, it is my educated guess that it was not only the youth who were unclear as to their role; I suspect that the adult organizers were also uncertain as to what youth could meaningfully contribute, despite their interest in having youth at the table.

It was a long drive from my home to the community where the meetings took place, and youth (unlike adults attending the same meeting) were not compensated for their participation. The meetings themselves were overwhelming – with little understanding of the process, and virtually no background information on the topics, discussions were tedious to the point of boredom. After several meetings, the youth decided they'd had enough. During a coffee break, we approached the chair and requested a breakaway session for youth to discuss their role at the meeting and report back. We were given permission to take all the time we wanted, while the meeting carried on without us. In the hallway, sitting in a circle on the floor, we shared our frustrations. We had all volunteered for this position in hopes of making a contribution to youth services in our region. So far, not only had we made no contribution, but moreover, we'd seen no action. Primarily, the meetings consisted of budgetary reports and organizational details. We felt powerless and without voice, and we felt cheated

because we had all volunteered under the assumption that our presence would really make a difference. We decided to return to the committee with a request for them to adjust their process so we could understand what was going on enough to contribute, and a strong recommendation that the work become more action focused as opposed to organizational networking and politics.

Upon return to the meeting, we bravely stood at the head of the boardroom table, brandishing a flip chart marker. We outlined our concerns about voice, accessibility and action in a clear and confident manner. Some faces around the table were supportive, and others were defensive. When we'd had our say, we were thanked, and the meeting was adjourned. Several people approached us with encouraging words, and congratulated us on standing up for ourselves. Nobody made any mention of change. We were never invited back.

There were two important assumptions made by the people at that meeting. Youth assumed that regular operations of a meeting must change in order to accommodate their voice. Adults assumed that since youth didn't fit with the regular operations of the meeting, they could not be accommodated. The result was a silencing of youth voice and a loss of great passion and energy, and the unfortunate conclusion that youth and adults cannot work together in that setting. Everyone could have benefited from a successful partnership, and yet it appeared to those involved that it would not work. I have undertaken this research to better explore how we can work around those assumptions and provide opportunities for youth engagement that works for everyone involved.

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Introduction

Youth engagement, as defined by the Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement (CEYE, 2003) is the meaningful and sustained involvement of a young person in an activity outside of him or herself. Youth engagement has positive effects on both youth and organizations (Driscoll, 2002; Hart, 1992; Zeldin, McDaniel, Topitzes, & Calvert, 2000). Research on youth engagement and participation in decision-making has identified that successful and sustainable youth engagement requires a combination of local, interagency (i.e., network or collaborative), and political level structures (Caputo, 2000). Waterloo Region[1] in Ontario, Canada, has isolated pockets of youth engagement in such structures; however no regional youth engagement strategy exists.

Regional efforts to improve the lives of young people do exist, however. One such initiative has made a commitment to youth engagement and strengthening youth voice. The Alliance for Children and Youth of Waterloo Region, hereafter referred to simply as the Alliance, is a group of public and not-for-profit organizations that engage in dialogue and work together on important child- and youth-related issues. The intention is that the service system will become more comprehensive and that individual programs and services will become more accessible as a result, and the community will consequently become more responsive to the needs of children, youth, and families. The structure that has evolved is one of interaction between a diverse group of organizational

[1] The region of Waterloo consists of three cities and four townships: the cities of Kitchener, Waterloo, and Cambridge, and the townships of Wellesly, Wilmot, Woolich and North Dumfries. The combined population of the region is 450, 000 and growing; in fact, it is considered one of the fastest growing populations in Ontario. In order to accommodate this rapid growth in a proactive manner, the Region of Waterloo is developing a Growth Management Plan, which includes specific attention to youth and youth related issues within the human services section of the plan.

members that all share a desire to build a strong community, capable of promoting the well-being of children, youth, and families.

Purpose of the Research

This research was undertaken in partnership with the Alliance for Children and Youth in order to explore what the Alliance can do to foster youth engagement, and what they need to make their vision of youth engagement a reality. There were three research questions addressed by this research: 1) How do Alliance members define youth engagement, 2) What are the unique opportunities and barriers associated with youth engagement in the Alliance context, and 3) What is the vision for how the Alliance can advance youth engagement in Waterloo Region. Emerging from this research was the recognition that organizational development is a pre-requisite for meaningful youth engagement with the Alliance.

I first explore the youth engagement literature to gain an understanding of the best practices for involving young people in their communities. I then explore the literature on collaboration and community change, in order to address the important dimension of organizational development. Using the literature as a foundation, interviews with key stakeholders in the Alliance explored how the Alliance wants to foster youth engagement, and what is necessary to make their vision a reality.

The Alliance for Children and Youth

The Alliance consists of organizations, agencies, and individuals working together to create community-wide change on a number of shared issues relating to child and youth well-being. Through monthly forums, public education and advocacy strategies, the creation of literature, and other related activities, the Alliance works

towards transforming the culture of Waterloo Region into one that is more supportive of children, youth and families. For more information on the specific outcomes and approaches the Alliance uses to guide its work, see the Model of Overall Direction, developed by the Alliance in 2004 (Appendix 1). The Alliance has been working towards transforming the youth-serving culture of Waterloo Region through networking and collaboration for nearly ten years.

History. The Waterloo community has a long history of partnerships, and it was in this tradition that the Alliance was created. The Alliance was formed in 1998 from two community groups: The Children's Interagency Collaborative Partnership (CHIC-P), a group of stakeholders from the community who worked in various ways to promote the well-being of children, youth and families, formed in 1991:

> I was at the original meeting that [was] called... it was around that in 1991 actually, that the first sort of group of agencies began to simply talk about how they could work together in new ways that might impact our ability to respond at times, and out of that the original group that was called the Children's Interagency Collaborative Partnership. CHIC-P [Pronounced Chick-Pea].

and the Children's Planning Forum (CPF), a networking, planning, consultation and information-sharing forum for child and youth serving agency directors and senior staff, created in 1996 when the Social Resources Council lost its funding:

> The Social Resources Council locally was funded by the Ministry of Community and Social Services to get a group of people together... it met its demise when ComSoc [the Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services] finally said, 'Hey, I wonder what good this group of people is doing in the community, so

> we're not going to fund your planning support any more.' Which then gave us a kick to say, 'Hey, we can't let this prospect go, of working together, how can we expand beyond that?' And out of that, I think, the Alliance started to form.

Typically, CHIC-P had representation from 'front-line' workers (i.e., direct service providers who work with children, youth and families), while CPF involved mostly agency directors and senior staff. The two groups incorporated many of the same organizations and ultimately concluded that the purpose of both groups could be better accomplished through one common alliance that combined the strengths and embraced a multi-level perspective. It was from this realization that the Alliance for Children and Youth of Waterloo Region was formed.

Out of CHIC-P and CPF, the Alliance was formed in the fall of 1998, with the intention of bringing together these two organizations in order to collaboratively build the capacity of the community to respond to issues facing children, youth, and families. The Alliance Terms of Reference (2003) states this ideal very clearly, by articulating that "the Alliance acknowledges that front-line community action and systems leadership are inter-dependent parts of the same continuum. By working together, both are better able to succeed in strengthening the community for children and youth." The diversity of membership that resulted from the initial parent organizations (one being more front-line, the other being more decision-makers) is seen as a source of strength rather than a weakness, in order to bridge gaps in the community and launch comprehensive, community wide collaboration, as one of the Alliance founders recollected during an interview: "It was a group of people and agencies that got together to say 'How can we make a difference in the community as a group as opposed to individually acting out

there?' And certainly I think that's fostered." The Alliance for Children and Youth of Waterloo Region is an example of organizations working together to create community-wide change on a number of shared issues of interest.

Membership. As an independent coalition (i.e., not required to report to government or any one agency), the Alliance brings together organizations and community members who are invested in the well being of children and youth in Waterloo Region. The membership is made up of a mixture of government, private sector and non-profit agencies, as well as individuals. Members can therefore take on varying levels of involvement (and consequently, engage in varying levels of collaboration) within the Alliance. This is described in their Terms of Reference document (2003):

> The Alliance provides a focal point for organizations and individuals interested in working together for the well-being of children, youth, and families in Waterloo Region. The Alliance provides an opportunity for:
>
> - The sharing of information and ideas,
> - Consultation and advocacy,
> - Promotion of child and family-friendly environments and policies,
> - Promotion of methods of achieving well-being of children,
> - Formation of groups of individuals who wish to work together on particular initiatives, including planning activities (p. 1).

A member of the Alliance that is involved in several of the abovementioned activities could be said to be truly collaborating in the academic sense, however many members

participate only in the first (sharing of information) or second (consultation), which could be considered collaboration only in the most colloquial way.

The level of involvement is determined by several factors, one of which is the role that the member representative holds within the member organization. Different levels of power are held by member representatives, from front-line workers to executive directors. There are also differing levels of time and energy, as some members of the Alliance are retired volunteers, whereas others are very busy professionals. Together, this diversity results in a great deal of richness in terms of perspective, access to resources, and commitment to a common cause.

Membership in the Alliance is more complex than it may first appear. The Alliance's membership is made up of organizations that send individuals to represent them at the Alliance table. This system is necessary, because 'organizations' cannot attend meetings; a person must be chosen to represent the organization. This results in the added challenge of having individuals who may collaborate at the Alliance table, but unless they are involving the larger organization, the 'member' is not collaborating. There are also about a dozen individual members who support the work of the Alliance but do not function within its model. These people are often retired, or working in academia. In addition to the complexities associated with membership, there are also complexities associated with understanding the Alliance's role.

The Role of the Alliance. The Alliance is not a service-providing agency and does not directly deal with children, youth or families. Instead, the Alliance represents collaboration between organizations; it is a network rather than an agency. As such, the Alliance receives funding through a partnership with the United Way of Kitchener-

Waterloo. This relationship is complex and evolving, but it is important to note that the Alliance is a United Way "partner" rather than a "member agency." United Way funds member agencies in order to provide benefit to the community through their services, whereas partnership represents mutual benefit to United Way and the partner. This means the Alliance is recognized as having a reciprocal and equal relationship with United Way.

How the Alliance Works. As a network, the Alliance aims to collectively accomplish what member organizations cannot do in isolation. The vision and mission clearly articulate the aims of the Alliance: the vision is to sustain a strong community by sharing responsibility for the well-being of children, youth and families, and the mission is to promote and enable planning and action by using strength-based approaches (Alliance for Children and Youth, n.d.). The vision and mission are pursued through member participation in the Alliance process, which includes three core components:

1) A monthly forum meeting (open to the public and all members of the Alliance)

2) Working groups (smaller groups formed for clearly identified tasks that advance the Alliance mission)

3) Regular communication (facilitated by the Alliance Facilitator and Manager in the form of the electronic "Mid-Month Connection"—which functions as a newsletter/listserv.

These activities are intended to facilitate change in the larger community as well as changes within member organizations, towards the common goal of improving services and support for children, youth and families.

An Example: The PPWG. The most prominent structure within the Alliance for true collaboration between members is the formation of working groups, which are

smaller groups that are formed for clearly identified tasks. It is through these working groups that the overall mission of the Alliance is advanced (Alliance Terms of Reference, 2003). The Alliance works towards transforming the culture of Waterloo Region into one that is supportive of children, youth and families. Within this broad vision, one of the central purposes of the Alliance is to promote the positive youth development approach. They have demonstrated their ability to work in a collaborative fashion towards this purpose through promotion of the developmental assets framework. During my time with the Alliance, I became a participant-observer on the Prevention-Promotion working group (hereafter referred to as the PPWG), which was dedicated to furthering this particular goal.

Over the past several years, this working group of the Alliance has worked to further the collective goal of promoting positive youth development. The PPWG began by bringing together the representatives of Alliance member organizations that had particular passion for the positive youth development approach, and also paid careful consideration to the individual characteristics of group membership. In other words, they brought together people who were committed to collaborating on this issue who could work well together. The group then set a direction—they chose to promote the developmental assets framework through a process of education (i.e., train-the-trainer) and the production of resources for the community such as a pamphlet on the 40 developmental assets. They also developed a process that worked for members, of regularly scheduled meetings that were engaging opportunities for like-minded people to share and network in a relaxed atmosphere. The final phase of action was relatively easy, because members were committed; the structure was in place, and external support from

constituents and those in power was readily available. At this point, trained facilitators have given hundreds of workshops and presentations on the developmental assets and positive youth development, and the Alliance has established that it speaks in strengths-based language.

The Alliance has now expressed a desire to pursue youth engagement within the framework of positive youth development, as they feel it will further their vision of improving the culture of Waterloo Region for children, youth and families. It is the intention of this research to begin the process of collaboration as outlined by Gray (1989) to work towards a youth engagement strategy for the Waterloo Region.

The Alliance historically has taken a strengths-based, prevention-focused approach, as an original member recalled:

> I think there was always a focus towards prevention and getting this before a crisis arose, and how we can better work together with other agencies and people in the community, under the aegis that it takes a community to raise a child.

This approach continues to be at the forefront of the Alliance, and is one of the contributing factors for their interest in youth engagement.

Importance of Topic

The Alliance has expressed a desire to foster youth engagement within the framework of positive youth development, as they feel it is a concrete strategy for improving the culture of Waterloo Region for children, youth and families. Recognizing that youth engagement is of value, the Alliance published a statement on youth engagement entitled "Let's Talk: Engaging and Listening to Today's Youth" (Alliance for Children and Youth, 2005). Supported by Alliance members, this statement clearly

articulates the Alliance's intention to take action for promoting and fostering youth engagement across organizations and within their network:

> We want to move from speaking about youth engagement and youth voice to putting these values and principles to work. We want to create opportunities/venues for young people to become meaningfully engaged and to bring youth voice to places it isn't currently being heard. At the same time, we want to connect organizations, groups, and individuals who wish to meaningfully involve young people with interested youth. (Alliance for Children and Youth, 2005)

Up to this point, the Alliance has made progress in researching youth engagement at the membership level through a survey of their member organizations about youth engagement (Alliance for Children and Youth, 2006). The survey focused on individual member agency practices rather than the collaborative efforts of the Alliance, and found that although organizations support youth engagement in principle (i.e. they believe it is important), lots of organizations do not have the resources to support formal structures or processes that facilitate active and purposeful engagement. More often, organizations engage in passive strategies such as informally consulting youth in their social circles or hiring young people to work in entry-level positions within their agency/organization. When surveyed, several organizations indicated an interest in formally engaging young people with the Alliance, but before now, no research has approached the unique challenges of engaging young people at the interagency or network level of the Alliance itself.

Relevant Theories and Research

Despite a broad base of literature on youth engagement in organizations, there is an absence of research on the potential for youth engagement at the interagency or network level. This study attempted to fill this gap by using collaborative ethnography (i.e., working closely with consultants from the setting in designing the research, analysing the data, and disseminating the results). Working within pre-existing organizational structures of the Alliance, this research articulated a vision for youth engagement for the Alliance. This research helps the Alliance answer the question, "if you're the Alliance for Children and Youth, where are all the children and youth?" which has been a refrain of outside observers as well as Alliance members in the past.

A review of theoretical and empirical research and best practices for engaging young people provides important information for best practices in initiating and sustaining successful youth engagement. Before discussing the specific context of the Alliance, an in-depth exploration of theoretical and empirical literature on youth engagement will provide a framework for conceiving of youth engagement that suits this setting. This exploration will review four major areas of youth engagement research, beginning with a broad approach and presenting progressively narrowed theories, ending with specific steps that can be taken for action.

Following the review of youth engagement literature, an exploration of the literature on collaboration assists in understanding the unique nature of how youth engagement can be supported at the inter-agency level. This facilitates an understanding of the unique nature of the Alliance, and allows for a direction of research that will begin the process of engaging youth regionally that is sensitive to the unique qualities of an

interagency network like the Alliance compared to a more conventional setting for youth engagement (such as an individual youth serving agency, organization, or government).

Relevant Youth Literature

The youth engagement literature is all grounded in a philosophy of positive youth development, but engagement itself can take many forms. I will review the positive youth development paradigm in order to ground the reader in the concepts behind youth engagement, present a definition of what youth engagement is, and then explore some of the forms that youth engagement can take. Resulting from this, I will introduce an integrated framework of youth engagement that is suited to a setting such as the Alliance.

The integrated framework begins with an exploration of positive youth development (Larson, 2000), which encompasses all strengths-based perspectives and approaches including, but not limited to, youth engagement. Youth engagement (CEYE, 2003) is introduced as one form of positive youth development. Under the youth engagement umbrella, youth participation (Checkoway, Allison & Montoya, 2005) is presented as a distinct category of youth engagement. Finally, specific steps are outlined, using the model of youth organizing (Edwards, Johnson & McGillicuddy, 2003). The relationship between the four areas of relevant research on best practices for engaging young people is outlined in the Table 1 (The Relationship between Relevant Youth Literature). What follows is an in-depth exploration of these four theories, which together constitute an approach, actions, specific activities, and steps for achieving the desired outcomes. It is important to note that these four theories are not mutually exclusive categories.

Table 1: The Relationship between Relevant Youth Literature

Positive Youth Development	"Positive youth development or PYD is a term that describes an approach to developing programs for children and youth. In contrast to traditional prevention models, PYD (sometimes shortened to "youth development") emphasizes building skills and assets in youth in addition to preventing common negative outcomes." (NCSL, 2007)	- Promotes bonding - Fosters resilience, self-determination, spirituality, self-efficacy, clear and positive identity, belief in the future, and prosocial norms - Promotes social, emotional, cognitive, behavioral and moral competence- - Provides recognition for positive behavior and opportunities for prosocial involvement (an approach)
Youth Engagement	"Youth engagement is the meaningful participation and sustained involvement of a young person in an activity, with a focus outside of him or herself. The kind of activity in which the youth is engaged can be almost anything… and it can occur in almost any kind of setting" (CEYE, 2003)	- the above is accomplished through meaningful participation and sustained involvement in an activity (activities that achieves the above approach)
Youth Participation	"Participation is about local communities being actively involved in the decisions that affect them" (Driskell, 2002) "Youth participation in public policy is a process of involving young people in the institutions that affect their lives." (Checkoway, Allison & Montoya, 2005)	- the kind of participation, (which will accomplish the above) is accomplished through citizen participation (a specific kind of activity from the above activities)
Youth Organizing	Youth organizing is a youth development and social justice strategy that trains young people in community organizing and advocacy, and assists them in employing these skills to alter power relations and create meaningful institutional change in their communities. (Edwards, Johnson & McGillicuddy, 2003)	- specific steps to achieve the citizen participation (ways to achieve specific outcomes from the above activity)

Positive youth development. Positive Youth Development is a useful paradigm for understanding youth engagement because it represents a core foundation of youth engagement – that youth are assets rather than deficits, and should viewed and treated as such. Positive youth development represents a paradigm shift from the historical approach that has been taken towards the study of youth. Adolescence first appeared as a subject of study with a focus on deficits, with the development of theories such as storm and stress (Hall, 1904). Consistent with this deficits-based perception of adolescence, youth have not always been encouraged to participate as stakeholders in decision-making or policy that affects them. Historically, academics have gone so far as to argue against youth participation, cautioning that adolescents do not possess the capacity to plan for themselves, let alone participate in community decision-making (Gibbs, 1953).

Times have changed for young people, and changes in the academic literature and in community practices are evidence of this. Even though there exists a well-developed understanding of adolescent dysfunction, the majority of current theories of adolescent development focus on pathways to healthy development (Larson, 2000). In the early 1990s, the term positive youth development (PYD) first appeared in academic literature (Benson, 1990; Pittman & Cahill, 1992). Since then, researchers and communities alike have advocated taking a strengths-based approach to youth development, but this has many different incarnations, and the term positive youth development has been used liberally in both theory and application relating to youth programming (Larson, 2000).

Hamilton (1999; as cited in King, Schultz, Mueller, Dowling, Osborn, Dickerson, et al., 2005) has identified three distinct manifestations of PYD used by practitioners: 1) it has been identified as a way of conceptualizing natural developmental processes within

a strengths-based philosophy; 2) it has been represented as a focus on programs developing the capacities of young people to make positive contributions to their community and themselves; 3) it has also been discussed as a specific set of guidelines for programs, including components of strengths-based approaches such as mentorship, skill building, and engagement in participation or leadership of valued community activities. Instead of viewing the three distinct directions for positive youth development made by Hamilton as separate and mutually exclusive classifications, it is useful to consider them as a form of triangulation - looking at something from three different angles in order to glean a fuller picture.

For example, we could examine a fictitious after school homework club from the perspective of their philosophical commitment to strengths-based approaches by looking at their mission and whether they focus on strengths rather than weakness. Their emphasis on contributions could be witnessed in whether they encourage mastery over performance and if they encourage peer mentoring. Their adoption of proven practices for achieving positive youth development could be tested through examination of staff language and interactions. An excellent real-life example of how a positive youth development approach differs from a deficit based one can be seen in the case of housing for youth who have developmental disabilities. Historically, youth with developmental disabilities requiring care beyond what their parents could provide were cared for in institutions, or more recently, smaller residential facilities that care for their basic needs and take precautions to keep them out of trouble. A positive youth development approach is found in l'Arche homes. The philosophy behind l'Arche homes is a focus on the strengths of residents:

> Relationships are central in L'Arche. A L'Arche home is a place of growth, where each person is supported to attain his or her full potential. In the sharing of life together, each one also grows in self-understanding and understanding of others. (l'Arche Canada, 2007)

As an organization, the Alliance has committed to a positive youth development (PYD) approach through the application of the developmental assets framework (Benson, 1997; Scales & Leffert, 1999). This approach is useful because it recognizes the important role that adults, organizations, and communities play in adolescent development. The key concept behind the developmental asset framework is that communities, including the individuals and organizations within them, must help build assets - young people cannot create assets on their own, nor should they have to. The exciting feature that has made the Developmental Assets framework popular with the Alliance is that the majority of assets are easy for communities to understand and foster - it's can be as simple as saying 'hi' or spending time getting to know neighbours.

To summarize the benefits of taking a positive youth development approach, researchers have come up with latent constructs used to synthesize the emerging and divergent vocabulary of PYD, and the equally emerging and divergent empirical evidence of the benefits it produces (Lerner, Lerner, Almerigi, Theokas, Phelps, Gestdottir, et al, 2005). These latent constructs summarize the benefits of positive youth development into five "C's": competence, confidence, character, connection (Eccles & Gootman, 2002), and caring/compassion (Lerner, 2004; Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003). Competence refers to a positive view of one's actions. It includes the concepts of social, academic, cognitive, and vocational competencies. Confidence represents an overall sense of

positive self-worth. Connection indicates positive bonds, both with people and institutions. Character requires respect for societal and cultural rules, and a sense of right and wrong. Caring (or compassion) is a sense of concern for others.

It has been argued that a sixth "c" (contribution) emerges when the previous "C's" are present, through contributing positively to self, family, community, and, ultimately, civil society (Lerner, 2004). This adds a "so what" element to positive youth development, by going beyond simply improving young people to improving the entire community through the involvement of young people. In this way, the Five C's framework creates a positive youth development foundation for meaningful youth participation and engagement by using a strengths-based philosophy with a focus on developing capacities for young people to meaningfully participate and become engaged in their community. Framed this way, youth engagement is a natural outcome of espousing the positive youth development paradigm.

Youth Engagement. Youth engagement exists within the PYD paradigm. Positive youth development is a way of viewing the world, whereas youth engagement is one framework for operating within that worldview. Positive youth development asks us to think a particular way, whereas youth engagement pushes us beyond thinking to a place of action. There are many different specific forms of action for engaging youth under the umbrella of youth engagement.

Comprehensively exploring the different varieties of youth engagement is not a simple task because youth engagement is both *complicated* and *complex*. Although these two words are often used synonymously, they have different meanings in the context of studying knowledge. Complicated refers to something that has many components, but

the components and their relationship to each other can be known in isolation; when something is complex it comprises many 'interacting agents' and relationships between these agents are dynamic and constantly changing (see Snowden, 2003).

The field of youth engagement is complicated by an inconsistent vocabulary, and varying manifestations. The phrase "youth engagement" is used in an assortment of ways in the academic and community literature, with inconsistent or often absent definitions. To add to this complication, "youth engagement" is not the only phrase used to describe activities or practices of this nature. Numerous other terms have been developed that have significant conceptual and practical overlap with youth engagement, such as:

youth work (Search Institute, 2005),

youth civic engagement (Youniss, Bales, Christmas-Best, Diversi, McLaughlin & Silbereisen, 2002)

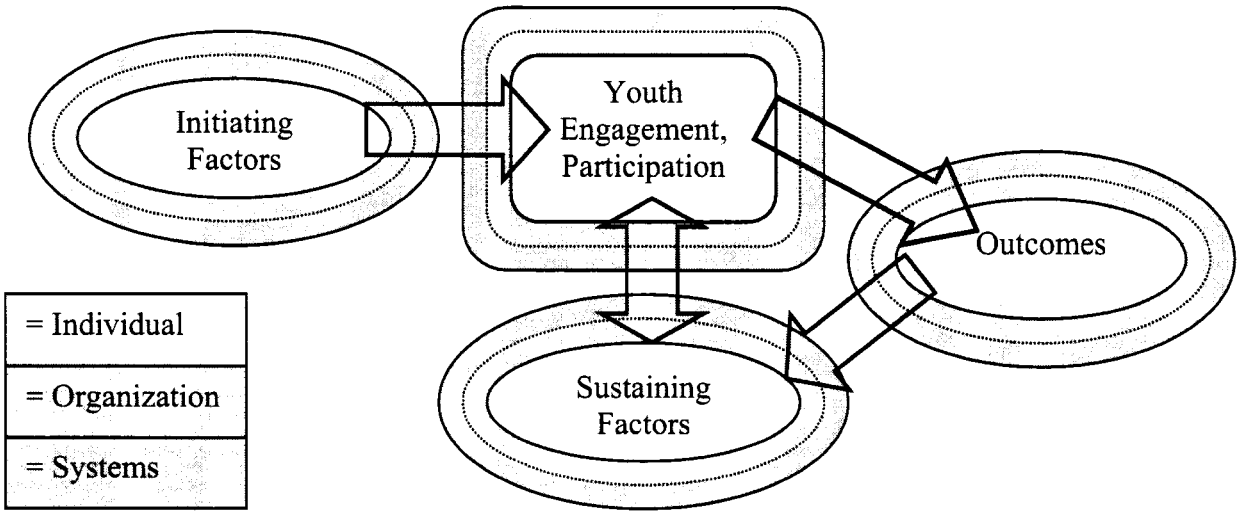
community youth development (Hughes & Curnan, 2000; Villarruel, Perkins, Bordon, & Keith, 2003)

Youth engagement is complex because it deals with the interaction between individuals and contexts, and its very nature (in fact, its purpose) is to support individuals in having influence on their context. In this way, youth who become engaged go from passive recipients of environmental influence to active agents of change, impacting their environments as well as themselves. There is no one formula for youth engagement that will work in every situation because youth engagement is not a service or an outcome in and of itself. It is a way of working with youth. This dynamic experience has theoretical importance, as well as practical implications for youth and organizations wishing to engage youth.

The Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement (CEYE) has pioneered a theoretical framework based on research by Pancer and colleagues (Pancer, Rose-Krasnor & Loiselle, 2002; CEYE, 2003) that is useful for conceptualizing youth engagement across multiple levels of analysis. It begins with the overall understanding that youth engagement takes place at the individual and systems level. In some incarnations of the model, youth engagement spans three levels: individual, organizational and community/societal (CEYE, n.d.). This represents the fact that all stages or phases of youth engagement have impact on multiple levels. The model organizes the process of youth engagement into four distinct phases: initiating factors, youth engagement, sustaining factors, and outcomes.

The relationship between youth engagement, outcomes, and sustaining factors is cyclical, in that positive outcomes contribute to sustenance of present and future engagement or participation. This cyclical relationship can be seen below:

Figure 1: Youth Engagement Framework (CEYE, n.d.)



Within the CEYE framework, focus is not directed at the nature of youth engagement, but rather the dynamic relationships between initiating and sustaining factors, engagement and outcomes.

Initiating factors are the catalysts for youth engagement. They include individual level factors (such as an interest in the activity), systems level factors (such as the accessibility of the activity). Engagement itself also occurs on the individual level, when a youth participates in something on their own (such as being a participant in a youth program), and on the systems level, when youth work together to impact change (such as being part of a youth action council). Sustaining factors provide for the maintenance of engagement. They also include individual level factors (such as enjoyment), and systems level factors (such as the continued existence of the activity, and its ability to stay interesting over time). Outcomes that arise from youth engagement also occur at the individual and systems levels. (Pancer, Rose-Krasnor & Loiselle, 2002)

A large body of literature outlines the benefits of youth engagement. Youth engagement in its many forms has the potential to positively impact youth, organizations, and communities, and this has been demonstrated empirically. A literature review conducted by Marla Pender (2005) on behalf of the Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement has explored the benefits that youth engagement holds for individuals, organizations, and communities. Pender identified ample research that demonstrates the benefits of youth engagement for individuals. For example, she found research indicating that young people experience personal growth and identity development (Dworkin, Larson, & Hansen, 2003; Finn & Checkoway, 1998; Pancer, Loiselle, & Rose-Krasnor, 2002). Also, research shows that youth engagement results in skill, knowledge, and

capacity building (Cargo, Grams, Ottoson, Ward, & Green, 2003; Checkoway, 1998; Conrad & Hedin, 1982; Finn & Checkoway, 1998; Matysik, 2000; Roker, Player, & Coleman, 1998). Young people also experience health benefits such as the reduction of risk and problem behaviours (Agnew & Peterson, 1989; Anderson-Butcher, Newsome, & Ferrari, 2003) and reduced drug and alcohol use (Eccles & Barber, 1999; Komro, Perry, Murray, Veblen-Mortenson, Williams, & Anstine, 1996). Youth engagement is also linked to positive academic outcomes (Anderson-Butcher et al., 2003; Eccles & Barber, 1999).

Outcomes on a systems level (that impact adults and organizations) have only recently been studied. Zeldin and colleagues (2000) conducted one of the only available comprehensive studies on the impact of the systems-level impacts (i.e., impacts on adults and organizations) of youth engagement. They explored the impacts of youth engagement on adults and organizations through surveying nineteen young people and twenty-nine adults from fifteen organizations that engage youth either through board representation or in other ways. They found overall that adults who worked within youth engagement projects reported feeling more positive about young people in general, and more confident in their abilities to work with and relate to young people. Adults also reported becoming better able to understand young people's needs and concerns, and better able to make youth programming more effective and responsive.

Organizations benefit from involving youth in decision-making because youth engagement improves organizational culture. Youth engagement infuses an inclusive and person-friendly approach and philosophy into the overall operation of an organization. Becoming more connected to youth also facilitates connections across the entire

community and helps organizations realize the importance of including a variety of community members in their decision-making practices (Zeldin et al, 2000).

Pender (2005) speculates that communities can also be expected to benefit from youth engagement, although this has not been studied directly. Research shows that engagement broadens social networks and strengthens relationships for young people (Dworkin et al, 2003; McGee, Williams, Howden-Chapman, Martin, & Kawachi, 2006), and allows young people to network with adults and expand their social capital (Dworkin et al, 2003; Jarrett, Sullivan, & Watkins, 2005). These positive outcomes of youth engagement could be considered positive outcomes for the community, since releasing the individual capacities of youth strengthens the community (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993).

Youth Participation. I would like to now introduce the reader to a specific incarnation of youth engagement, wherein youth are able to impact decisions and contribute to their community on a systems-level. Whereas youth engagement is any meaningful involvement in an activity outside of themselves (Pancer, Rose-Krasnor, & Loiselle, 2002; CEYE, 2003), youth participation is a specific type of youth engagement activity, which creates a chance for young people to become meaningfully involved in the institutions and decisions that affect their lives (Checkoway, Allison, & Montoya, 2005; Checkoway & Guttierez, 2006). This type of youth engagement has been demonstrated to have positive impacts on youth, adults, and organizations alike (Zeldin, et al., 2000).

Not all participation is equal, and although some forms of participation can have positive impacts across multiple levels, the opposite can be true – participation can be ineffective or even harmful to individuals, organizations, and systems if not used wisely

(Marques, 1999). Fortunately, we can learn as much from examples of failure as we can from examples of success. A case study of youth participation in the Ontario School Board system offers several valuable lessons for developing effective youth participation, from the experience of an ineffective effort at including youth in board processes. In 1997, the government of Ontario passed the Education Quality Improvement Act, which mandated the creation of non-voting student representation on every school board in the province, but left all of the details of how to institute this representation up to the individual boards (Marques, 1999). Although some school boards effectively involved young people in their policy process, the overall results of this legislation were cause for concern.

An evaluation of the student trustee models across the province resulting from this legislation found that in most cases, student engagement was systemically flawed (Haid, Marrques, & Brown, 1999). First, the legislation that initiated student participation was in fact a barrier to their meaningful involvement because students were not given voting rights and were excluded from meetings that were not open to the public. Second, there was a lack of enforcement, so there was no way to ensure the legislation was being implemented. Third, there was a failure to use democratic selection processes in most of the boards. The legislation did not outline detailed standards for student involvement, leaving each individual school board to improvise a strategy for selection and inclusion of the student representative. Fourth, once student trustees became part of the school board, they were not supported. They were not provided with sufficient orientation or training to become effective contributors to the process, they were excluded from meaningful participation because of their lack of vote and restriction from closed

sessions, and they were not adequately able to consult with other students in order to be effective representatives.

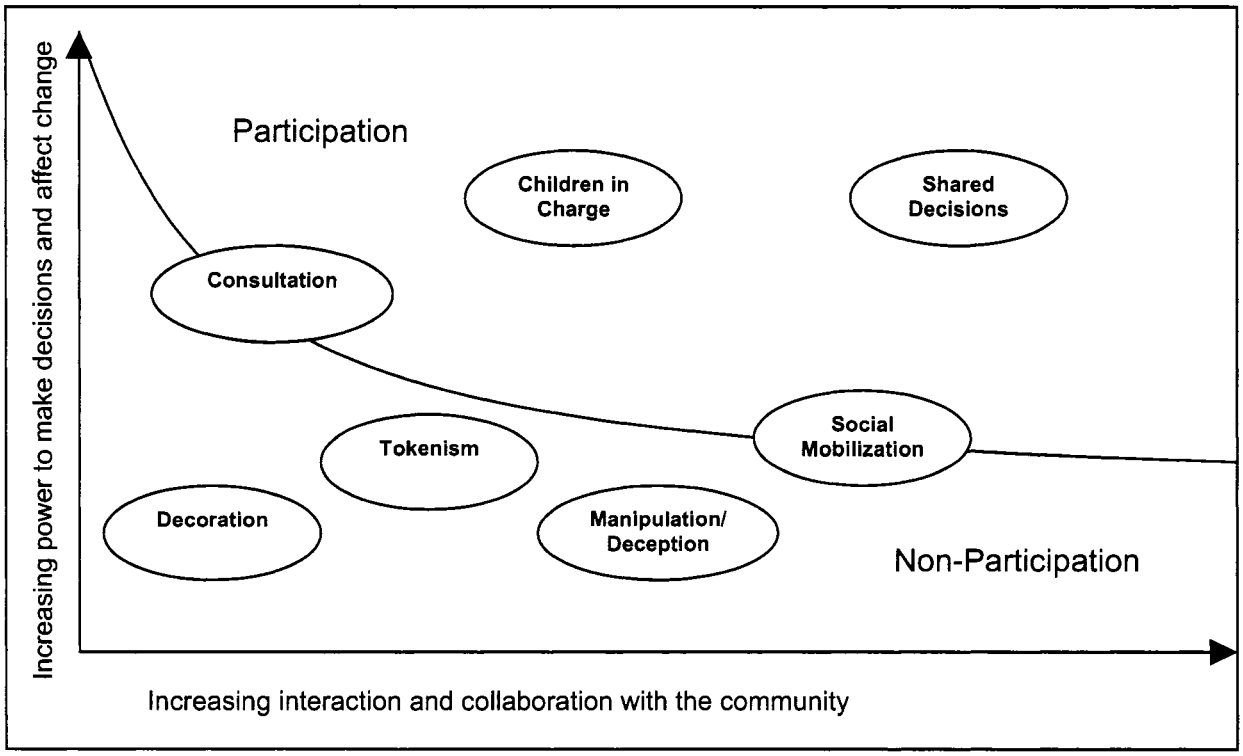
The valuable lessons for youth participation in general that can be learned from the 1997 Ontario School Board case study can be summarized into two points. First, if meaningful participation is expected, power and control must be shared. In the case of the school boards, voting rights and access to closed meetings would have strengthened the contribution of youth by allowing them access to information and granting them the power to truly influence decisions. Second, clear and well-designed processes for initiating and sustaining youth participation are essential. Simply inserting a token young person into a pre-existing adult organization is not sufficient to ensure meaningful participation. It is imperative that efforts to involve young people take into account the lessons that have been gathered from the systematic study of youth participation.

The study of youth participation first brought major attention through a United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) project that studied children's participation in community development and environmental care. Out of this project came the acknowledgement that children and youth have the capacity to contribute meaningfully when given the chance. Also arising from this project was the Ladder of Children's Participation (Hart, 1997), a hierarchical organization of the types of participation that children[2] can be engaged in. At the bottom of the ladder rests the three types of non-participation: manipulation, decoration and tokenism. Manipulation involves using children's voices to convey adult messages. Decoration refers to adding the presence of children in order to promote a cause, but not including them in the organizing or

[2] The word child is used during the discussion of Hart (1997) because this is the terminology used in the framework. It is not intended to limit this framework to within a particular age group, particularly because the framework was based on the ladder of citizen participation (Arnstein, 1969) that applies to all ages.

designing of the message their presence sends. Tokenism occurs when children are involved in ways that are merely symbolic, such as having children attend but not provide input or having an individual child speak for all children. As you climb the ladder, participation becomes more and more participatory beginning with the least participatory option of being 'assigned but not informed', then moving to 'consulted and informed', 'adult-initiated with shared decisions', 'child-initiated and directed', and finally 'child-initiated with shared decisions' viewed as the most participatory option because everyone participates fully and equally.

Figure 2: Continuum of Participation (Driscoll, 2002)



This framework has been criticized because there is a lack of consensus as to which form of participation is truly the most meaningful: child-initiated and directed or child-initiated and shared decisions with adults. To address this problem, and more fully explore the dimensions of participation, another conceptual map of participation was

developed by a United Nations project (Driscoll, 2002). In the Continuum of Participation, two dimensions are considered: power and connectedness. Power is conceptualized as the ability to make decisions and effect change, whereas connectedness involves level of interaction and collaboration with the community.

Positioned throughout the continuum are similar constructs as the steps on Hart's Ladder, but in a different configuration based on their level of power and connectedness. Using this framework allows clarification of which form of participation is truly more meaningful, as it is easy to see that shared decision-making provides equal power and more connectedness than children in charge by themselves. This set-up also allows for the recognition that collaboration with the community, and not just power, is an essential element of participation. This is congruent with the reality that youth participation has effects on communities as well as individuals.

The empirical literature on youth participation largely consists of short case studies, from which authors draw conclusions for application to youth participation in general. A literature review of 18 case studies examining youth participation in planning (Frank, 2006) revealed five recurring lessons. First, it is important to give youth responsibility and voice. Second, youth participation should build youth capacity. Third, successful participation happens when adult organizations encourage youthful styles of working (this is of benefit to both youth and adults). Fourth, it is essential to have adults involved throughout the process. Finally, if youth participation is to have meaningful outcomes, it is necessary to adapt the socio-political context to allow young people the chance to make changes, not merely recommendations. When participation initiatives follow these guidelines, the results are positive for youth and their communities.

The results of youth participation for individuals can be summarized into impacts on knowledge and skill, and attitudes and behaviours (Frank, 2006). Participating young people gain knowledge about their local community and about how to create community change. They develop skills related to specific projects/tasks they work on. For example, youth who participate in a municipal election learn about the governance of their community, while also developing teamwork, organizing, and public speaking skills. Attitudes and behaviours change through the development of confidence and assertiveness, as well as enthusiasm for community involvement. On a different note, Frank (2006) revealed that youth participation often led to young people experiencing frustration with the lack of adult responsiveness to their suggestions. This negative consequence of youth participation can be effectively dealt with if adults are committed and willing to change the status quo to become more youth-friendly.

Frank (2006) found that impacts of youth participation on communities are also mostly positive. By involving young people in the organizations and decisions that affect their lives, youth participation raises youth concerns that are often not raised otherwise. This results in a better chance that organizations and decisions will be youth-friendly. Youth participation also raises community concerns that are mutually held by adults and youth. Often these overlap with services for making cities more "liveable" for all ages (e.g., transportation, public space). Youth are in a particularly valuable position for safeguarding public services because they are often more dependent on the services than the adults who typically make decisions about them. Youth participation can also contribute to generating information about communities and environments (i.e., gathering data), and youth are capable of presenting feasible recommendations, especially when

adults work with them to provide all the relevant information. Corresponding with the abovementioned frustration that adults are not always responsive, recommendations made by youth are sometimes not implemented because of competing adult concerns. This is one of the leading barriers to youth participation, because it has negative impacts on individuals and communities.

The final observation made by reviewing a cross-section of case studies in youth participation is that youth have a great deal of innate capacity for participation, making the prospect easier for adults who wish to engage youth. Frank (2006) argues that youth capacity for participation is high because youth interest in participating is generally very high, and youth often possess the necessary skills. No study reported difficulty in soliciting youth for participation; in fact, often the youth requested consultation and initiated participation. Youth have the capacity to do what is asked of them when appropriate opportunities are presented. Youth who participate in decision-making are found by researchers to be "articulate, passionate, honest, independent, and competent" in expressing what matters to them (Frank, 2006, p. 365). They are also good at taking other perspectives in order to design solutions that suit many needs, and they are effective at collective decision-making. Challenges for youth participation exist in mobilization, mostly around the current socio-political climate's non-responsiveness to youth recommendations and denial of power. This has negative consequences for youth, adults, organizations and communities. It is imperative that the field of youth participation finds ways to conquer this barrier to youth participation in order to achieve the potential benefits of communities and youth working together.

Youth Organizing. Now I will present a method that has been developed for youth participation that is of particular interest because it allows for incremental growth in the amount of participation that youth engage in, and outlines the specific steps necessary for youth to not only participate, but also influence change in the institutions that affect their lives. Through a four-step process of training, outreach, issue identification, and action, youth organizing supports and empowers young people to be agents of change in their communities (Edwards, Johnson, & McGillicuddy, 2003). In this way, youth organizing is essentially a system for helping youth become agents of change.

The youth organizing literature speaks loud and clear to the importance of believing in the strengths of young people, in creating engaging opportunities for them, and allowing them to participate in the decisions that directly impact them. Youth, like 17-year-old Jason Warwin, have made the same case:

> If you had a problem in the black community, and you brought together a group of white people to discuss how to solve it, almost nobody would take that panel seriously. There'd probably be a public outcry. It would be the same thing for women's issues or gay issues. Can you imagine a bunch of men sitting on the Mayor's Advisory Committee on Women? But every day, in local arenas all the way to the White House, adults sit around and decide what problems youth have and what youth need, without ever consulting us. (Warwin, J. quoted in Sullivan, Edwards, Johnson, & McGillicuddy, 2003, p. 6).

There should be little question that it is important and valuable to pursue youth engagement and participation. The question that remains is: how can youth engagement be achieved amidst a socio-political climate that marginalizes and disenfranchises youth?

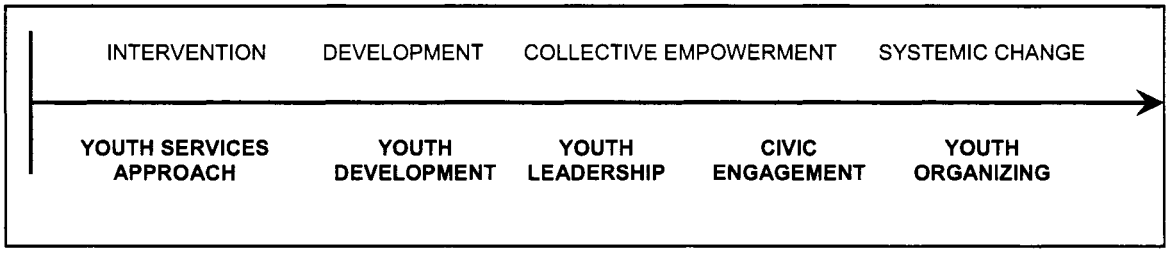
Much can be learned from the feminist movement of the late 1950's and 1960's. Like youth, women have not always been respected enough to participate in community decision making. Access to power was denied to women in a patriarchal society, just as it is denied to youth in an ageist one. In order to overcome these barriers to their active participation in the power structures that directly impact them, women first needed to recognize their oppression as something more than personal. This led to the slogan, 'the personal is political' which women realized by sharing their experiences. This process was labelled 'consciousness-raising'. Anne Forer is credited as coining the phrase 'consciousness-raising' by drawing similarities with the U.S. labour movement from the 1800s:

> In the Old Left, they used to say that the workers don't know they're oppressed, so we have to raise their consciousness. One night at a meeting I said, 'Would everybody please give me an example from their own life on how they experienced oppression as a woman? I need to hear it to raise my own consciousness.' Kathie was sitting behind me and the words rang in her mind. From then on she sort of made it an institution and called it consciousness-raising. (A. Forer, as quoted in Brownmiller, 1999, p. 21).

The idea that the personal is political and the techniques of consciousness-raising are useful beyond the women's movement from which they were born. These realizations and approaches have utility for any oppressed or marginalized group in society, and serve as means for organizing and overcoming the socio-political barriers experienced by youth today. It is in this tradition that the emerging field of youth organizing (Funders Collaborative on Youth Organizing, 2003) has developed.

Youth organizing represents a method for engaging young people within a youth participation framework and under the paradigm of positive youth development, via consciousness-raising and adult-supported, youth-led activism. It pays attention to the dimensions of power as well as connectedness in participation, recognizes the importance of strengths-based approaches, and allows for evolution of youth participation that builds upon other forms of youth development and engagement. Youth organizing is conceptualized as being on a continuum of youth engagement, with traditional youth service models on one side and youth organizing models on the other.

Figure 3: The Youth Organizing Continuum (Sullivan, Edwards, Johnson, & McGillicuddy, 2003)



The youth organizing continuum (Figure 3) begins with the *youth services* approach, which aims to help young people overcome deficits and conquer challenges by defining young people as clients and offering them professional assistance. This approach provides services to address individual problems and pathologies of young people, and is defined around treatment and prevention rather than focusing on strengths (Sullivan et al, 2003). Although often necessary for the management of challenges and problems young people face, the service approach fails to recognize the systemic and contextual factors that contribute to a young person's challenges.

Like youth services, the *youth development* approach provides services and support, access to caring adults and safe spaces, while additionally providing opportunities for the growth and development of young people. This approach meets young people 'where they are at' rather than expecting them to adapt to adult-driven contexts. The focus of youth development is in building young people's individual competencies through age-appropriate support and an emphasis on positive self-identity (Sullivan et al, 2003). This approach supports youth-adult partnerships rather than taking the client-professional perspective.

Youth leadership goes beyond youth development by including authentic youth leadership opportunities within programming and organization. This helps deepen young people's historical and cultural understanding of their experiences, as well as building skills and capacities for young people to become effective decision makers and problem solvers (Sullivan et al, 2003). This approach moves beyond youth and adults working together to improve the individual, and creates opportunities for youth to participate in community projects; however the focus is still on youth rather than community development.

Civic engagement enables young people to become involved in political education and awareness within the broader community. It accomplishes this through building skills and capacity for power analysis and action around issues that young people identify (Sullivan et al, 2003). In this way, it maintains passion and commitment by ensuring issues are relevant to youth. The process of civic engagement helps young people build collective identity and recognise their worth as social change agents through advocacy and negotiation.

It is essential to recognize that the youth organizing continuum is sequential, but not mutually exclusive. This means that as you engage in higher levels on the continuum, you do not cease to engage in the previous levels. By encompassing all of the practices and benefits of the previous models on the continuum of youth engagement, *youth organizing* helps create systemic change by involving young people in direct action and political mobilizing, while ensuring that young people have their basic service needs met by working in partnership with existing social service agencies. It continues to work within a youth development model to foster the skills and competencies that youth need to succeed in leadership roles. Young people are also involved as part of the core staff and governing body for the organizing institution, which models the change that youth organizers would like to see across all aspects of society in engaging youth as leaders of today (Sullivan et al, 2003). By combining all of these elements, youth organizing allows for an integrated approach to social change by combining "issue-based organizing with leadership development programs, service learning activities, cultural enrichment programs, and even academic and personal support components" (HoSang, 2003, p. 12) which allows for a much more comprehensive experience than any other element along the youth engagement continuum.

The specifics of youth organizing projects are diverse and emergent, because youth organizing is intricately linked to the context in which it takes place. This has primarily resulted in case examples in the literature, rather than guiding principles or templates for a standardized mode of youth organizing. A unifying framework has been proposed, however. HoSang (2003) identifies three elements that are essential to youth

organizing: taking an integrated approach to social change, valuing political education, and paying close attention to the central role of staff organizers.

The integrated approach to social change developed by youth organizing projects refers to the breadth of needs addressed across individuals, the community, and society as a whole. Youth organizing takes a holistic approach (HoSang, 2003) and thereby addresses the issues that youth members face from multiple levels. Members gain individualized support through relationships and skill-building exercises, they gain community support through the service and outreach projects that serve to strengthen community, and they gain societal support through political education and through the work that they do to increase youth's status in society.

Valuing political education is a key defining feature of youth organizing that separates it from other forms of youth engagement, and it puts youth organizing very much in the same tradition as 1960's feminism (i.e., consciousness-raising) and the labour movement. In their own words, youth organizers "want to foster critical and reflective thinking. It's core to their mission" (Goldberg, as quoted in HoSang 2003, p. 14). The rationale behind political education being core to the mission of youth organizing is connected to the goal of creating systemic change. Before you can create systemic change, you must first understand that there are systemic causes for problems. Understanding the problem is half the battle.

The central role of staff organizers within the youth organizing framework is due to the importance placed on creating the youth organizing environment, which is not often found in youth services and is a unique challenge for staff (HoSang, 2003). Talented and committed staff people are essential for building the unique environment

where youth are supported but not subjugated. This means that staff must alternate roles from leaders to trainers to fundraisers and more, and above all, be flexible and aware of group dynamics at all times. One of the challenges for youth organizing, therefore, is the availability of such dynamic staff people. Many youth organizing groups flounder because they are founded by staff people who are able to pull together all of these talents, but due to the demanding nature of the job, staff turn-over is high. Replacing qualified, passionate, committed staff is a necessary yet difficult reality for youth organizing (HoSang, 2003).

The benefits of youth organizing can be summarized based on the three main categories of youth organizing activities (analysis, action, and reflection) and the three levels at which they impact (interpersonal, community, and socio-political) (Ginwright, 2003). These three categories and levels of impact are closely aligned with the action research spiral (Lewin, 1946), which stipulates that action research should encompass a repeating cycle of planning, action, and fact finding about the results of the action, and the ecological levels of analysis, which include examining microsystems (the immediate environment), mesosystem (connections between immediate environments), exosystems (external environmental settings that only indirectly affect an individual) and macrosystems (the larger cultural context) (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Analysis refers to activities akin to consciousness-raising, in that analysis focuses on understanding the political and contextual influences that surround the situations youth would like to see changed. This includes time for researching and planning, debating, and coming to a collective decision about how to proceed. During the analysis phase, youth build capacity for critical thinking, strategic planning, written and oral

communication, as well as interpersonal skills and relationships with each other (Ginwright, 2003). Action refers to the collective, public activity of a youth-organizing group that results from their analysis (Ginwright, 2003). Through action, participants achieve a sense of accomplishment and efficacy in community change. It also helps build relationships and contribute to a sense of purpose for young people. Essentially, action leads to empowerment and civic engagement (Ginwright, 2003). Reflection is the final stage for youth organizing, when participants engage in journaling, group discussion, and other forms of debriefing in order to process and learn from the experience. Reflection has three main outcomes for youth development (Ginwright, 2003). It fosters a sense of commitment, it builds young people's identities (especially perception of their own agency), and it helps youth heal from negative experiences by creating a supportive and caring environment and engagement in activities that help process experiences (e.g., meditation, breathing exercises, support groups).

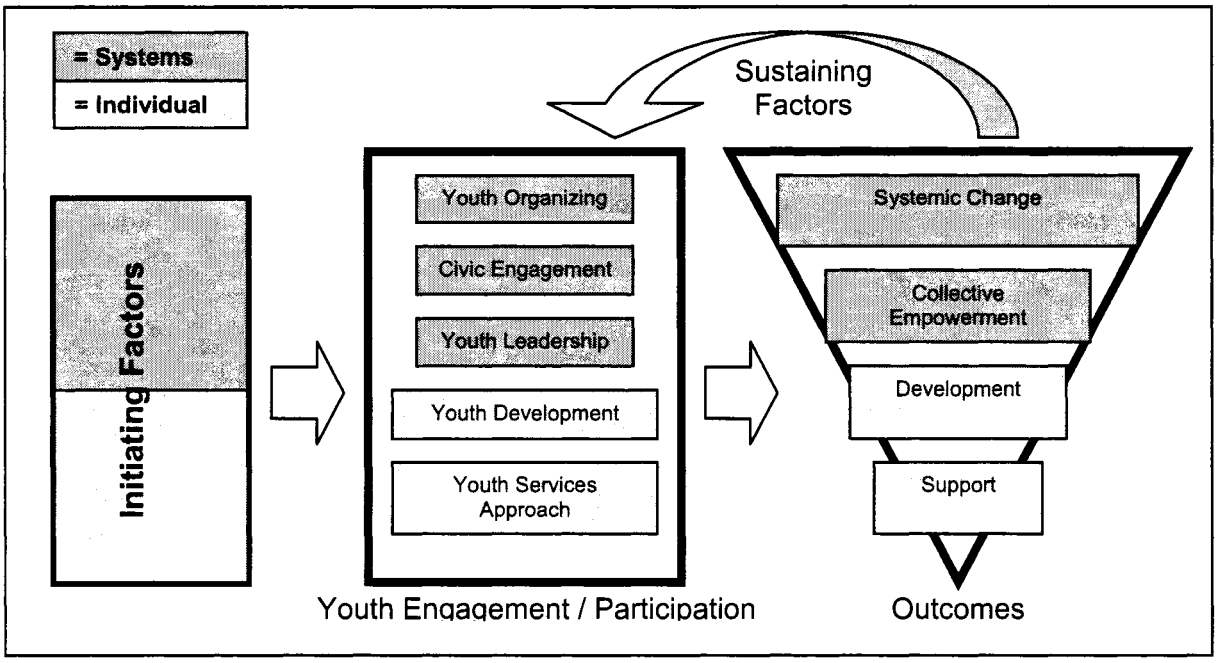
Through a cyclical process of analysis, action, and reflection, combined with strong support from adults and institutions, youth organizing has the capacity to achieve truly participatory, systemic change for youth in our society.

An Integrated Model for Youth Engagement. In order to conceptualize the combination of positive youth development, youth engagement, youth participation, and youth organizing, I have developed a combined model of involving youth in decision-making. The combined model does not introduce any new theoretical ideas, but rather combines the elements of theories discussed thus far into one integrated model.

Beginning with the idea that youth engagement happens at multiple levels, the integrated model includes factors, actions and outcomes at two levels of analysis:

individual and systems. Following from the youth engagement framework presented earlier (Pancer et al, 2002), the new model has initiating and sustaining factors, as well as outcomes. To integrate this framework with youth organizing, I have inserted the youth organizing model in place of the broadly defined youth engagement and participation phase of the cycle. Youth organizing aspires towards true participation in the sense that youth and adults work together to impact change more and more as you progress from youth services to youth organizing. This results in a change in appearance for the model because of the continuum arrangement of youth organizing (i.e., the spectrum of youth services through to youth organizing). I have arranged the types of youth engagement outlined in the continuum enclosed within the same box, because ultimately they are designed to operate together, with youth having opportunities to access whichever levels will fulfil their needs. Outcomes are also arranged in a continuum, but the fact that they are enclosed in an upside-down triangle indicates the size of the impact on three levels of analysis from each of the forms of youth engagement. Youth services have an important role to play, but their impact can only be felt at the individual level, whereas youth organizing impacts across multiple levels of analysis, and aims to create systemic, transformative change.

Figure 4: Integrated Model for Youth Engagement



According to this integrated model, a young person will experience the same initiating and sustaining factors as expressed in the original framework, but each type of engagement results in a specific set of outcomes, which are demonstrated by the presence of the youth organizing continuum within the model. Ideally, the model allows for incremental change within the type of youth engagement/participation, building from service-like engagement to youth-led social change that can be achieved through youth organizing. To walk the reader through this integrated model, a young person would experience similar initiating factors (such as availability of activities and social support for participation) as in the original CEYE model. In the new model, youth engagement is articulated in a continuum, as outlined in the youth organizing literature, and therefore outcomes have a corresponding continuum. Whereas the activities listed in this model are arranged in a box (indicating that they are available to youth simultaneously and are not particularly hierarchical), the outcomes are arranged in an upside-down pyramid

(indicating that the impact from the higher levels is greater than the impact from the lower levels). In addition to outcomes, youth engagement produces sustaining factors that range from individual (support) to society-wide (systemic change). It is postulated that the longer this cycle of engagement, outcomes and sustaining goes on, the more youth engagement and outcomes will move up the continuum. In this way, the model strives to connect youth to their community, allowing for an evolutionary approach that meets youth where they're at, and encourages them to grow and develop over time.

There is a conceptual link between fostering youth organizing that leads to systemic change, and the same process undertaken by adults. The ideas behind youth engagement and youth organizing are essentially the same as those behind community organizing. Individuals can glean a fuller understanding of the issues by sharing their perspectives and experiences, and they can impact greater change when they work together. A lone individual does not hold much influence over our society. We influence decisions and changes via collective bargaining, democratic majority rule, and the power of the collective consumer. Even when it appears that a single charismatic individual has been the catalyst for major societal change, either adult (like Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr.) or youth (like Craig Keilburger), the reality is that these individuals effected change through their ability to organize groups of people, who then influenced governments or corporations through the use of collective social power. It is for this reason that I now turn to an exploration of how adults (and organizations) affect social change through working together in groups like the Alliance.

Literature on Organizations Working Together

Organized groups of people come together for a variety of reasons. The Oregon Center for Community Leadership has divided the various forms of working together into five increasingly collaborative modes: networking, cooperation, coordination, coalition, and collaboration (Hogue, 1994). Networking and cooperation are undertaken for the purpose of sharing information and ensuring that services are comprehensive yet not overlapping. The creation of systemic, transformative change is a goal of coordination, coalition, and collaboration. On this end of the spectrum, organizations share ideas, resources, leadership, and vision. Because few individuals can create change by themselves, they work together within organizations. Likewise, because few organizations can create community-wide change by themselves, organizations work together to impact changes at a systemic level. It is through collective action and community empowerment that change occurs in our society, both at an individual and organizational level. In exploring how organizations work together to affect change, I will introduce literature from three different areas: mediating structures, organizational empowerment, and collaboration.

Mediating Structures. An organization that effects change on behalf of an individual is represented in the concept of mediating structures (Berger & Neuhaus, 1996). Mediating structures are defined as "those institutions standing between the individual in his private life and the large institutions of public life" (Berger & Neuhaus, 1996, p. 158). Because of the nature of our society, individuals live their private lives under the control of large public and private institutions such as government, large capitalist enterprise, and other bureaucracies. These large organizations, called mega-

structures (Beger & Neuhaus, 1996), are typically alienating or out of reach of the individual:

> One of the most debilitating results of modernization is a feeling of powerlessness in the face of institutions controlled by those whom we do not know and whose values we do not often share. Lest there be any doubt, our belief is that human beings, whoever they are, understand their own needs better than anyone else—in, say, 99 percent of all cases. (Berger & Neuhaus, 1977/1992, p.164)

Berger and Neuhaus suggest above that there is hope for meeting the needs of individuals because individuals understand their own needs—the first step in having those needs met is having a means to voice them. One way of then expressing their needs to the mega-structures that control the circumstances of their lives is through the process of collaboration.

Organizational Empowerment. Community empowerment is defined as "the process of gaining influence over conditions that matter to people who share neighbourhoods, workplaces, experiences, or concerns" (Fawcett et al, 1995, p. 679). Community empowerment has been conceptualized by Speer and Hughey as "the ability of community organizations to reward or punish community targets, control what gets talked about in public debate, and shape how residents and public officials think about their community" (1995, p. 732). Essentially, community empowerment means that the collective community has the ability to influence its environment. Community empowerment can be achieved via organizational empowerment, which encompasses empowerment for individuals, organizations, and communities (Peterson & Zimmerman, 2004). As expressed by Peterson and Zimmerman, empowerment for the individual

occurs when individuals in an organization are empowered within that setting. This results in shared decision making and influence within an organization, called intra-organizational empowerment. Inter-organizational empowerment occurs when an organization is empowered amongst other organizations, resulting in strengthened relationships between organizations and strengthened organizational capacity. The ability for an organization to effect community-wide change arises from extra-organizational empowerment, which occurs when an organization is able to effect societal change on behalf of the individuals it serves. Extra-organizational empowerment is made possible through community projects and the dissemination of information that result in policy change and the mobilization of resources. These become really complex ideas when dealing with an organization of organizations (like peeling back layers from an onion), but they are useful constructs to keep in mind.

Collaboration. The word collaboration is used in different ways in different settings. Colloquially, collaboration simply means working together, which is reflected in the Latin roots of the word, *com* and *laborare*, literally translated as "together work". In the academic literature, collaboration is defined much more specifically. Gray (1989) describes collaboration as a process through which "parties who see different aspects of a problem can constructively explore their differences and search for solutions that go beyond their limited visions of what is possible."(p. 5) Chrislip and Larson (1995) define collaboration as creating "a shared vision and joint strategies to address concerns that go beyond the purview of any particular party."(p. 5) Collaboration, in the academic sense, is more than simply individuals talking about the same things or having the same goals. Collaboration has three distinctive qualities: 1) organizations working together to achieve

one or more specific outcomes, 2) engaging in actions, not just words, and 3) collaborative leadership and consensus building (Lank, 2006).

Collaboration is a means to empowerment because it is a means for low-power groups to influence more powerful ones through the creation of a mediating structure. Collaboration is a "process through which parties who see different aspects of a problem can constructively explore their differences and search for solutions that go beyond their own limited visions of what is possible" (Gray, 1989, p.5). Most human service organizations have a mission that extends beyond their organization's boundaries toward the potential value their organization can provide to society. In order to achieve a goal that extends to the broader community, organization can work with others in the community committed to similar visions.

Breaking down boundaries between organizations results in reduced replication of services, increased capacity to implement and refine innovative approaches, and collaborative rather than competitive relationships with funders and other funded organizations (Wheeler, 2000). A key pitfall in many organizations, youth development organizations included, occurs through "organizational empire building" (Wheeler, 2000, p. 52). Empire building refers to creating a focus on the organization and its expansion as opposed to working with other organizations to meet the needs of clients together. This can be avoided by maintaining a vision and mission that is focused on youth and their circumstances instead of on an organization. This focus serves to break down boundaries, and thereby facilitates bi-directional collaborative relationships with other organizations that have similar aims. Gray (1989) outlines the collaborative process as three distinct phases: problem setting, direction setting, and implementation.

The first phase in the collaborative process is concerned with getting the right people (both those with resources and those with a legitimate stake in the problem) to the table so that the problem can be defined clearly and with consensus. There also needs to be an established commitment to collaborate. This phase is often the most difficult step (Gray, 1989). The second phase requires the collaborators to set a direction, which requires attention to both process (how the collaborative will work together) and outcome (what the collaborative will work toward). If successful, this phase results in agreement and an actionable plan to address the issue. The final phase involves implementation of the plan, and requires attention to commitment, structure, and external support from constituents and those in power who are impacted by the action.

Current Context

From the review of literature on youth engagement, it is clear that involving young people in their communities and in the decisions that impact their lives requires systemic change. We cannot expect that young people can simply be inserted into the pre-existing adult structures that govern our community. However, it is clear from the literature on collaboration that organizations must work together to achieve transformative change in society. An agency's capacity to establish meaningful, effective relationships with other similarly mandated institutions has a direct impact on its ability to achieve systemic change (Luton, 2000). Therefore, if Waterloo Region wishes to change the youth serving culture from one of service to one of engagement, collaboration across organizations is a necessary step in the process. The Alliance for Children and Youth of Waterloo Region is one such community alliance that is working towards

transforming the youth-serving culture of Waterloo Region. It is in this context that the current research takes place.

Summary

Given the established body of knowledge on youth engagement that has been presented, this research aims to explore how the best practices of youth engagement can be applied at a regional level via the Alliance for Children and Youth of Waterloo Region. Using Gray's (1989) three-phase model of collaboration, this research will begin the Alliance's progress through problem setting, direction setting, and implementation.

To set the problem, this research will seek a common definition of the "problem" of youth engagement (i.e., the Alliance's vision of youth engagement). This will include gauging the commitment of members and those individuals who hold power within the Alliance, and understanding the unique challenges, resources, and opportunities present within the Alliance.

Setting the direction requires an understanding of what the Alliance wishes to do. By exploring some of the best practices in youth engagement, this research will help the Alliance explore options and understand the relevant information. This research essentially asks three questions: 1) How do member organizations define youth engagement, 2) What are the unique opportunities and barriers associated with youth engagement within this context, and 3) What is the vision for how the Alliance can advance youth engagement in Waterloo Region. Using this information, this research results in a road map that outlines the specific steps necessary for the Alliance for Children and Youth to implement and sustain a youth engagement project successfully.

Research Approach

Using qualitative inquiry, this research explores the potential for youth engagement within the Alliance using a particular form of qualitative inquiry called collaborative ethnography (Lassiter, 2005). Qualitative inquiry emphasizes situational and often structural contexts, and it provides researchers with the opportunity to make use of their personal experiences (Strauss, 1987). As such, this research draws heavily on my experiences with the Alliance, but is not restricted to my limited experience, but is instead enriched by the collaborative type of ethnography used. In choosing this collaborative approach, I am espousing what Lincoln and Guba (2000) call the constructivist paradigm. The assumption underlying this approach is that reality is constructed by the experiences of individuals and their interactions with their environment, therefore you can only understand reality by accessing the lived experiences of those people whose reality you seek to understand. This results in the acceptance that although academic researchers are familiar with the tools and methods to study a problem, a true understanding can only be achieved with the participation of stakeholders. By using collaborative ethnography, this research capitalizes on the experiences and expertise of members of the Alliance.

By espousing the collaborative ethnography approach, this research required an extensive community entry process, and research participants consisted of collaborators as well as interviewees. Every stage of the research was reflected back to participants in order to ensure true collaboration, and participant input was incorporated into the design, data collection, and analysis. This collaborative process began long before the research

began to take shape, with a year-long community entry period. (For a complete timeline of the research, see Appendix 2: Research Map).

Community Entry & Participant Recruitment

By engaging in a lengthy process of community entry and relationship building, and through the extensive support of my gatekeeper I was able to become a participant-observer in the Alliance for Children and Youth of Waterloo Region for the duration of this research (from January 2006 to May 2007). Gatekeepers are individuals who control access to a community, organization, group, or source of information (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999a). In this research, my gatekeeper was also my key informant (the facilitator/manager of the Alliance), and as such, she was the major facilitating factor for both my participation and my observations. Participant-observation occurs when the researcher becomes involved as a participant in the setting which they are observing and recording for their research (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999b). By attending Alliance Forums (i.e., monthly meetings of Alliance member representatives) and select working groups and sub-committees of the Alliance as a participant-observer, I established a first-hand understanding of how the Alliance processes work and how the vision and mission are enacted through regular meetings. As well, the community entry process allowed me to gain insight into the Alliance, its membership, and some of its special projects. For a complete detailing of the community entry work that happened "before the beginning" (Kelly, 1986; Sarason, 1972) see Appendix 3.

In addition to establishing regular contact with the Alliance through general participation, I also engaged in focused relationship building It is essential to note that a major factor for community entry to the Alliance was the friendships that existed (and

continue to exist) between myself, the key informant, and the stakeholder steering committee members. Much of the trust and information-sharing necessary for an understanding of this context was available to me because of these relationships. Upon successful community entry, I gained commitment from my key informant and my research steering committee to undertake this research. At this point I obtained ethics approval for research involving human participants from Wilfrid Laurier University Research Ethics Board (see Appendix 4) before beginning the collaborative design phase of the research.

Methodology and Collaborative Design

Classic ethnography is an inductive approach to learning about social and cultural life, using the researcher as the primary tool of data collection through human interaction and dialogue (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999b). In keeping with classic ethnographic methodology, this research used a participant-observation approach to inquiry. By immersing myself in the research setting of the Alliance through frequent attendance at working group meetings and forums, and regularly spending time with the Coordinator at the Alliance office, I established myself as a participant as well as a researcher. I was able to create research data out of human interactions and dialogues via interviews with members of the Alliance, and field-notes taken after meetings and forums, resulting in rich ethnographic data.

Collaborative ethnography actively engages consultants from the community in the entire research process. In this way, it closely resembles community-based participatory research, by involving stakeholders - people who are directly involved or affected by an issue, event or program - in a process of learning and decision-making

about the subject being researched. Both approaches emphasise the principles of cooperation, co-learning, systems development and local capacity building, empowerment, and balance between research and action (Israel, Schulz, Parker, & Becker, 1998). In keeping with collaborative ethnographic methodology, this research was developed in close relationship with Christine Bird (the Alliance Coordinator), and the Prevention Promotion working group, who served as consultants in the research design, data collection, and analysis. Similar to a participatory design, this research incorporated stakeholders in all stages of the research (Whyte, Greenwood, & Lazes, 1991), because consultants were involved in the planning and development of the research questions as well as participant selection and recruitment, and the interpretation of findings. In this way, the research benefited from expert guidance through every step of the research process, from inception of research questions to final analysis.

Lassiter and colleagues (2004) developed a statement of ethics that demonstrates the values of collaborative ethnography, which have been adopted for this research. The following table outlines seven ethical principles developed by Lassiter and colleagues, and the corresponding measures taken in this study to ensure adherence to these guidelines.

Table 2: Ethical Guidelines for Collaborative Ethnography (adapted from Lassiter, 2004)

Statement of Ethics for Collaborative Ethnography:	**Measure(s) Taken in the Current Study:**
Primary responsibility is to the community consultants with whom we work.	Full recognition of the contributions of community collaborators, establishing respectful and mutually beneficial relationships.
Maintain academic integrity by creating faithful representations.	Quotes and analysis checked for accuracy with interviewees.
Establish good rapport with the community so that future collaborative studies can be undertaken.	Making results meaningful and useful for the Alliance (e.g., contributing to the Alliance work plan). Member-checking analysis and wording of results, and making appropriate changes.
All project participants should be aware of the study's products. Materials are only archived with the participant's consent. Participants have rights to have copies of their own interviews.	Transcripts provided to interview participants, copy of thesis and an executive summary provided to the Alliance upon completion. Alliance members and leadership invited to attend thesis defence (defence scheduled appropriately in order to make this possible)
Willingly and openly communicate intentions, plans, goals, and the collaborative processes of the project.	Continuous consultation with key informants, as well as some participants. Presentation of organizational development as well as youth engagement findings to Facilitating Committee.
Remain open to consultants' experiences and perspectives, even when views are different from ours.	Verbatim transcription of interviews and in vivo coding during analysis, clear statement of assumptions as part of the results. Collaborative analysis with key informant.
Responsibility to the community, our respective disciplines, and our future audience to fulfill our commitment to finish what we have started.	Creation of an executive summary (i.e., an eight page document in plain language) for the use of the Alliance and its membership. Presentation to Alliance Facilitating Committee, invitation for members to attend the thesis defence.

After reviewing relevant literature on youth engagement and community collaboration, I developed preliminary interview questions to address the research question of what the Alliance for Children and Youth could do to foster youth engagement in Waterloo Region. I also developed a preliminary list of people to interview, based on the understanding of the Alliance and its membership I gained through participant-observation. Participants were therefore selected using purposeful

sampling (Patton, 2002) to obtain perspectives from a variety of stakeholders of varying levels of involvement and power within the Alliance. The preliminary questions and participants were shared first with my key informant, who helped me refine them based on her intimate understanding of the Alliance and its members. This consultation was confidential, as it included advice on the personalities and levels of understanding of particular individuals involved in the Alliance. The refined list of questions and potential interview participants was shared with the research steering committee during their January meeting (for the list of questions and participants shared at this point, see Appendix 5: Questions Proposed to PPWG in January, 2007). Through a 20 minute dialogue we established that they would prefer the simplified question "Is there a role for youth within the Alliance?" They suggested that this question be elaborated on via prompts in the interviews. In the pilot interview, which included one of the members of the PPWG, it was apparent that the single question was hard for participants to answer because it was very broad. The suggestion was to re-frame the question using the strategic planning approach of asking three questions: where are we now, where would we like to be, and how do we get there. There were no suggested major modifications to the proposed participants. At this point, the key informant and I sat down to finalize participants and write the recruitment email (see Appendix 6: Recruitment Email, and Appendix 7: Final List of Participants).

Sources of Data

Due to the collaborative nature of this research, many people who are involved in the Alliance for Children and Youth were involved in the creation, implementation, and analysis of this research as research consultants and sources of data.

Consultants. In collaborative ethnography, consultants serve a crucial role in ensuring the progress of the research is serving the community more directly and more immediately than conventional academic research (Lassiter, 2005). For this research, two types of consultants were engaged: a research key informant and a research steering committee.

The *research key informant* also served as the gatekeeper for access into the Alliance, as she holds the role of Facilitator and Manager, and as such is the only paid staff member. The key informant is white, female, mid-thirties, and has a strong personal connection to the community, having been born and raised in Waterloo region. A strong relationship between the researcher and the research key informant was the cornerstone of the entire research process. Our friendship developed independently of this research, and it was a strong asset, both in access to information and also as an ethical reminder for my research practices, as it personalized the process for me; it was not only my academic ethical integrity on the line, but also my personal relationship. She refers to me as a "safe person" and thus I am privileged to hear her opinions and assessments of people and descriptions of situations that are insightful, but not something she would likely share with an outside researcher. Although I do not report any of the information given to me when talking in "safe person" mode (generally prefaced thus by her, but if not, I ask her about it if information seems sensitive), I am able to use it for navigating the complex political, professional, and personal web of relationships and individuals that make up the Alliance. Because of this friendship, I have had access to the research context in a much deeper way than if I were an outsider.

The *research steering committee* was created out of the members of the Prevention Promotion working group (PPWG) of the Alliance. As mentioned earlier, the PPWG is a collection of Alliance member representatives committed to positive youth development. There are 12 members of this working group, made up of members of the Alliance who wanted to devote extra time to tasks specifically designed to further the prevention and promotion agenda through education, literature, and networking. Members of the PPWG are mostly female, mostly middle aged and middle class, and mostly white. Because of the close affinity of positive youth development and youth engagement, the PPWG identified itself as a potential steering committee early in the design of this research, and offered to undertake this role. They agreed to work with me as research consultants because of their commitment to youth engagement and positive youth development, and also based on the quality of the relationships we established.

Participant-Observation. Beginning in January, 2006 (one year prior to data collection), I began attending Alliance forum meetings. During this time, I took field notes during and after meetings, and wrote reflections on a regular basis in a research journal. This journal informed the direction of my research, particularly in question formation and participant selection, and provided an opportunity to document, and therefore make more explicit, the evolution of my understanding of the complexities of the research setting.

Interviews. It was the intention of this research that wherever possible, interviews would be held in pairs. This was to facilitate dialogue, given the open-ended and conversational approach to interviewing that was employed. Interview participants were chosen based on three determining factors: their understanding and involvement with the

Alliance, how representative their agency is, and personal relationships between participants that would facilitate the interview process.

Understanding of the Alliance was important because of the importance of the context. A generic youth engagement strategy would be of little use to a system as complex as the Alliance, and recommendations made by individuals who didn't understand the setting would not be as useful.

Having a broad spectrum of representation was important because of the scope of the Alliance membership. The individuals and organizations involved in the Alliance run the gamut from concerned community volunteers with no professional affiliation, to some of the largest youth serving organizations in the community. The value of these different perspectives is in ensuring that the perspectives represented in this research are as true to the actual Alliance as possible. Interview participants were selected to represent as many different sectors as possible (e.g., the school boards, large as well as small non-profit organizations, regional government, etc.).

Finally, considering personal qualities and relationships between individuals fostered better group dynamics and more valuable conversations. As one participant stated at the end of their interview, "It made a big difference for me being able to sit with someone that I know as opposed to someone that I don't. I appreciate that." In all but one case, the interviews were audio recorded with the permission of participants. For the participant who requested no recording, I took detailed point-form notes throughout, and filled them out into detailed field notes immediately following the interview. Field notes were recorded following every interview, and the interviews were transcribed within a

few days of recording for the sake of benefiting from observations and insights that may have faded from my memory with time.

Alliance Documents. Alliance internal documents (e.g., official terms of reference, the work plan) were available to me through the facilitator/manager. These documents provided an understanding of the intended organizational structure and the history of the Alliance.

Data Collection

Participant observation permitted access to much of the Alliance's documents and attendance at meetings over the course of a year provided further insight into the Alliance process. Field notes were recorded in a notebook and on meeting agendas. Informal conversations with the key informant also provided important data, which was recorded with the field notes. To supplement participant-observation, interviews provided a rich source of data.

My interviewing strategy was very conversational and open-ended, which encouraged participants to share information that they felt was relevant, without being limited by rigid questioning or prompting. Wherever possible, people were interviewed in pairs. Interviewing more than one participant at a time is useful for learning more about the degree of consensus on a topic (Morgan & Krueger, 1993), and it also provides a conversational flow that elicits deeper discussion, as participants reflect on what their partner has said and elaborate on it or contest it. In total, I conducted four individual interviews and six paired interviews.

Interviews were scheduled over email, and held at times and locations convenient for the participants. This resulted in a variety of settings, mostly coffee shops and

offices. Questions were provided to participants in advance of the interview via email. Several participants commented on the benefit of this practice, as it allowed an opportunity for reflection prior to the discussion, resulting in deeper, more reflective commentary. The nature of the questions and interview technique were evolutionary. A pilot interview revealed that the singular question was not easy to answer, but could be replaced with a three-part approach of "where are we, where would we like to be, how do we get there" (Ouellette, 2007). Upon conclusion of each formal interview, I asked if there were any comments on the interview process. I asked two specific questions: 1) Was there anything you would like to say, but didn't get a chance to because the questions I asked didn't address it, and 2) Do you have any comments on the interview process that could help me improve for future interviews. These answers were used to improve future interviews. As the interviews progressed, participant suggestions were used to improve interview technique through improved prompting and clarification statements.

Approach to Analysis

Analysis was initially approached using grounded theory methods (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1987) using a combination of manual and software-based methods. Interviews were transcribed and then open-coded manually to discover categories. Using the emergent preliminary categories (see Appendix 8: Code Book), NVivo qualitative analysis software (QSR International, 2007) was used to go over the data line-by-line. This served to distil the data into descriptive categories and codes that described the barriers, strategies, and suggestions present in the data, but did little in the way of answering the specific research questions or revealing emerging theories. The

primary emergent theory was the realization that youth engagement was intricately connected to organizational development. For this reason, I took the opportunity to hold a theoretically sampled interview with individuals who were known for their knowledge on these subjects and their experience with the Alliance.

At this point, I returned to the research question and the literature, and developed a coding strategy preferred by Miles and Huberman (1994). They suggest creating a "provisional 'start list' of codes... that come from the conceptual framework, list of research questions, hypotheses, problem areas, and/or key variables that the researcher brings to the study," (p 58). Using a combination of Grey's (1989) collaborative process and Hart's (1994) ladder of participation, I developed a code book (see Appendix 8) that examined the dimensions of participation and the steps in collaborative work, with distinguishing codes for youth engagement versus organizational development (as it arose from the interview data).

Trustworthiness

Through the use of theoretical sampling (i.e., collection of data in light of emergent categories; Glaser & Strauss, 1967), interviews were held with a broad sample of Alliance representatives. Results were shared with two well-respected individuals identified as experts in the community, and focused on the results of the research, which was an opportunity to search for negative cases (i.e., instances that do not fit with the conclusions drawn from the data; Strauss, 1987) and validate the findings. During coding, I was careful to examine all possible negative cases and include them in the analysis, to recognize the complexity and depth of the data. Field notes and transcripts were made available to participants upon request, and analysis as well as quotes were

checked with participants for accuracy, and to ensure they were comfortable with my interpretation. This process is called conducting "member checks" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As a final measure, I held meetings with my advisor to discuss the coding strategies I was using and the themes and codes I was drawing from the data.

Dissemination

Upon completion of data collection and preliminary analysis, findings were shared with the steering committee in order to collaborate on final conclusions and recommendations. In order to give back to the community and provide the opportunity for action arising out of this research, it was essential to incorporate dissemination in a form that is applicable to the setting, in addition to academic documents such as this thesis and any subsequent publications. For this reason, the Alliance was provided with an "executive summary" (i.e., a short, readable document containing the most relevant information). This summary provides an overview of relevant background, literature, methods, and results as well as a discussion of the implications and recommendations arising from the research (see Appendix 9).

Conclusion

Methods undertaken in this research served three purposes: educational experience, academic contribution, and community contribution. Because this project constitutes a Masters thesis, attention was focused on being reflexive and conscious of methodological choices, while being thorough and intentional in selecting the methods of data collection and analysis used. Because there is a gap in the literature around engaging youth in cross-sector community collaboratives, this project contributes to the academic literature on youth engagement, and sets the stage for further research in this area.

Because of the nature of community research and the collaborative ethnography approach, this research has the goal of being relevant and useful for the community setting in which it was conducted. The design of this research reflects all three purposes. The interviews were designed to address the question of how the Alliance could foster youth engagement. The results of these interviews reveal that this straightforward question has a complicated answer.

Findings

With the publication of "Let's Talk: Engaging and Listening to Today's Youth" (Alliance for Children and Youth, 2005), the Alliance for Children and Youth of Waterloo Region expressed their intention of facilitating youth engagement within the Alliance and across the broader community. In that document, it was stated that "We [the Alliance] are interested in incorporating youth voice into community planning while encouraging and promoting youth engagement in our member organizations. We see this as a demonstration of our values," and "we believe there are unrealized opportunities for youth engagement both inside and outside of the programs and services in our community." This statement was made in an effort to get the Alliance to think about how to achieve the goal of fostering youth engagement in the broader community. As a researcher, I was interested in taking this statement one step further, and exploring the potential for youth engagement within the Alliance itself. In this section I will first describe the results of the interviews and participant-observation, and then introduce the theory of planned behaviour to help interpret the results

Descriptive Results

In order to present the results of this research, I return the reader's attention to the three research questions asked: 1) How do Alliance members define youth engagement, 2) What are the unique opportunities and barriers associated with youth engagement in the Alliance context, and 3) What is the vision for how the Alliance can advance youth engagement in Waterloo Region.

How Alliance Members Define Youth Engagement. The first research question sought to discover how Alliance members define youth engagement. At first glance, this

question is already answered; there is a definition provided in the youth engagement statement published by the Alliance (2005). This definition reads:

> Youth engagement is the meaningful participation and sustained involvement of a young person in an activity, with a focus outside him or herself. The kind of activity in which the youth is engaged can be almost anything, and it can occur in almost any kind of setting. (Definition obtained from "What is Youth Engagement," Available from the Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement, www.engagementcentre.ca)

The youth engagement statement containing this definition was provided to interview participants as part of the introduction to the interviews, and some participants commented that it was a very useful one because of the flexibility of the definition. But a deeper definition presented itself over the course of the interviews. Two defining characteristics for youth engagement arose in the interviews: purpose (the idea of consultation and voice as reasons for engagement), and practice (youth-friendly environments and the possibility of incremental engagement activities as ways to accomplish engagement).

Purpose. Youth voice is defined in the literature as similar to the concept of youth participation. The youth engagement statement also defines youth voice:

> Youth voice is the concept that young people are respected for their ideas and opinions and are free to state them within an organization or program. We want to encourage and facilitate 'voice' in all young people, especially those who feel they don't have adequate opportunities to be heard. We recognize that there is not

> a single 'youth voice' and that no one young person speaks on behalf of all youth. We want to bring many voices into community decision making.

Recognizing that youth voice does not currently exist in many member organizations or at the Alliance table, participants nonetheless commented on the importance of youth voice. As one participant put it,

> I think youth voices are very valuable… their thoughts and opinions on everyday issues that come up are so important to us… the best place to start is having the strongest understanding of what it's like, and they're the best ones.

Participants suggested looking for items on the agenda that could benefit from consultation, and making efforts to include youth voice through that avenue:

> If there is something that we really should try to get the input of youth on a particular issue, call a meeting, find some people you want to invite to that meeting, order a pizza and talk to them… And that's a way you can get good response from youth, but it needs to be focused and targeted and limited.

The elements of voice and consultation are useful in defining a purpose for youth engagement.

Practice. Participants also defined the practice of engagement. Making an environment youth-friendly was seen as a pre-requisite for youth engagement. Suggestions were made about attire, timing of meetings, language, and other logistical concerns that would need to be addressed in order to make a setting youth-friendly. It was recognized that youth engagement has benefits for adults as well; a youth friendly environment is a friendly environment for adults, too. As one participant commented, "Just by bringing youth to a meeting, for me, automatically makes the meeting better."

The other element of practice that arose in the interviews was the idea of incremental opportunities for engagement, which closely parallels the youth engagement literature (see Figure 3: The Youth Organizing Continuum).

> I suppose if you thought about it, you probably could construct a program that had various levels to it. It would have a sort of beginning of entry level activities, and for those who needed more or are continuing onwards, it sort of progresses onward into more complicated opportunities…

Recognizing the potential for a continuum of youth engagement is a very exciting element of the Alliance's definition, because it offers an opportunity to build on the purpose definition presented, and allows for future conversations that may push towards greater youth engagement.

Youth Engagement Opportunities and Barriers. The second research question directed attention towards the opportunities and barriers associated with youth engagement within the context of the Alliance.

Opportunities. One of the interview participants has been working in the field of youth engagement for years. She points out that "youth engagement is pretty accepted now as a practice," and that it's not so much a problem of convincing people that it's a good thing, as much as showing them how and giving them the means and confidence to start." The Alliance is no exception to this; it is apparent that there is a favourable view of youth engagement around the Alliance table. The fact that the Alliance published a statement declaring their support of youth engagement is strong evidence that their membership has a positive attitude about youth engagement.

As a participant-observer at Alliance meetings, I attended one Forum where there were young people in attendance presenting posters they had created to express their developmental assets. The experience I had was compatible with the above comments. Youth voice allowed for an element of fun to the meeting, it was apparent that the adults were interested in the point of view expressed by the youth, and the adults demonstrated a real desire to support the youth in their presentations.

The importance of making youth consultation meaningful was echoed by other participants who were speaking from experience with their own organization's youth engagement attempts:

> We've found it challenging in the past, and continue to find it challenging, to find a meaningful way to engage youth in planning. But we've had good success where we've tried engaging youth in the programming and providing guidance and feedback to the programming... when it's directly relevant to them.

This quote hints at a defining characteristic for identifying opportunities for youth engagement, which is ensuring that there is mutual benefit for both parties:

> [Speaking about an example of youth engagement that the Alliance has had in the past] I think that was a good youth engagement situation because it was a partnership – both groups were getting something out of it. We were able to support them financially with some resources and they got to apply their skills in a real community context... they did legitimately get something they wanted out of it. It wasn't the adults setting the agenda.

These are the two ways in which participants suggested identifying opportunities for engaging youth. This helps address the clear call for action rather than "a brochure in

a box somewhere" approach, which participants expressed dissatisfaction with. Alliance members called for the Alliance to "more people will come on board when you do something practical, based on the success that you have." This sentiment was echoed in many interviews.

Barriers. Despite the opportunities for youth engagement that were identified by participants, barriers were also identified. Barriers such as experiencing trouble clearly understanding what youth engagement is and what its indicators are, tokenism, and the appropriateness of the Alliance as a setting for youth engagement all need to be addressed before the Alliance will embrace action around advancing youth engagement.

Well thought out change requires an understanding of what purpose you're trying to achieve, and what will be the indicators of change (Patton, 1997). It is useful to have terms of reference for defining what you are doing and who your target population is. These basic tenets of program evaluation are useful in framing the questions the Alliance needs to answer before they can undertake any attempt to engage young people or promote the engagement of young people amongst other organizations. The basic question of "for what purpose" was a persistent theme in interviews:

> Why is it that we want to engage youth? What is our desired outcome?... what is it that you want to accomplish? Youth engagement sounds great, but to what purpose? That's always what I come back to when I'm doing my programming too. And then let's talk about strategies.

Not all participants expressed a thoroughly positive attitude towards youth engagement as a strategy that adults should pursue. One participant raised concerns with the value of investing resources in this area, when it's possible that it is a self-resolving issue:

> Youth kind of move into adulthood. Like, how important is this? It's being touted as very important, but... essentially, is that really what happens anyways, whether someone takes a strategy approach. Do they sort this out as part of being youth and moving forward into adult development?

To counter this, another participant responded that the above comment may be true in terms of limited value for your investment regarding impact on youth, but there still may be inherent value for the organizations that can be gained from engaging youth in terms of making services more responsive and accessible.

Participants pointed out that it is necessary to have a common understanding of what youth engagement is, and expressed reservations about current levels of shared understanding:

> I'd want to go back and say, you know, I'm really unclear about what we mean by engaging youth in the Alliance... See, this is where I'm a little bit concerned, because I'm not sure youth engagement is well enough defined as a concept for us to be able to know what to do with it or assess whether we're making progress with it... And I run into people who seem to have very different ideas about what youth engagement is.

Along with understanding what youth engagement is, there is a concern that without a way of determining a need for engagement and evaluating progress, it is difficult to justify any actions or projects they might wish to encourage or undertake:

> What are the indicators of it? I mean, are we really low in this, is this a real problem with youth right now, or do we really know how well the community is

doing, or how well youth are doing, if it's really this meaningful participation, you know, do we know enough about the baseline, the current?

These unanswered questions give rise to concerns about the Alliance undertaking any youth engagement project or strategy. Two recurring concerns about youth engagement appeared in the interviews: the fear of tokenism and the sense that young people would not be comfortable in the Alliance and its processes.

Tokenism, the idea that young people are involved but have little or no choice about the subject or process of participation (Driscoll, 2002), was frequently mentioned as something Alliance members were not willing to engage in: "I'm really fearful of that... I think that youth need more than that to feel engaged." In general, the sentiment was that it's better to do nothing than to do something that had no meaning or could cause harm. This is not to say that concerns surrounding tokenism present an insurmountable barrier, because participants did suggest ways to engage youth meaningfully and avoid tokenism - namely, ensuring that there is meaning and mutual benefit in any youth engagement project. Nonetheless, it was a concern that was prevalent, likely because there are examples of tokenism that can be observed in the community which members at the Alliance would be aware of.

Participants expressed the concern that the Alliance forum is not an appropriate setting for engaging young people, and may simply end up as a form of tokenism. Members of the Alliance have historically been wary of including young people in the forum processes: "They've talked about it a few times, and they just go 'kids don't want to be at this meeting. I don't want to be at this meeting, why would kids want to be at this meeting?'[quoting Alliance members]." The reasons for this hesitation have merit:

participants fear that inviting young people into a process that is not welcoming or engaging for youth could be alienating, and end up doing more damage than good. For this reason, it is the recommendation of this research that the Alliance look for ways, other than in the Alliance forums, if they choose to pursue direct forms of youth engagement.

Logistical concerns, such as time and locations of meetings, the intimidating nature of adults' formal attire, the use of inaccessible language and acronyms, were mentioned by numerous participants. These concerns, balanced with the reality that the current functioning of the Alliance Forum and many other meetings depend on the status quo for proper functioning, result in the recommendation that youth engagement should not simply consist of inviting young people to pre-existing Alliance meetings.

Despite the challenges that have been articulated by participants, there was also energy and commitment behind furthering youth engagement via the Alliance:

> As opposed to saying we have a youth engagement statement but we really don't have a strategy or any idea of where we're going with it – that's de-energizing – instead, being able to say we have a small strategy and we've started. We may not have accomplished everything, but we've started. Even being able to say we've started, and here's how we've started, that gives momentum.

By naming the concerns that Alliance members have regarding youth engagement, it is now possible to address them. By recognizing barriers, we can be strategic in overcoming them.

Vision for Youth Engagement. The third research question was intended to articulate a vision for how the Alliance can advance youth engagement in Waterloo

Region. Two visions were articulated by participants: direct youth engagement within the Alliance itself, and indirect support of youth engagement via the Alliance's model of working with organizations.

Direct Youth Engagement – Modeling. Interview participants indicated that there is an opportunity for the Alliance to serve as a role model for successful youth engagement:

> Can the Alliance, as an organization, find a way to walk the talk and demonstrate success in doing that? This community is pretty quick, once they see that something works, they're pretty quick to pick up on it, but they're not likely always, or in a position to be, the one who'll be the guinea pig.

Participants recognize basic challenges in engaging youth appropriately given the existing Alliance structure, as exemplified in the following quote from one of the founding members of the Alliance:

> We're open ended. We're talking about all sorts of things on an ongoing basis, and that's very difficult for many youth to contribute to meaningfully. In fact, I think it can end up being quite destructive, because you can end up with youth feeling like, "I don't think I fit here, I don't feel I belong, I can't find a way to join in or contribute, so I'm not coming any more" and out of no ill intention, it can end up not being a positive experience, so I think you've got to be careful...

Despite the recognition by Alliance leadership[3] that adjusting typical Alliance activities is not a viable alternative, the Facilitator and Manager reported feeling pressure:

[3] Alliance leadership includes the Facilitating Committee (a group of members elected by the membership as a whole), the officers (e.g., chair and vice-chair) and staff.

> There's a very basic call of "you're the Alliance for Children and Youth, where are all the children and youth" even though we meet at two o'clock in the afternoon on a Thursday, and we speak in acronyms and we talk about work-plans and governance and terms of reference and things.

This is not to say that all Alliance processes should be altered to become more accessible for youth. In fact, when checking the above quote with the participant, she stressed that the call for children and youth to be present in all Alliance processes is a frustrating and naïve one. Not all Alliance processes can or should be changed to make them youth-friendly. As the participant then said, "we aren't likely to change our meetings enough to make them truly youth-friendly – for example, nobody's going to come if we have forums in the evening. If we did, we may have youth attending, but lose our core group. I can't see us making that trade-off." The value in the original quote is in recognizing that the logistical concerns are important to consider when appropriate opportunities arise, but that does not mean that all Alliance processes should be changed. This makes sense, keeping in mind the criteria of purpose and benefit. There are some activities that would not have a clear purpose for engaging youth (i.e., conversation between services – youth are not a service), and would not benefit (or may even cause harm).

Although adjusting all Alliance activities to make them a location for youth engagement is not a supported direction, participants anticipate that opportunities will arise from time to time that have great potential for youth participation. When these opportunities present themselves, members want to be able to act on them. In order to identify when these opportunities arise, participants suggested two defining characteristics: purposeful participation and mutual beneficial results. By using the two

criteria of purpose and mutual benefit for identifying youth engagement opportunities, the Alliance will be able to answer the call for action that participants expressed loud and clear, with a well-justified explanation of when, where, and why they engage youth.

Participants also made suggestions for small-scale projects that could get the ball rolling, citing the benefits in 'walking the talk' and role-modeling for the Alliance member organizations. Over the course of interviews, participants made suggestions that go beyond including youth when opportunities naturally arose with the Alliance. Some of the suggested projects included the creation formal and informal consultation mechanisms, supporting or initiating a "youth alliance," and having a youth-friendly working group to focus on youth engagement activities. These suggested projects were included in a report given to the Alliance as part of the dissemination strategy of this research (see Appendix 9).

Indirect Youth Engagement – Supporting Members. Overall, the approach of focusing on fostering youth engagement via the member agencies rather than engaging youth directly with the Alliance was strongly supported by those members who were interviewed during the course of this research. There are two reasons why participants supported this approach. First, the focus on member agencies fits more with the Alliance model:

> The Alliance is made up of many organizations that do work directly with kids. And there's nothing wrong, I think it's absolutely right on for the Alliance, if people come to the table and they think through what should youth engagement look like, what are the ways this could play out, and then we don't do it here but we take that back into our own organizations out there in the community. We use

> it there. That seems to me a perfectly legitimate role for the Alliance to play, because there you have developed a concept that is generally shared by a number of different organizations across the community in a broader sense than if we had all come up with our own notions that all looked different.

Secondly, the capacity to impact change in the community is increased exponentially when the Alliance works with its members:

> If the Alliance stays focused with agencies, and there's some practicality around that, it really is the encouragement of the agencies to find a way to encourage all of those youth. Because I really think you've got a larger, broader base of engagement that can happen than leaving it with a small forum that meets on a monthly basis. I think that youth need more than that to feel engaged. But if you take full member agencies and have them all doing that, wow. That starts to say a bit more about what's going on.

Recognizing the Alliance's unique nature and working within the organizational structure is a far more sustainable approach. Rather than creating new opportunities within the Alliance, the indirect approach fosters youth engagement within the larger community without creating new resource demands that go beyond the Alliance's model.

Participants look to the Alliance as having the capacity to educate its members: "give us the framework of what youth engagement is, or what youth engagement could look like when you open it up, so you can see the ideas of how you can engage that." There is obviously a need for education, but the nature of the Alliance isn't to provide a direct service, it simply provides a way for organizations to interact. In this way, the

Alliance could educate about youth engagement by having member organizations act as mentors for each other, and show the way for good youth engagement:

> It's one thing to engage people and get them thinking about it, but there also needs to be people who can show the way, who walk the talk, and demonstrate that it can work. So who are the lead organizations who are actually engaging youth, and how do you showcase what they're doing?

The mechanisms for this education and dissemination of mentor organizations' wisdom could be through printed materials, web-page access to resources, or more hands-on learning such as workshops and special forums, as several participants pointed out:

> Have a forum focused on what organizations are currently doing in terms of youth engagement, as well as, how the Alliance might bring together tools or expertise to assist members in taking their youth engagement to the next level

These suggestions work within the Alliance's current model. In fact, I was witness to a similar process of public education and influence that the Alliance undertook regarding the Developmental Asset framework. With the creation of a working group, and the creation of some specific forums, printed materials, and a train-the-trainer initiative, the Alliance fostered an understanding of the Developmental Assets in their member organizations and the broader community. This model worked well within the organizational structure of the Alliance, and therefore was very successful.

Conclusion. To summarize the findings of this research and answer the research question, I return to Grey's (1989) three step model of collaboration: problem setting, direction setting, and implementation.

In seeking a common definition of the "problem" of youth engagement, the interviews revealed two key elements for categorizing a successful project: meaning and mutual benefit. These two elements are strongly supported by the youth engagement literature, and are therefore good indicators that the approach identified by participants has transferability.

In exploring the direction Alliance members seemed to support, this research revealed two distinct streams of thought: direct engagement of youth within the Alliance, and indirect fostering of youth engagement by the Alliance within its spheres of influence. Members supported both of these approaches to youth engagement for the Alliance. It was recognized that direct youth engagement is something that will likely happen serendipitously when appropriate opportunities for youth engagement present themselves, whereas indirect fostering of youth engagement works within the Alliance's model of service collaboration, information sharing, strategies, and the development of a common language.

Implementation will require attention to resources and opportunities that support youth engagement. The Alliance's ability to influence these elements of their own organization as well as their member organizations hinges on the Alliance's capacity for organizational empowerment. As one participant pointed out, "people would have to be very careful, which could be a really good thing and a really exciting thing, but people would definitely have to be on board, and everyone would have to want it." This observation corresponds with youth engagement best-practices in the literature.

Given the importance of individual and organizational buy-in, how does the Alliance go from having a vision of youth engagement to actually advancing youth

engagement in Waterloo Region? It is at this point that I attempt to answer this question by examining the findings through the lens of the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). [NB: The theory of planned behaviour is being used as an organizing framework, and is not intended to make empirical claims about the presented analysis. Other theories that have been supported empirically on an individual level have been used in the same way in organizational literature (i.e., smoking cessation using the stages of change model developed by Prochaska, DiClemente & Norcross, 1992)]

Interpretive Results

I was not the first to ask the question "if this is the Alliance for Children and Youth, where are the children and youth?" but as the research evolved it became apparent that this question is not as straightforward as it appears, and that engaging youth with the Alliance itself is only one way, and perhaps not the most powerful way, for the Alliance to foster youth engagement within the community. This research resulted in the articulation of direct and indirect ways that the Alliance could foster youth engagement, including a list of best practices for youth engagement, several specific ideas for youth engagement projects, and suggestions for promoting youth engagement within the broader community. I would now like to take the opportunity to interpret some of these results.

Given that Alliance members predominantly define the opportunities for youth engagement within the Alliance as consultation and youth voice, and express barriers that are present in typical Alliance activities, but identify opportunities that exist in both direct and indirect ways, how might they begin to advance youth engagement in the Waterloo Region? Given that ultimately, advancing youth engagement represents a behaviour

change for the Alliance, it is useful explore how behaviour is changed. To do this, I will frame the approach to youth engagement with the Alliance within the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1991).

The theory of planned behaviour suggests that actions follow intentions, and three determining factors influence an individual's intention to act: the person's attitude towards the behaviour, the perceived social pressure surrounding the behaviour, and the degree of control the person feels over performing the behaviour. These three elements contribute to the intention to perform behaviour. In addition to intention, it is postulated that opportunities and resources need to be present for the behaviour to be performed.

Although most often applied to individuals, this framework fits nicely with the challenges faced by the Alliance in successfully "performing the behaviour" of fostering youth engagement. What follows is an examination of the Alliance members' attitudes towards youth engagement, their perception of the associated social norms, and the perceived behavioural control that participants believe the Alliance possesses, as well as the resources and opportunities present to enable any behaviour. I draw on interviews, Alliance documents, and my own experience as a participant-observer in the Alliance to describe these elements. Through this lens, it will become apparent that any plan for change with regards to youth engagement must address accompanying elements of organizational development.

Attitudes towards youth engagement. Positive attitudes towards a particular behaviour serve to improve the chances that the behaviour will occur. In general, our society has come to accept youth engagement as a popular concept. Interview participants commented on the value they place on youth engagement, particularly in

consultation. Participants also commented on the benefits for organizations being more responsive to youth needs, and the value in supporting youth in order to have strong adults in the future. Overall, the attitude of Alliance member representatives towards youth engagement is positive, and will serve to build intention to act on any future youth engagement strategy.

Participants indicated that youth engagement requires a "paradigm shift" within member organizations:

> It doesn't mean a single event, I think it's going to mean a change in thinking about the way people perceive the activities that they do, and where youth might be involved with them, and how that's going to be is going to have to be completely different for each activity, and for the youth that are involved in those activities. So it becomes, really, a paradigm shift in how people think about what's happening within their own organizations.

This shift would have the potential to result in a common language, or "common thread":

> It's almost like an encouragement of those member agencies to really find the opportunities they can, and maximize those opportunities. And I think if you keep it being spoken about, if it becomes that common thread, it's a bit of a force. You're able to get people buying into that a little better, understanding the value of that and really seeing the end results of that, where right now I don't think it's that little thread.

In this way, youth engagement could become a shared, community-wide commitment.

Influencing the attitudes (or philosophy) of member organizations in a way that increases their buy-in to the idea of youth engagement could be an exemplar of the kind

of community-wide impact the Alliance desires to achieve, but this process has been identified as a major challenge that the Alliance is facing. This was pointed out by the Facilitator and Manager: "organizations are not likely to have a single consistent attitude or behaviour, especially large organizations ... There may be pockets of support within an organization, but that's not the whole organization." Inconsistent 'buy-in' to the Alliance process within each organization makes it tough for an individual to represent the views of an organization. It has been difficult for the Alliance to influence changes that reach beyond the individual representatives who attend Alliance Forums. Awareness about current organizational practices and policy on youth engagement is a starting point for change, but unless the organization also becomes aware of the reasons why youth engagement is important, or what benefits it could have for them, little will be accomplished.

Social norms surrounding youth engagement. Increases in the perceived social pressure to perform a behaviour increases the likelihood that behaviour will be performed. The social norms of altruism and considering cost-benefit analysis seemed to be influencing interview participants in their desire to engage youth. Altruism, or the desire to do good for the sake of doing good, is well-received in our culture, and is an especially prevalent social norm in the helping and service-providing professionals that constitute the Alliance membership. Alliance members (both organizations and their representatives) do good work for its own sake. This was demonstrated over the time I was present in the setting in the support the Alliance lent to a member organization that had suffered the loss of its building during a fire. But beyond altruism, there are tangible benefits for organizations that practice youth engagement. Participants raised three

sources of benefit to an organization: increased funding opportunities ("So does that mean that if we're really good at youth engagement, it brings in more grant or revenue?"), more responsive services ("As we move into being more evidence based in how we plan, bring the research forward, show them how there's value."), and the provision of equity for stakeholders("[engaging] youth is an equity issue because they're not being treated as equal partners"). Social norms are therefore another vehicle that the Alliance could easily use to build intention for action around youth engagement.

Another way for the Alliance to build social norms around youth engagement is to undertake a public education project, designed to clearly articulate the benefits of youth engagement:

> I think that if I were to give a role to the Alliance, it's to begin to engage in an educational process about rights and developmental capacities [of youth], right? And with individuals, with parents, with community, but also with key decision makers.

By educating member organizations and the broader community on the rights and developmental capacities of youth, the Alliance could foster a social norm of youth engagement through creating a climate that expects and appreciates youth participation.

By creating a climate that expects organizations to consider youth engagement, the Alliance could foster behaviour change amongst member organizations. By drawing attention to organizations' current practices and making salient the reasons why youth engagement is important, the Alliance can foster the desire to pursue youth engagement. In the same way that the Alliance could encourage their own action, creating social norms around equity and cost-benefit analysis could foster a shift towards youth engaging

behaviour. But in the same way that attitude change across an organization is a challenge for the Alliance, so is the development of social norms. The Alliance may not have the level of influence, beyond the individual member representative, that is required to make organization-wide shifts in norms.

Perceived behavioural control. The final element in the theory of planned behaviour that contributes to intention is cause for some concern. If there is a challenge that exists in getting the Alliance to a place of action, it lies in fostering a sense of perceived behavioural control. Perceived behavioural control refers to "the perceived ease of difficulty of performing the behaviour... assumed to reflect past experience as well as anticipated impediments and obstacles." (Ajzen, 1991, p. 188) Ajzen (1991) compares perceived behavioural control to Bandura's concept of perceived self-efficacy, which "is concerned with judgements of how well one can execute courses of action required to deal with prospective situations" (Bandura, 1982, p. 122, as cited in Ajzen, 1991, p. 184).

Although not specific to youth engagement, the perceived level of control or perceived collective-efficacy that the Alliance possesses is generally observed to be very low. The Alliance members interviewed expressed concerns around the Alliance's capacity to take action as a group or influence action in organizations any subject (not just youth engagement) because of the organizational position the Alliance is in as an unincorporated group of member organizations who have agreed (but are not mandated) to work together. This raises the clear and important concern about how the Alliance accomplishes anything, given the nature of their organizational power to influence behaviour.

Many themes emerged around the Alliance's capacity to inspire action in member organizations and the broader community. The lack of perceived behavioural control does not represent an insurmountable obstacle; it simply identifies another challenge that can be overcome in making the actions associated with fostering youth engagement possible. Overcoming this challenge is not directly related to youth engagement, or the research questions asked in this study, but represents a major learning for me in this research process. For this reason, organizational development will be returned to and examined in more detail in the discussion.

Opportunities and resources. The final postulation of the theory of planned behaviour is that a person (or in this case, collection of people) must have access to the required opportunities and resources in order to perform a behaviour. In exploring what the possible action steps could be for the Alliance with regards to youth engagement, this research revealed two distinct kinds of opportunities: direct engagement (modeling youth engagement by way of a project of the Alliance), and indirect engagement (support of members in carrying out their own projects within their own organizations). Some participants were in favour of one strategy over the other, but most expressed a desire to pursue both direct and indirect forms of youth engagement.

A final consideration of directly engaging youth within the Alliance is the resource requirements this would demand. Effective youth engagement requires support, and resources (such as staff, space, transportation, and the like), which are not currently accounted for in the Alliance's budget or staffing structure:

> Who's going to [support youth engagement activities]? You know, Christine doesn't have the time. It's a great group that comes together, but if this is what we

> want to do or where we would like to be... but someone has to [attend to it], that has to be their focus.

Opportunities for direct youth engagement with the Alliance have arisen in the past because of financial or in-kind support, and this will be a consideration in any future projects. The opportunity for engaging youth indirectly via education, support, and encouragement for member organizations of the Alliance presents unique resource needs. Unlike a direct youth engagement project, which requires the obvious resources required for the practice of youth engagement (such as staff, program materials, space, transportation), fostering youth engagement amongst member organizations may require resources focused at increasing the Alliance's power to influence organizations. Much like behaviour change within the Alliance, behaviour change at the individual member organizations can also be viewed through the lens of the theory of planned behaviour. Behaviour can be changed by influencing member organizations' attitude, increasing social norms around youth engagement at the organizational level, and educating for best practice in order to provide organizations with a sense of perceived behavioural control, while simultaneously providing resources and encouraging opportunities for youth engagement.

Conclusion

There is a difference between the Alliance doing something itself, and the Alliance using its sphere of influence to encourage its member agencies to do things. The difference is not only in type, but in scale. Give someone bread and you feed them once; teach someone to plant, mill, and bake, and you help them to feed themselves. In the same way, change that results from member organizations influencing each other and the

broader community leads to greater community-wide impact than can occur out of an individual project run by the Alliance. What's more, this is congruent with the Alliance's organizational model. For this reason, many interview participants indicated a desire to see the Alliance foster youth engagement within its member agencies.

Upon examining these three aspects of behaviour change, it becomes apparent that the Alliance's organizational model plays an important role in how they achieve their goals. It is for this reason that organizational development arose as an inextricable result of this research, despite a lack of intention for this in the research questions. Given the emerging importance of organizational development, it will be explored in the following section.

Discussion

This research was designed to answer the question of how the Alliance for Children and Youth of Waterloo Region can foster youth engagement. The major finding is that participants envision two courses of action for the Alliance that could foster youth engagement: the direct route of engaging youth within the Alliance, and the indirect route of supporting youth engagement in member organizations and the broader community. Both of these courses require attention to the mechanics of behaviour change (attitude, social norms, perceived behavioural control, opportunities and resources). Although some participants favoured one route over the other, it appears that pursuit of both direct and indirect youth engagement work could be accomplished by the Alliance. In this way, this research supports the Alliance in identifying and making good use of opportunities to consult and engage youth in Alliance projects when possible (direct youth engagement), and also encourages them to foster youth engagement in members and the broader community (indirect youth engagement) by taking advantage of their existing sphere of influence. The major consideration for pursuing either form of youth engagement is that the Alliance has a collaborative model, one step removed from direct service. For this reason, the Alliance may engage in consultation more frequently than other forms of youth engagement (which, according to the literature, is not ideal), however it is essential to be aware of the fact that the Alliance more frequently engages in consultation with adults, rather than more active forms of adult involvement. It is not the intention of this research to suggest that consultation is an acceptable form of youth engagement when used exclusively, but rather to recognize that youth engagement involves youth in adult processes, and in the case of the Alliance, the processes that adults are engaging in are

mostly consultative in nature. It is important to work within the model of the Alliance, and recognize their collaborative and non-service approach, in whatever kind of youth engagement is pursued.

Youth Engagement

The similarities between this case and the other cases examined in the literature exist within the recommendations for how the Alliance can pursue youth engagement directly. Direct youth engagement is something that has been well-researched and best practices have been articulated. The suggestions made by participants in this research for identifying youth engagement opportunities (activities that are meaningful and mutually beneficial) are consistent with youth engagement best practices in the literature. Opportunities that participants identified for youth engagement were most often on the level of consultation, rather than further along the youth engagement continuum. Participants indicated that the Alliance needs to be conscious of making any environment in which they would like to engage youth youth-friendly (i.e., being aware of logistical concerns as well as adult attitudes), and they were wary of tokenism. This is also congruent with the youth engagement literature.

What is unique about this case, compared to other cases, is that the Alliance is in a unique position to foster youth engagement indirectly. That is to say, the Alliance can impact the community's youth engagement behaviour through its collaborative sphere of influence that reaches across member organizations and beyond. This would be a powerful force for positive change, and Alliance members recognized this. For this reason, the main recommendation of this research is to focus on the Alliance's capacity to work within its model of collaboration and communication across services. This leads to

the inevitable focus on how the Alliance model works, and whether or not the theory for collaboration within the Alliance aligns with its practices. It is to this that I turn the attention of the reader for the remainder of the discussion.

Organizational Learning

The Alliance is a complicated idea for a researcher to master. My experience researching the Alliance was a humbling one: the more I learned, the more I realized I didn't know (and realized that I hadn't known what I was getting myself into). I started out wanting to develop a "how to" manual for youth engagement with the Alliance, in hopes that the Alliance could be a vehicle for youth voice to be influential regionally. As I began to understand the Alliance more, I questioned whether I could assume that youth engagement would be welcome or appropriate at the Alliance table at all. I therefore revised my approach from one of "how do we engage youth with the Alliance" to an open-ended strategic development approach of asking "where are we now, where do we want to be, and how do we get there" in relation to youth engagement.

By asking the question of 'how does the Alliance get to where it wants to be regarding youth engagement,' what I didn't realize is that I was asking a much larger question. By asking how the Alliance could reach its goals around youth engagement, I was really asking how the Alliance reaches any of its goals. How the Alliance can achieve anything is a question of organizational structure and development. Given this reality, it is not surprising that organizational development appeared as a persistent theme in my results. Because organizational development did not address the research questions, it was intentionally not addressed in the results section. However, because it plays a very important role in understanding the bigger picture, it will be explored here.

There were three main themes that were expressed as organizational development challenges: focus, action, and membership.

Focus. The concept of focus covers what the Alliance talks about and chooses to pursue, and is most clearly understood as the items on the agenda. When I say agenda, I am referring to the literal meaning of what is covered in their forum meetings, and also the figurative and more fluid notion of the ideas the Alliance pursues in a larger sense than just what gets talked about at the Forum.

Some interview participants experienced the Alliance as having too many directions in that "there's so much going on with the Alliance that things just kind of get lost." One participant expressed her experience with the Alliance as seeing varying levels of focus. "Sometimes I look at the focus and think, I'm not sure. It's better when there's a particular focus... like, this is what we're focusing on, so there's work to be done." Some members also suggested that focusing more narrowly is a way for the Alliance to alleviate some of that confusion:

> But they need to be clear about what that work is, and I think that's where the confusion is right now. I think there's been great effort to try and get there, but I think it needs to be narrowed down. I think the focus needs to be a bit tighter...

Another participant suggested that concentrating on outcomes is a way to draw out more focus, and that "the whole thing on deciding what the outcome we want, I think is pretty critical. If we can decide or agree on a focus, then I think you're on your way." These participants' comments imply that a focus is lacking, which may or may not be the case.

It is important to note that the participants quoted above are general members of the Alliance. The perspective expressed by Alliance leadership is very different. When

completing a member check of the data with the research key informant (the Facilitator and Manager of the Alliance), she noted "Some would say we do have a focus (for example, those who worked really hard on the last planning process). Maybe what's lacking is communication rather than direction." The Vice-Chair recognized the need to communicate about vision and focus rather than simply proceeding:

> So I think the Alliance, or any alliance, has to be looked at in relation to an evolving process, but also a vision of where you want to be in the future. And, as far as our Alliance is concerned, I'm not so sure that everybody sees a future of the Alliance in a similar fashion, and I think there's going to have to be more discussion in a more focused type of way to have people say, 'hey, this is the way we need to go' as opposed to just letting it happen.

It has been my observation that the Alliance works on an unconventional level, focusing on community-wide change and approaches that entail somewhat intangible activities like coordination, advocacy, and communication. For many Alliance members, this approach may feel very un-focused, but that is not the case for the leadership. It is more likely that the focus (as conceived of by the leadership) is difficult for members to grasp and / or has not been communicated in a manner that is clear enough for everyone to understand.

Action. Much like focus, action is a challenging category because although it is an "in vivo" code (i.e., a code that represents the actual word used by participants), participants used the word in two different ways depending on if they were general membership or part of the Alliance leadership. Members' usage is consistent with their understanding of focus (i.e., something tangible and limited and easily observed). As the following statement indicates, some participants did not consider the kinds of approaches

currently used by the Alliance as action: "It's time for action. So we've done a lot of that other work in networking and education, and it's 'so what' time, in order to really make a difference for youth in our region..." Instead, what participants were looking for seemed to be more along the lines of service provision:

> Do something practical and more people will come on board when you do something practical, based on the success that you have. Whatever it is that you decide to do, do it and I think that'll bring more people on board [note: on board is understood to mean membership buy-in].

Again, there was a difference in the way general members and Alliance leadership conceived of action. As the Facilitator and Manager pointed out, "There's always this push to become a service provider. Like your work doesn't have value unless we can count the number of kids you've fixed." The Alliance's model is not one of direct service, but of working together in order to support services and foster community-wide change. This model is understandably difficult to grasp for many members, including myself as a participant observer. The apparent disconnect between the understanding of members and the Alliance leadership leads us to a discussion of Alliance membership itself, and the discrepancies that may exist between the expectations (or theory) and the realities (or practice) of membership.

Membership. Membership in the Alliance is a complicated thing to pin down. The Alliance membership is composed of organizations rather than individuals. For example, if I were to be a member of the Alliance, fitting within the model of member organizations and representation, I would be representing Wilfrid Laurier University Community Psychology Department, not Shauna Fuller, because that is my organization.

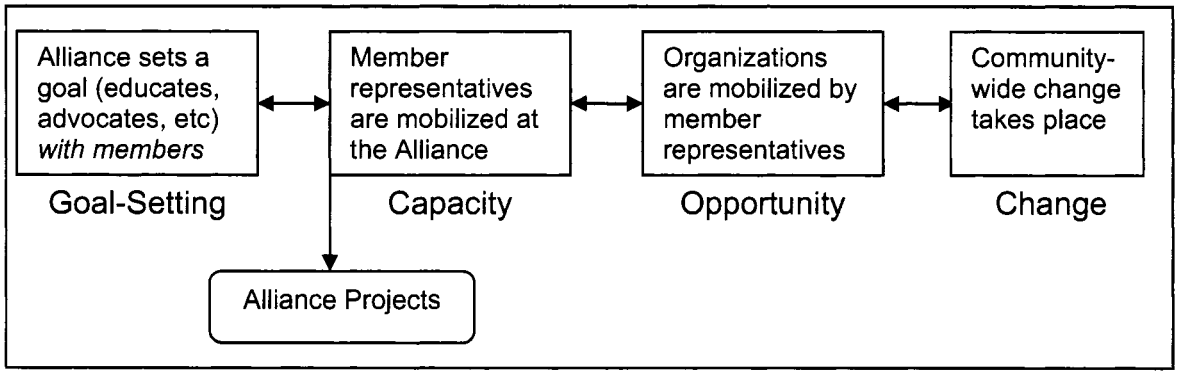
The member organizations are very diverse, ranging from a small entrepreneurial counselling business to the largest employer in the region, with a range of services and target populations. This diversity is multiplied by the diversity within member representatives, with varying roles in their home-organization (e.g., front line, middle management, executive), reason for attending (e.g., information, networking, action, sense of obligation), population of interest (e.g., children, youth, families, or some combination), and characteristics such as leadership skills, level of understanding regarding the Alliance, motivation to contribute, etc. The Alliance also has about a dozen individual members who are community volunteers committed to the mission and values of the Alliance, but who are not affiliated with any particular organization.

The level of diversity across Alliance membership returns us to the discussion of intra-organizational versus inter- and extra-organizational empowerment (Peterson & Zimmerman, 2004). To refresh the reader's memory, intra-organizational empowerment is a concept used to describe the influence that can be leveraged within an organization, whereas inter-organizational empowerment involves how much influence is held with other organizations, and extra-organizational empowerment describes the amount of leverage an organization has on the outside world (e.g., the broader community). The Alliance is organized as such to require a complicated mixture of both intra-, inter- and extra-organizational empowerment, and really requires its members to have both simultaneously, considering their home organization as one setting, and the Alliance as another organizational setting.

In order to articulate the importance of organizational empowerment (both intra, inter, and extra), I would like to draw a simplified map of how the Alliance appears to

conceptualize how it does its work. The following table outlines the process from which a goal develops from something the Alliance adopts into actually impacting the community. Keep in mind that "the basic dilemma faced in all sciences is that of how much to over-simplify reality" (Blalock, 1964, as quoted in Patton, 1997), and that any attempt to break down an organization as complex as the Alliance will undoubtedly be an over-simplification. This model is intended to outline the chain of events necessary for the Alliance to achieve its goals in the most basic of ways. Please take into account that despite the discrete boxes presented in this model, the "Alliance" is not an organization independent of its members and representatives, and all three exist within the community.

Figure 5: Model of Alliance Change



When you explore this chain of events, it is apparent that member representatives and organizations they represent are crucial components of the equation for community-wide change. Without them, the Alliance is not equipped to directly influence the community. Therefore, the relationship of member organizations and member representatives is essential to understanding the Alliance's capacity to accomplish its goals.

We can begin by exploring how the Alliance proposes to influence member representatives and organizations in theory, and then look to the data to see if this theory

is materializing in practice. The theory of membership is articulated very clearly by a facilitating committee member who participated in the interviews:

> It's a commitment that you make, beyond just paying membership dues and coming together to listen to some great speakers. Being a member of the Alliance means that you bring something to the table as well...this really needs to be a two-way communication stream.

The concept of a "two-way communication stream" fits with the organizational model presented above, that the Alliance is a place where member representatives take what they experience in their organization and in the community, and set goals that fit with perceived needs, then create the capacity to influence change by working with other members of the Alliance. Once the goal and the capacity to influence change has been established by the member organizations via their representatives, then the opportunity needs to be present within member organizations to mobilize for community-wide change, leveraging their power to change beyond what they would be capable of alone. In this way, the Alliance and its member organizations need to work towards becoming what Peter Senge (1990) calls a "learning organization." A learning organization actively creates, captures, transfers, and mobilizes knowledge to enable it to adapt to a changing environment. It does this by actively promoting, facilitating, and rewarding collective learning. It is for this reason that the interaction among individuals within an organization is a key element in organizational learning. I think this is a key element in the theory behind how the Alliance and its member organizations accomplish their collaborative work.

Taking a critical view of the Alliance model raises the question of whether youth engagement can even be accomplished via this route. Although it is true that member representatives have expressed favourable attitudes and social norms surrounding youth engagement, and may be supported and encouraged into a place of perceived behavioural control, this does not mean that organizational change will follow. The nature of the Alliance is such that membership is the link between the Alliance and community change. For this reason, I now turn the discussion towards understanding member engagement.

Member Engagement

I have demonstrated a difference in how members describe the Alliance and how the Alliance leadership conceives of the Alliance when I presented the differing concepts of focus and action. There is a disconnect between how some Alliance member representatives conceive of their role, and how the leadership constructs it. For the leadership, the Alliance differs from any other community meeting – it is a "thinking place" and a place to pull together ideas, directions, and strategies around community-wide efforts to improve services and circumstances for children, youth, and families. For many organizational members, individual members, and member representatives, I'm not sure if this distinction is clear. It may be that newer members, or members who are minimally involved, do not understand Alliance meetings to be different from other community meetings. This difference in perspective is especially important, because of the established importance of member representatives and organizations in the Alliance model of community-wide change.

I would venture to say that the Alliance has reached a tipping point in regards to their membership. There was a time when the Alliance consisted mainly of people who were involved in its creation. Many of these individuals are still involved, and some now occupy leadership roles. As more organizations, their representatives, and other interested individuals become involved in the Alliance, their membership grows, but the number of people who fully understand the model does not necessarily increase proportionally. Thus the potential result is "organizational drift" (i.e., the loss of learning as group members change), as the core team of founders cannot effectively communicate their messages and new learning to members. The Chair of the Alliance recognized that member recruitment and retention (and ultimately, succession planning) poses a serious threat to the Alliance:

> The huge challenge that the Alliance is facing organizationally is that the work rests on the back of one staff and a few over-committed volunteers, and it's unsustainable over time. I mean, we'll have a recruitment and retention issue if we keep up this process. We need to think about that structure, and we need to get ahead of that challenge...

But what was not raised in that quotation was the challenge of member education. This concept was certainly expressed in my interactions with Alliance leadership in my role as a participant-observer. The Facilitator and Manager, members of the facilitating committee, and the Alliance Chair all expressed to me the challenge of communicating to new members (both representatives and organizations) what the nature of the Alliance is, and what the expectations for members are.

The way that I understand the role of members is akin to Berger and Neuhaus' (1977/1992) concept of mediating structures. A mediating structure is an institution that stands between an individual and the larger institution of public life. In the introduction, collaboration was identified as the creation of a mediating structure due to the fact that collaboratives act as a mediating structure wherein low power groups can influence high power groups. From my perspective, I've witness more mediation going on in the Alliance than just collaboration – the nature of Alliance membership positions the member representative as a mediator between the Alliance and their organization.

Member organizations and the Alliance as a whole interact via the mediator of an organizational member representative. Taking this view of the role of the member representative allows us to understand and look for qualities representatives must possess in order to be successful mediators. In order to mediate successfully, the member representative must have some sense of their role, and also some influence within both organizations (the Alliance, and their home organization). It is in these two areas (understanding of role, and holding of influence) that identify the challenges the Alliance is facing with regards to membership.

Understanding of Role. Member organizations and member representatives need to understand how Alliance meetings are different from other meetings they attend in the course of their work, if they are to be expected to behave differently at the Alliance than they behave at other meetings. This requires communicating the Alliance model, mission, and purpose, as well as the modus operandi for the Alliance's collaboration. There is room for improvement in this area. I recognize that Alliance is currently evolving, and hopes to dedicate resources to this area in the future.

Bi-Directional Influence. The value of having influence within and between the Alliance and the member organization cannot be overstated. Without the ability to influence organizations, the model under which the Alliance is working plateaus at projects, and does not impact community-wide change any more effectively than a traditional service-based organization is capable of. A member of the facilitating committee pointed out her concerns around her own experience in trying to leverage power within her organization:

> Middle management has so much authority and then it just stops. And so, if there's truly a youth engagement strategy, it has to be endorsed by the executive directors, like higher than the people that are often at the Alliance.

The Alliance doesn't have restrictions on who can be a member. In fact, the deciding factor is not always inclusive of the amount of influence the individual holds within their organization. As one participant stated,

> Anyone can be a member who wants to be a member. And that's not a bad thing, but also it can be a confusing thing, when we're all coming to the table for our own reasons, not necessarily the reasons of what a collective group of people can do together in the community.

The following story, told by the Alliance Facilitator and Manager, illustrates the challenge of selecting the appropriate person:

> We were trying to figure out a new appropriate rep for a school board. I've approached a number of people, and I got an email yesterday asking if we are you looking for an administrative type, or if it's okay to have a principal or teacher at the table. And I said there are advantages of having an administrative type in

> terms of communication with your board, being able to implement change at the board level, being able to speak on behalf of your board, etc., etc. But I said if I had to choose between somebody with power who's going to show up every now and then, and somebody who's passionate and committed, I'd pick the passionate rep who shows up regularly - any day of the week, because I can help you with the communication between you and the organization. I can support you in that; we can figure that out. What I can't manufacture is the passion. And people need to know that face is the school board rep, they've been there, and I keep seeing that same person, so if I wanted to talk about how my organization might connect with their organization, I now know who to call.

Although the value placed on consistent attendance and passion is important and should not be ignored, it may be a mistake to assume that the Alliance can create power for an individual within that individual's organization. Participants themselves articulated the unlikelihood of this:

> The Alliance can't tell me in my work that I have to do this... they can engage me, they can educate me, they can get my thinking moving in that direction, but it really doesn't have any authority or control over [what I do], so it makes it a tough position for the Alliance to sit in...

So how does the Alliance recruit and retain the appropriate representatives for their member organizations and ensure that they act as mediators between the Alliance and the member organization? This is a big question, and not the question asked of this research, but given that the opportunity has arisen, it seems serendipitous to examine the youth engagement literature from the perspective of adult engagement. I have identified the

potential for using the integrated framework of youth engagement (see Figure 4) as a transferable model, since what we're talking about here is fostering the engagement of adults and organizations.

The integrated framework for youth engagement that I articulated in the introduction was created by integrating the Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement model (CEYE, 2003) and the youth engagement continuum presented in the youth organizing literature (HoSang, 2002). The framework involves four components: initiating factors, engagement, sustaining factors, and outcomes. If these four factors are translated into factors for adult engagement, or organizational engagement, the model still works the same way, but the factors, activities, and outcomes would change. Initiating factors are required as a catalyst to begin engagement, the engagement activity itself must have certain characteristics (otherwise it is not engagement), sustaining factors ensure continued engagement, and outcomes arise from the engagement activity. Within the engagement activity, a continuum of engagement exists, presenting the opportunity for incremental change towards greater engagement, and resulting in incremental changes in the scope of outcomes. All of this operates across multiple levels of analysis.

If I could make one recommended direction for future research to arise from this discussion, it would be to examine the potential for using the integrated framework in relation to adult and organizational engagement. Participants have demonstrated the absolute necessity of having strong representative and organizational engagement with the Alliance. By identifying the initiating and sustaining factors, clarifying what exactly is expected of member representatives and organizations, and what could be the outcomes or results of engagement with the Alliance, I think taking this approach would

successfully address concerns around membership with the Alliance. By articulating a continuum for engagement that could exist within the Alliance, there may be an opportunity to appeal to member organizations and representatives to incrementally increase their engagement, resulting in broader impact.

Contributions to Theory and Practice

This research has made a contribution to youth engagement theory, as well as community psychology practice, and offers some contribution to the community. Youth engagement literature to date recognizes the capacity that organizations hold in terms of fostering youth engagement directly, by creating youth-friendly environments and providing opportunities for meaningful engagement. What this research contributes is the importance of an indirect advancement of youth engagement that is particularly suited to community collaboratives, but could also be transferred to a large organization or other agent of organizational culture change.

By successfully using a collaborative ethnography research approach, this research contributes to community psychology's research menu. Collaborative ethnography espouses similar values of participatory action research (Nelson, Ochocka, Griffin, & Lord, 1998), but without the resource requirements of community partners. Although collaborative ethnography would have been difficult without such a strong relationship between myself as a researcher and the participants in the Alliance, I feel that based on resources, the Alliance as an organization would not have been able or willing to rededicate their staff or volunteer resources towards a PAR project.

Contributions to the community have been made through what value this research can offer to the Alliance. As a participant-observer at the Alliance, I engaged in dialogue

and offered my support in projects unrelated to this research. As a result of the organizational learning that arose from this research, I also had the opportunity to speak to the Facilitating Committee to make recommendations for their consideration regarding the developing work plan. I have also presented my results regarding the difference between directly and indirectly fostering youth engagement via the Alliance at the April 2007 Forum, allowing the membership to contemplate the possibilities, and hopefully acquire some "perceived behavioural control" from my observations.

Limitations

There were three notable limitations to this research: participants were talking in the hypothetical, youth were not interviewed, and there were challenges associated with working collaboratively and maintaining critical objectivity.

The concern with discussing youth engagement in the Alliance context is that it is presently a mostly hypothetical construct; interview participants were speculating based on their experiences of the Alliance and their understanding of youth engagement gained from experiences outside of the Alliance, as there has been little actual experience of youth engagement with the Alliance to draw on. Because the Alliance has not engaged youth in any notable capacity thus far, it was impossible to truly explore the nature of youth engagement in this setting. All the same, interview participants demonstrated clear understanding of the nature of youth engagement, and their commentary on the Alliance as a setting was useful for both a youth engagement strategy as well as organizational development.

The question of whether or not to interview youth is a complicated one. The values that underlie the youth engagement literature would dictate the importance of

youth contribution to the research; however, there are two significant reasons not to interview youth at this time. Firstly, the collaborators from Alliance indicated concern with raising the hopes of youth by inviting them to offer their thoughts on this subject. They felt that asking youth should only be undertaken if the organization is ready to do something meaningful with the answers youth provide, and the consultants, as well as several interview participants, indicated their concern that the Alliance is not ready to do anything meaningful with such input. I agreed with them to some extent, but had a different reason for not interviewing youth. The second reason, from my own perspective, was that I felt that it would be more valuable for the Alliance (rather than an outside researcher) to undertake this consultation themselves, as it demonstrates more commitment, and would result in greater potential for action, than if done by a student who was working on a project. It is my hope that they will have the opportunity to do so in the future.

The final limitation of this study resulted from the use of a collaborative methodology. Collaborative ethnography offers researchers rich and authentic experiences from which to draw on, but the qualities that make collaborative research so valuable carry challenges that can hinder a researcher's critical perspective. I have recognized limitations with the Alliance's current youth engagement practices when comparing them to the literature, and could comment on them, but have chosen not to based on my experiences as a participant-observer in the Alliance, and having reached the same conclusions on a personal level as many of the Alliance leadership regarding slow change, and focusing on process over the long term rather than immediately changing the setting in order to make it open for youth. Taking a truly critical approach to research in

community psychology can put the researcher in conflict with those who hold power and prefer the status quo. I recognize that my experiences as a collaborator and a participant in this setting have resulted in a changed sense of what should be done (i.e., I used to believe that the Alliance should make changes to their process, without a doubt, whereas I have since changed my opinion after working with the Alliance for a year). It is a possibility that I have been converted falsely based on an interest in maintaining the status quo, but it is equally possible that I have developed a deeper understanding of the complexities in this setting, and therefore revised my opinion accordingly. I leave it to the reader to make a judgement about this for themselves.

Conclusion

This research set out to answer the question, "if you're the Alliance for Children and Youth, where are all the children and youth?" which seemed like an honest and straightforward question. Although I've experienced a very indirect and round-about route, I feel that I have found an honest and straightforward answer: that's not what the Alliance is about.

Youth engagement is a politically correct idea; it is an accepted attitude and social norm. Therefore, there is momentum around it within the Alliance. It is also important to note, however, that this momentum may be heavily influenced by politeness and not by actual commitment. People don't object to the idea of youth engagement, and may expect that it is something that others support strongly, so they go along with it. This sort of commitment is not strong enough to translate into action; there's no one to 'champion the cause', but because no one objects, the idea lingers and gets raised from time to time. The Alliance provided examples of how they would be interested in engaging youth, but

they also provided reasons why they should not engage youth because it does not fit within their model. Consultation was supported as a definition of youth engagement because it is the form of youth engagement that most closely fits with the Alliance's approach of raising issues, creating strategies, and working together. The Alliance, as many participants pointed out, is not a service provider, nor do they operate programs. They consult with adults, therefore they would like to extend that to consulting with youth. There is not currently a location for greater forms of youth engagement within their structure, and they are not interested in adjusting how they operate in order to incorporate youth because there are good reasons for operating the way they currently do.

Alliance members did present sincere interest in consulting with youth and engaging them in specific and focused projects. This is where their idea of direct youth engagement stopped, with the exception of short-term, limited projects in which youth could play more meaningful roles. Indirect youth engagement was a common theme because it recognizes the Alliance's mode of operating and works within it. As a critical researcher, I struggle with this reality, because although I acknowledge the limitations and barriers associated with engaging youth in the Alliance process, I see an opportunity for the Alliance to champion youth voice through engagement at the regional level that doesn't exist in many other settings. I would like to encourage them to devote resources and energy to a youth engagement project, but I must also recognize that I am not the conductor of this orchestra – the Alliance has expressed an interest in exploring opportunities for engagement when they arise, and fostering a culture of doing the same within their sphere of influence; this is the extent to which they are interested in pursuing

youth engagement. As a researcher, I have provided them with resources to access on the occasion that they become interested in going further with youth engagement.

I would like to conclude on a bright note. The Alliance is definitely at a crucial point in their organizational development - this was made apparent by participant-observation as well as the infusion of organizational development themes in my interviews. But I would like to comment on the positive steps that the Alliance is taking, to make sure the reader understands that the Alliance is not adrift, it is simply plotting its course for organizational change. Members of the Alliance have recognized the importance of having a clearly articulated focus and engaging in action, and are undergoing a strategic planning process for to develop these areas.

In 2004, the Alliance completed a "model of overall direction" (Alliance for Children and Youth, 2004), which outlines a vision, mission, process, outcomes, and approaches for Alliance work. This document answers the direct questions about what the Alliance's focus is, and provides clearly articulated approaches. A second document, currently under review, provides actions that are intended to help accomplish the already established outcomes, using the already agreed upon approaches. The Alliance has identified a need to focus on membership in order to improve their organization's viability, and this research has suggested a direction to follow in facilitating that process by thinking of membership in terms of a framework for engagement. This suggested direction is only one of many possibilities, and it is my experience that the individuals around the table possess the requisite knowledge and critical thinking to accomplish the task of clarifying roles and articulating a clear direction for themselves. It was an exciting time in the Alliance's history, and I was privileged to be a part of it.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Alliance Model of Overall Direction

VISION

What kind of future do we want? A strong community that is able to promote the well-being of all children, youth and their families so as to ensure that each individual can reach his/her full potential

MISSION

What do we promise to do?
To nurture a culture in Waterloo Region that challenges and empowers all people, groups, and organizations to show they have a stake in the community's future by visibly valuing children youth and their families

PROCESS

How will we do that?
By sharing the responsibility for sustaining and advancing the well-being of children youth and their families

OUTCOMES

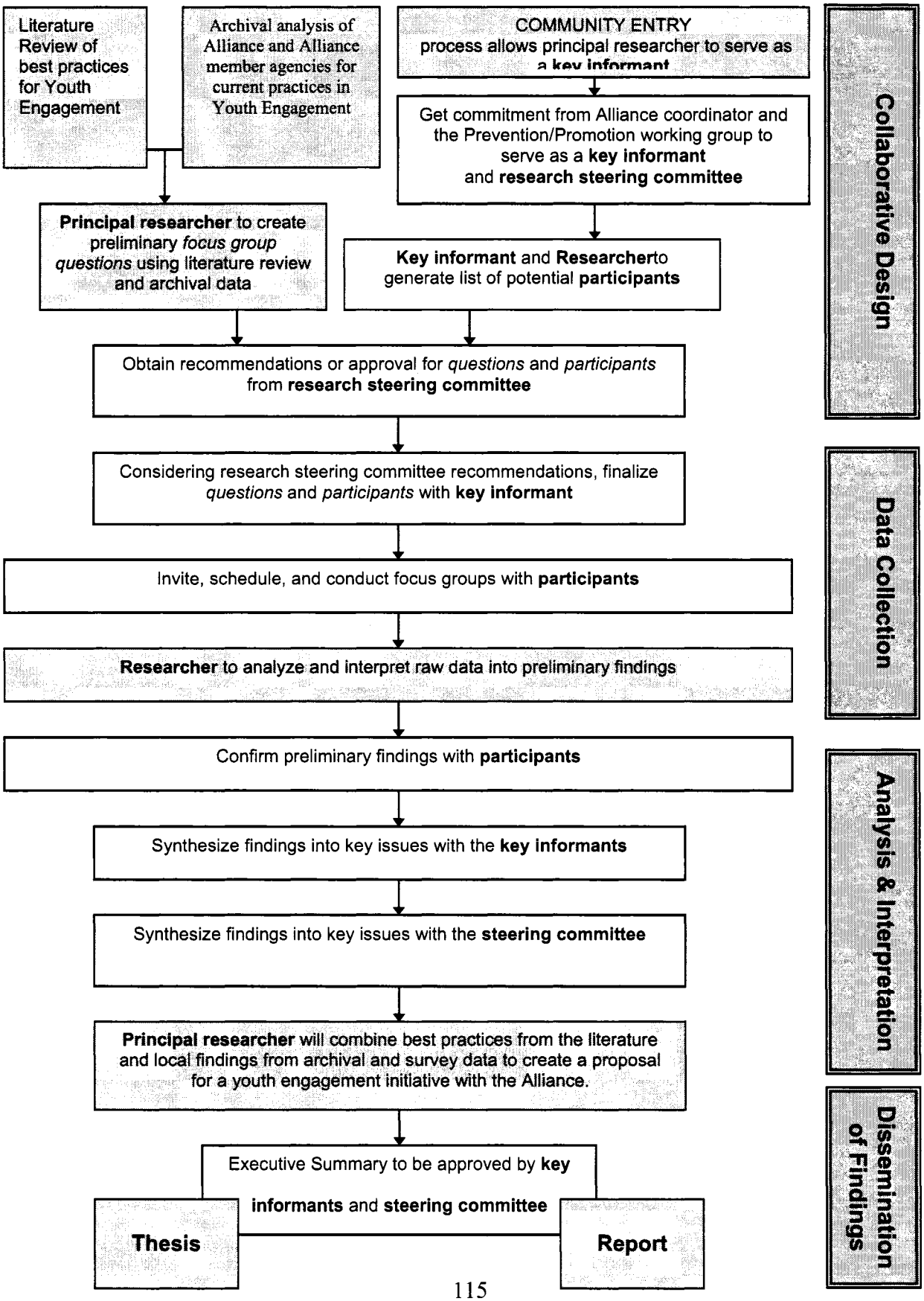
What outcomes do we expect to see?			
The community is engaged in actions that are known to foster child well-being.	There is a strong collective voice that champions child well-being in our community.	The policies of private and public organizations promote the well-being of children.	Decision-making demonstrates that child well-being is always a key factor in deliberations.

APPROACHES

What approaches will guide our activities?

Coordination	Capacity Building	Advocacy	Promotion of Prevention
Evaluation	Consultation	Communication	Public Education
Collaboration	Creative Problem-Solving		Research Training

Appendix 2: Research Map



Appendix 3: Before the Beginning

To fully understand the context of this research, it is essential to acknowledge the relationships that exist between the individuals who make up the context. I am going to speak here of the underlying history behind the relationships that facilitated community entry and research within the Alliance. Christine Bird, the key informant and coordinator of the Alliance, is also a part-time Masters candidate in Community Psychology at Wilfrid Laurier University. It is within this context that I became aware of the Alliance and the potential for a research project exploring youth engagement. I am also a Masters candidate in Community Psychology at Wilfrid Laurier University. Christine and I attended two classes together during the 2005-2006 academic year. Over the course of this year, we worked together as partners on several class assignments and socialized outside of class as friends. In March, Christine conspired with my partner Ryan to throw a surprise 25th birthday party for me (she was the decoy, inviting me to supper while my friends gathered and decorated my apartment).

In January of 2006, Christine extended an invitation for all of our classmates to attend the Alliance forum. I attended that forum, and most of the forums since that time, as a guest and student observer. I also attended the prevention-promotion working group because of my interest in their topics. I completed part of my practicum requirements with the Alliance and worked on a grant proposal with many key members of the prevention-promotion working group. In the summer of 2006, Christine was able to offer me a job under a student employment grant. I was hired to research youth engagement within member organizations, as a strategy for understanding the current level of youth engagement within the Alliance, and providing an opportunity to put youth engagement

on the radar as an important issue. Through the summer research project, I was able to interview many Alliance members and become familiar with the United Way (given that my office was located in the United Way).

It is because of these opportunities that I was able to integrate myself into the context of the Alliance well enough to obtain the commitment of the key informant and research steering committee. This history has a significant impact on my ability to conduct research with the Alliance, and cannot fully be captured within the phrase "community entry."

Appendix 4: Ethics application

Ethics for this research was approved by Wilfrid Laurier University Research Ethics Board. A change form was submitted for the approved ethics to allow a change in principle researcher (from Dr Colleen Loomis to Dr Scot Evans, due to change in committee roles and the changing of the Thesis Committee Chair), which included a request to include recording and transcribing of interviews and focus groups.

Appendix 5: Questions and Participants Proposed to PPWG in January

Proposed Questions:

How does membership in the Alliance benefit your organization?

How does the Alliance benefit the community?

Is there a role for youth within the Alliance?

What can the Alliance do to foster youth engagement?

Prompts for question 3 & 4:

- Can you give me an example?
- What does this look like?
- What happens at other organizations?
- Who should be involved?
- What needs to happen in order to make this possible?

Proposed Interview Categories:

School Boards

Agencies that do not directly serve youth

Regional Government

Youth Serving Agencies

Funders

Alliance Founders

Positive Youth Development Advocates

Appendix 6: Invitation e-mail to participants

Hello,

This is a quick note to let you know that Shauna Fuller will be contacting you soon to request an interview during the month of February. Shauna is completing a Masters in Community Psychology at Wilfrid Laurier University, and she is researching the possibility of youth engagement within the Alliance.
Shauna worked with the Alliance this past summer collecting information about member agencies' youth engagement. Although related, that project discussed what each member agency was doing independently. She presented a report on that information at the October forum, which was circulated to all Alliance members (and beyond) through the November Mid-month Connection. The current research is focused on the Alliance itself, and whether or not there is a role for youth in Alliance activities.
Examining whether or not there are roles for youth in the Alliance requires a starting point of shared understanding about what the Alliance does. Below you will find an overview of some typical Alliance activities, derived from the terms of reference and other Alliance documents. You will have an opportunity to review this list in the first part of your interview in preparation for the discussion about youth engagement.

Some Typical Alliance Activities:
* Forum meetings (networking, sharing local success stories, dialogue about important children's issues)
* Electronic bulletin of events, news, information, and upcoming opportunities (i.e., Mid-Month Connection)
* Public education/advocacy (e.g. Kids on the Edge document, Safe Schools Act comments, Youth Engagement Statement)
* Publications (e.g., Asset brochure, Community Fit for Children bulletins)
* Training (e.g. Developmental Asset workshops, Advocacy workshop)
* Consultation (e.g., F&CS model of service, Public Health "True Boys" program)
* Self-governance (i.e., Facilitating Committee)

Shauna will provide the interview questions in advance, once you've scheduled a time to meet.

Thank you, in advance, for your willingness to participate.

cb.
Christine Bird
Coordinator
Alliance for Children and Youth of Waterloo Region

Appendix 7: Final List of Participants

Interviewed:

Gord Beckenhaeur (volunteer, Alliance founder)

Peter Ringrose (Executive Director of Family & Children's Services, Alliance founder)

Heather Montgomery (United Way of Kitchener-Waterloo and Area)

Christiane Sadeler (Community Safety & Crime Prevention Council, Alliance chair)

Janice Oullette (Youth Coordinator, City of Kitchener)

Marla Pender (Youth Coordinator, City of Kitchener)

Brian Kamm (Reaching Our Outdoor Friends)

Alaina Holman (Big Brothers Big Sisters of Kitchener-Waterloo)

Debbie Hoekstra (YMCA of Kitchener-Waterloo)

Deb DeJong (K-W Counselling)

Lynette Eulette (Waterloo Regional District School Board)

Two participants who chose to remain anonymous

Invited (But Not Available):

United Way of Cambridge and North Dumfries

Opportunities Waterloo Region

House of Friendship

John Howard Society of Waterloo-Wellington

Catholic District School Board)

Interviewed After Analysis for Validity:

Lynda Sylvester (volunteer, Strong Start Literacy Program)

A community leader who chose to remain anonymous

Appendix 8: Code Book

TD – "Thick description" of the setting (Geertz, 1973; Denzin, 2001)

From Grey's (1989) model of collaborative process:

PS – Problem Setting

DS – Direction Setting

IM – Implementation

From Hart's (1994) ladder of participation:

B – Barriers

T – Tokenism

C – Consultation

L – Leadership

From grounded theory emerging from the data:

Y – Youth engagement

M – Membership/Organizational development

Appendix 9: Executive Summary

(Note to Reader: Please see the attached document following the references. The summary was created in a desktop publishing program, and was not transferable to this document.)

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