

# DEVELOPING LEADERSHIP

**Peer networks provide a real and authentic opportunity to develop leadership skills and capacity in young people. While some may not want that label, or see themselves as leaders, they are certainly able to influence peers, make connections and impact decision-makers.**

It is important that youth peer networks are driven and owned by young people, and that young people are the actual leaders.

Young people are best equipped to advocate for their needs when creating and implementing policies and programs, to ensure youth-friendly peer networks.

Young people are more receptive to change, and younger leaders see things differently. They will have a much better sense of what resonates and what doesn't.

Young people will learn fast and will not be afraid to challenge assumptions. They are technologically savvy and will bring an unrefined passion for the cause.

*"It is our capacity to be aware of how we are interacting with people, to engage their hearts and minds, and to speak to their strengths which will help us to inspire others to 'dream more, learn more, do more and become more' – to be successful leaders."*

**Leigh Tabrett**



<http://cru.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Leading-Change-Tabrett.pdf>

Peer networks offer a number of ways in which young people can start to develop their leadership skills. This might be through:

- mentoring other youth
- providing leadership for a project
- teaching others through sharing experiences
- attending leadership training and then using those skills in leadership roles
- facilitating conversations amongst peers
- identifying and addressing community and state-wide issues
- learning and developing self-advocacy skills.

Young people will need some initial support as they take on the leadership roles. This may be an adult advisor or staff member. This person will play an important role in the success of the peer network, not by running it themselves but by making sure the young people are the decision-makers and leaders.

Young people will need the support of a caring adult who challenges and supports their activities and guides them in the process. The support can be provided through several ways, such as coaching or mentoring, and mostly it might be through encouragement. It also comes through treating young people as equals and developing a partnership relationship.

## JFY Peer Connectors

**The Peer Connectors facilitating the peer support networks for Julia Farr Youth are clear about the benefits they received from the role and how empowering it was for them. This was a motivator for them, and they gained skills as leaders in their community.**

*"I never expected to become a PC and be capable of facilitating a meeting."*

*"I have been able to extend myself and co-host events. I didn't think I would be able to do that."*

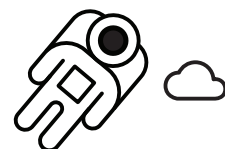
The Peer Connectors also spoke about the confidence they had gained from the role:

*"I certainly feel more confident. I am getting to know the content, and getting to know who I am working with – both PCs and members. Having that confidence has enabled me to speak off the top of my head, which I couldn't do a year ago. It has helped me in professional contexts, such as going to a meeting or interview, and I don't feel anxiety over these situations so much anymore."*

*"In the last twelve months, I have been relying less on notes I have prepared or the agenda. I am able to speak more freely and talk to the audience rather than the paper."*

**The Centre for Adolescent Health's *Paying Attention to Self (PATs)* peer support program also stresses the importance of having peer leaders:**

*"The peer leader is an important role model for the other participants. Being enthusiastic and welcoming is very important and observing the dynamics of the group and feeding this back to the worker can be very helpful. Often peer leaders will pick up on things, which are happening in the group that the worker may not be aware of or have noticed."<sup>9</sup>*



## Case study: CanTeen

**CanTeen was set up by a group of young cancer patients in 1985 and has young people involved at every level of the organisation.**

*“Not only do our young leaders ensure that we truly understand how cancer is different in a young person’s world, they are developing the skills, resilience, and confidence to contribute meaningfully to the world around them through their experiences of leadership in CanTeen.”*

There are many opportunities for young people to get involved as valued contributors to the organisation. Every young person is empowered as an expert in their own wellbeing and can also sign-up to become a member (there’s no charge) to exercise their vote on matters that affect them and the future of CanTeen.

Members participate in local leadership groups, which enable them to get involved (according to their interest and skill) in governance, advocacy and fundraising, as well as being a powerful support to one another online, in person and on programs.

## For more information

**YERP** by **Youth Affairs Council Victoria:**



<https://yerp.yacvic.org.au/get-started/involve-young-people/involving-young-people-guiding-principles>

**Youth Friendly:**



<http://youthfriendly.org.uk/index.php/what-we-do/youth-friendly-documents>

**Apathy is Boring** developed the **Youth Friendly Guide** to help non-profit professionals meaningfully engage young people in shaping and directing their organisations:



[http://www.youthfriendly.com/uploads/3/1/3/9/31399973/youth\\_friendly\\_guide\\_4th\\_edition.pdf](http://www.youthfriendly.com/uploads/3/1/3/9/31399973/youth_friendly_guide_4th_edition.pdf)

The **Centre for Adolescent Health’s Paying Attention to Self (PATs) Peer Support Programme Guide 2006** has some great ideas about peer support:



[https://www.rch.org.au/uploadedFiles/Main/Content/cah/Paying\\_Attention\\_To\\_Self\\_PATS\\_Programme\\_Guide\\_2006.pdf](https://www.rch.org.au/uploadedFiles/Main/Content/cah/Paying_Attention_To_Self_PATS_Programme_Guide_2006.pdf)

**Michigan State University:**



[https://www.canr.msu.edu/uploads/resources/pdfs/cyi\\_2017\\_4h\\_teen\\_leadership\\_curriculum\\_web.pdf](https://www.canr.msu.edu/uploads/resources/pdfs/cyi_2017_4h_teen_leadership_curriculum_web.pdf)



## Reflection

Take a moment to think about the leadership opportunities that the peer network provides for young people. How will young people be supported to develop and extend their leadership capacity?

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# GOOD LUCK

This workbook has taken you through eight key stages to think about when setting up a youth peer network. Young people have told us that these eight things or beads strung together will help make a network strong and vibrant.

Once you have all the beads it should look like this:



The peer network may still have highs and lows, and you can take a look at the companion workbook ***Strong networks: connecting the beads together*** in conjunction with this one.

We have also made a short animated film about the life of a peer network, which can help explain some of the ideas in this workbook. You can watch it here on the **Peer Connect** website.



<http://www.peerconnect.org.au/>

The **Peer Connect** website also has lots of other Quick Guides about how to run a peer network and some of the stuff a peer network might talk about. We see this as a browsable library that you can dip into to get more information about what you need.

