

YOUTH FORUM
TRAINING PACK
1999

CONTENTS

- 1. ALL ABOUT YOUTH FORUMS**
2. GETTING A FORUM STARTED
3. YOUR FORUM'S CONSTITUTION
- 4. WRITING JOB DESCRIPTIONS 5.**
BEING A CHAIRPERSON
6. BEING A SECRETARY
- 7. BEING A FORUM MEMBER**
- 8. BEING A REPRESENTATIVE**
9. CHECKLIST FOR MEETINGS
10. HOW TO WRITE YOUR AGENDA
11. WRITING GOOD MINUTES 12.
- HOW SUB-COMMITTEES WORK
13. GOOD DECISION MAKING 14.
- STEPS TO SOLVING PROBLEMS
- 15. BEING ASSERTIVE 16**
- GETTING YOUR MESSAGE ACROSS**

1. All about Youth Forums

The purpose of a youth forum is to enable young people's views and activities to be widely understood, effective and influential.

Young people face considerable difficulties in getting their opinions listened to or having any influence on decisions, even when those decisions affect them directly. It is almost as difficult for young people to gain the experience and resources that are necessary for them to organise activities and services themselves. A local forum is one of the ways for young people to organise themselves, discuss issues of interest, develop their ideas and increase their influence in the club/community.

While youth forums are not the only means by which young people can participate effectively in the club/community, their particular strengths are that they are composed entirely of young people from different backgrounds and interests. A strong forum can be accepted as a democratic body, representative of young people in the area.

These aims will not be fulfilled unless those involved in establishing the forum have a genuine commitment to encouraging and enabling young people to be effectively involved in seeking and achieving change. This means recognising that the direction of change and the areas and issues young people want to become involved in may not be the ones which are youth workers or other adults expect or wish to see. A strong forum can sometimes make life uncomfortable, but it is better to be prepared for this than to encourage a council which will be a token body, without power or a role.

2. Getting a Forum Started

What are the benefits?

Youth Forums exist to enable young people to meet, discuss and take action on issues which interest, affect and are important to them.

Genuine Youth Forums are run and controlled by their members according to the rules in their constitution; thus they give legitimacy to the voice and aspirations of young people within organisations.

Youth Forums can bring great benefits to the club as a whole and the local community, for the following reasons:

- They get young people fully involved in the club, especially in their own programme of activities.
- They help young people to look at the issues which affect them in a more positive way.
- They provide an introduction to working with adults.
- They give young people the experience of learning about democratic decision making and how to use the official channels of communication effectively.
- They give young people an official voice in the club, and beyond.
- They encourage young people to stay in the club as a junior leader/volunteer.

Being a member of a Youth forum can also make a great contribution towards helping young people to become responsible and caring adults. These are some of the special benefits for the individual:

- They learn to take responsibility.
- They become more self confident
- They are able to influence decision making
- They gain many new skills
- They make new friends
- They have FUN!

How to get started?

Firstly, arrange a meeting with your club leader or get in contact with your local WAYC Curriculum Development Worker and ask him/her to help you arrange a meeting of all members of your club aged between 14 and 21. Then discuss with the group steps to establishing your own Youth Forum. If you decide to set up a Youth Forum you should come away from the first meeting with an Action Plan which will give you a timetable for: j

- Election of officers
- Election of club Representative to the WAYC regional Forum
- Writing and agreeing your constitution
- Planning basic training for Forum members
- Dates of future meetings

By having an Action Plan you will ensure that the initial enthusiasm is not lost, and others will want to become involved.

3. Your Forum's Constitution

One of the most important jobs for any newly created Forum is to get stuck into the writing of your Constitution or Charter. It is vital that this is done early on because it is the Constitution which will lay the foundations for the work of the forum, especially during its developmental stages. Once agreed, it will set out clearly for everyone exactly what the Youth Forum does and how it operates, as well as providing the 'groundrules' which everyone who is actively involved agrees to keep to. Once the Constitution is accepted, you stand a very good chance of avoiding some of the conflicts which can occur when people are unclear about the way their organisation is run.

The list below is designed to help you cover the main points when you begin to work on writing a Constitution for your Youth Forum. While you are still in the drafting stage, remember to consult with the club leaders; often they will have had some experience in this area of work and will have some constructive suggestions to offer. They may also have some sample constitutions for you to study before deciding how you want to word YOUR Constitution (See over the page for a copy of a suggested constitution). It is very important that the rules listed in your Constitution are stated so clearly that they are not open to a variety of interpretations.

These are the main topics which should be covered in your Youth Forum's Constitution:

These are the main topics which should be covered in your Youth Forum's Constitution:

- **Its aim and purpose**
(sometimes called a Mission Statement)
- **Its membership**
 - How many members?
 - Age range?
 - Equal representation of boys and girls?
 - Ex-officio members
(e.g. club leader, or other adults)
- **Meetings**
 - How often?
 - Annual General Meeting?
- » **Elections**
 - Who?
(e.g. Chairperson, Secretary, etc.)
 - How long?(e.g. for 1/2/3 years)
 - Method?(e.g. nominations, secret ballot, etc.)
 - Who may participate?
- » **Executive Committee**
 - Elected to run the business of the Youth Forum(whether you choose to have one will depend on the size of your club.)
 - Is one necessary?
 - How should it be appointed?
- Quorum**
 - The minimum number of members required for decisions to be legitimate.
 - How many members required?
- Relationship with Regional Forum**
 - How to agree representation from the club

You will see from all this that there are a lot of matters to be discussed thoroughly before you agree your Constitution, what you come up with should respond to the needs young people in your club.

4. Writing Job Descriptions

Once you have decided to establish your own Youth Forum, you will need to start thinking about the various posts you will have to fill to make sure things run smoothly. The next few pages include advice for a Chairperson, Secretary, Representative and members, but you may want to appoint people to other positions, such as Treasurer, PR. Officer, Social Secretary, and so on - in which case it is a good idea to draw up a job description and then match it to a person specification. If you do this, you are much more likely to make a good appointment than if you just ask for a volunteer or even 'pressgang' someone who finds it hard to say 'NO'.

Here are some of the questions you need to answer when drawing up a job description:

- What is the main purpose of the post?
- What are the main activities? Who is the person responsible to? Who is the person responsible for? Who are the person's main contacts?
- within the club
- outside the club

- What is the limit of responsibility?
- What support/training is provided?
- What is the time commitment?

When you begin to look for the right person for the job, it is important to consider these questions:

- What experience does the person need?
- What skills, knowledge and abilities does the person need?
- What qualifications does the person need?
- What personal attributes does the person need?
- What personal circumstances does the person need to have?

By giving time and thought to preparing job descriptions and matching them to the person specification, you stand a good chance of finding someone who will do the job efficiently and enthusiastically.

5. Being a Chairperson

Being the Chairperson of any kind of democratic group is one of the most challenging jobs around. But the role can also be most rewarding as the group gels together and achieves results. The success of your Youth Forum, particularly in its early stages when so many decisions will have to be made, and so many people made aware of what it's all about, will depend very largely on whom you elect as your Chairperson. It's not always a good idea to vote for the person who has the loudest voice, or the most opinions; there are other qualities you should be looking for aswell.

Here are some ideas to start you off:

An effective Chairperson should:

- take time to prepare for meetings;
- conduct meetings in a business-like manner, keeping to time, and following the agenda;
- give all members the opportunity to voice their opinions;
- summarise all discussions and debates before decisions are taken;
- ensure that decisions are made and recorded accurately;
- uphold the 'rules' (Constitution) of the Youth Forum;
- promote/represent the Youth Forum to others;
- ensure that decisions get put into action;
- resolve conflicts by discussion and clarification, and
- support and train her/his successor

You will see from this list of ideal requirements of a Chairperson that the role is a demanding one which calls for a clear mind, a cool head and the tact of a diplomat.

6. Being a Secretary

The position of a Secretary on your Forum can be a most interesting and rewarding job, but, it can also involve lots of work. The main aspects of the Secretary's role include

Keeping track of correspondence

Receiving and noting all letters, phone calls, faxes and messages; taking relevant correspondence to Forum meetings for discussion (and action where necessary); replying on behalf of the Forum and keeping everything in reasonable order in a safe place.

Convening meetings

Forum members should be reminded in advance of a meeting, usually with a note enclosing the agenda with date, time and place of the meeting clearly stated. If possible, it is good practice to agree meeting dates well in advance.

Preparing agendas

It is a good idea to use minutes of the previous meeting to ensure that all actions have been implemented. The Secretary always consults the Chairperson to agree the agenda items and their order. Other Forum members may wish to include items for discussion; they should be encouraged as it is a sign that everyone is feeling involved in what's going on.

Servicing meetings

The Secretary records the names of those present (usually by passing round a list which is signed by everyone). He/She ensures that there are enough people to make a Quorum (the minimum number required to be present as stated in the Constitution) before any decisions are taken and makes notes at the meeting. These notes form the basis of the Minutes.

Writing Minutes

These should be written as soon as possible after the meeting (while memories are still fresh!), agreed with the Chairperson and circulated to members.

Communicating

Sometimes the Secretary also has responsibility for liaising with the Media. This is a very important aspect of the job because it encourages a higher level of awareness about the work of your Youth Forum. Be aware of opportunities both within WAYC (Club/Regional newsletter, Feedback Cymru) and the wider media (local newspaper, radio, and television station) who will often be

interested in publishing accounts of special events, especially if they are accompanied by lively, good-quality photographs.

J

Looking to the future

j

Remember that one of the key responsibilities of your Secretary will be to train her/his successor so that the good work will continue.

With all these jobs in mind, you should be looking to appoint a Secretary who is a good communicator, enjoys a certain amount of paperwork, is reliable and fairly well organised, and who has the time to do the job well.

7. Being a Forum Member

Your Youth Forum will only ever be as good as its members and the personal commitment each individual puts into it. When you begin to think about nominating people to work on the Forum, here is a quick checklist of the sort of qualities you should look for in an effective Forum member

He/She should be:

- well briefed about the role and responsibilities of a Forum member
- well prepared, punctual and reliable
- well informed and able to make a positive contribution
- enthusiastic and interested in all the Forum's work
- assertive
- committed to the aims of the Youth Forum
- supportive of other Forum members, especially the Chairperson
- a good listener to the opinions of other members
- a supporter of decisions taken by consensus

There are probably other qualities you can think of when considering the type of person you want on the Forum.

Once your Youth Forum is well established, and the youth of the club are participating actively in its affairs, you will be able to identify various members who, because of their skills, talents and commitment, should be encouraged to stand for one of the officer posts, i.e. Chairperson, Secretary, etc., when the next election is due. In any democratic organisation which has limited terms of appointment for its principal office members, it is absolutely vital to ensure that there are people who are prepared to follow on, and are adequately trained to do the job effectively. If you don't look to the future you may find that when the election is due, there will be no-one who feels able to take on the responsibilities; this will weaken the structure of the Forum and make it less able to carry out its work.

8. Being a Representative

As explained earlier, the key to the success of the National Youth Forum depends largely on the quality of the representatives, elected by each region, who make up the membership of the Forum. In turn the effectiveness of the Regional Youth Forum will depend on the quality of the representatives who are elected by each club.

It is, of course, a great privilege to be elected as the official representative of any group, but it also carries some important responsibilities. The most important thing to remember is that a representative represents - that is, s/he does not attend meetings as an individual, but to represent the views and opinions of the group which has elected him/her as their representative. Your Forum's representative on the Regional Forum is the voice of your club, so you must think carefully before deciding who should be entrusted with this responsibility.

You may decide that your own Chairperson should act as the representative, or you may choose another member to do the job. This means you are giving another person the chance to gain some useful experience. But, before you choose, you might like to consider what are the essential qualities of any good representative.

Effective Club Youth Forum Representatives will:

- understand that they represent the club and not themselves as individuals;
- consult members before attending a Regional meeting;
- ensure that members' opinions are passed on;
- attend Regional meetings regularly and contribute to discussions;
- report back to the club after meetings;
- keep good two-way communications between the Club and Regional Forums, and
- keep to deadlines for gathering and passing on information

9. Checklist for Meetings

While you are still in the early stages of setting up your Youth Forum, you may find the thought of taking part in meetings rather daunting. It's not always easy to speak up, challenge a proposal or put another point of view - most of us need lots of practice before being really confident about taking a full part in meetings.

Here are a few tips to help you practice fully in your Forum meetings:

- learn about the issues which are being discussed;
- listen to other people during meetings
- think before you speak;
- speak clearly and to the point;
- don't be afraid to make your point;
- respect other's opinions;
- make a note of any points you want to come back to, and
- be loyal to the Forum's decisions - even if you did not agree with them

Taking the time to evaluate your meetings can be an effective way of improving them. Here are the most important aspects of any meeting which you should be aiming to improve on all the time.

Try to answer each question honestly!

- Did I receive the agenda on time?
- Were all the papers clear and easy to follow?
- Had everyone prepared for the meeting?
- Did the meeting start on time?
- Did the meeting follow the agenda?
- Were all the items introduced clearly?
- Did the discussions always stay on the point?
- Was it just one meeting or were there several?
- Was everyone encouraged to take part?
- Were decisions clearly proposed?
- Was the voting fair?
- Was I clear about all the actions we agreed to take?
- Did I find it easy to contribute?
- Did others value my contribution?
- Did I find the meeting interesting?
- Was I happy with the decisions taken?
- Did I think the meeting was worth my time?

By taking the time to work through these questions on a regular basis, and to share your answers, you will be able to see how your meetings can go on becoming more effective. If they don't, you may need to reconsider whether you have the right people in the right jobs.

10. HOW TO WRITE YOUR AGENDA

An agenda is the "running order" of business for your Forum meetings and contains a list of all the topics which the Chairperson intends to cover. It is usually prepared by the secretary (in consultation with the Chairperson) and circulated with any other relevant information about a week before the meeting takes place as this gives members time to prepare themselves for discussion and, where appropriate, to consult with others on particular items.

A sample agenda for your Youth Forum could look like this:

AGENDA

1. Welcome and apologies

(Chairperson -welcomes everyone, in particular new members and special visitors)

2. Minutes of previous meeting

(Assume members have read them and check that they are accepted as an accurate record.)

3. Matters arising from the Minutes

(This pick up on matters outstanding from previous meeting which do not appear elsewhere on the agenda. These should be kept as brief as possible.) i.e. An Award Ceremony

4. Correspondence received

(Copies of letters are sometimes sent out with the agenda)

a) Letter from neighbouring Club inviting us to participate in outdoor pursuit event.

b) Letter from the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme officer asking if she can give a talk to the youth club

5. Election of new club representative to Regional Youth Forum.

(ensure that you have all the ballot papers)

6. Reservation from Forum member on programme planning.

I (Check if they will need any visual aids)

7. To discuss participation in

club Vfone raising event

(You may have invited the youth worker to introduce this item)

8. To discuss invitation to join

Regional Youth Service Forum

9. Any other business - Try to make these

short and to the point as it can make meetings long and tedious

(Items to be given in advance)

10. Date of next meetings

(Wherever possible, dates of meetings should be known for a year in advance.)

Important points to bear in mind when setting your agenda are:

- ensure that items requested by members are included;
- take care about the order in which the agenda items are listed; it is a good idea to put the longer items at the beginning! and leave less time at the end to debate those topics which require a shorter! discussion;

- do not include more items than meeting i

can cope with in the time allowed;

- try to time the items so that the meeting j will begin and end on time;

- try not to take the agenda items out of i order (although sometimes this is! unavoidable), and

- ensure that all papers sent out with the agenda have a clear reference which j relates them to the relevant agenda item

If you take time to construct a well-thought j

**out agenda, you will benefit from having;
efficient effective Youth Forum meetings j
which will be able to get things done.**

11. Writing Good Minutes

The Minutes are the Official notes of meetings they contain a record of what went on and they must be accepted as accurate by all members before the Chairperson can sign them.

They should not be long winded (remember, Minutes rather than hours to read them !), but they must show clearly :

- what decision were made;
- who proposed and seconded items for decision;
- when there is a vote, how they were cast (i.e. numbers in favour, number against and numbers who abstained from voting).
- what future action is agreed, and
- who will carry it out and by when

It is also useful to include - as briefly as possible

- a summary of the main opinions expressed during discussion and a summary of the reasons why the Forum took a particular decision.

To summarise, Good Minutes should be accurate, brief and clear. They should follow the same order as the agenda, and set out in such a way that those who need to take some specific actions are prompted to do so (some minutes carry a specific action column down the right hand side with members' names against specific items).

The draft minutes are approved by the Chairperson and circulated as soon as possible after the meeting (don't wait until you are sending out the agenda for the next meeting). Being responsible for the minutes is one of the most important parts of the Secretary's job; it can be a bit tedious, but it is certainly worth doing well. Good minutes will help your Youth Forum to make good decisions .

12. HOW SUB-COMMITTEES WORK

When your Youth Forum has been going for some time you may begin to find the workload too complex for the full Forum to deal with effectively. You may decide to set up sub-committees or working groups to deal with separate areas of work such as researching into a particular issue, planning a special event, compiling an important report, etc.

These small groups are especially useful in providing opportunities for a greater number of members to develop skills and widen experience in ways which are not always possible within Forum as a whole.

However, there are some simple guidelines which should be understood and followed if a sub-committee is going to be truly effective.

A sub-committee must know:

- why it has been set up;
- what it is to do;
- when it has to do it, and
- what it has to do it with

A sub-committee can only:

- Present information
- Make recommendations

It is the responsibility of the Youth Forum as a whole to agree the level of responsibility delegated to sub-committees and to take decisions based on their recommendations .

13. GOOD DECISION MAKING

A sure way of being confident that your Youth Forum is working well is by the way decisions are taken. There are five recognised routes to decision making by groups such as committees or councils :-

- A simple show of hands (majority of vote"
- A secret ballot (often used when the issue to be voted on is particularly sensitive or involves people present)
- Allowing the Chairperson to 'gauge' the mood of those present
- Allowing the Chairperson to take silence from the members as signifying agreement with what is being proposed.
- By a generally expressed **consensus** of views

What is Consensus ? Here is a step by step guide "or you to follow:

- Ensure a thorough debate on the issue under discussion
- Let everyone express their opinions
- Clarify and sum up all points of view
- Agree that under the circumstances one particular solution is the best decision to take
- Take the decision and record it

You will know that it was a decision taken by consensus when everyone involved in the process is prepared to support it even though it may not have been their own preferred solution

The advantages of taking decisions by consensus are:

- members feel that they have contributed to the process;
- all points of view have been represented in reaching the final decision, and
- members are likely to support the decision when it comes to putting it into action

In a Youth Forum which wants to operate along democratic lines, making decisions by consensus is always something to aim for.

14. Steps to Solving Problem

Solving problems is part of everyday life for all of us; there are many ways of coping with problems - sometimes, if you are lucky, you can ignore them and they disappear of their own accord ! More often, however, we need to take steps to resolving our problems. Certainly, your Forum will need to be able to recognise problems if it is going to be really successful.

Here are some simple basic steps to help you solve your problems:

1. Be clear what the problem is!
2. Write it down so that everyone can agree that you are all looking at the same problem.
3. Decide what information you need to help solve the problem. Share this information with others. Do not forget: the better the quality of your information, the more likely you will be to crack the problem.
4. List all the possible solutions and then consider the various arguments for and against each suggested course of action.
5. Choose a particular course of action after everyone has had the chance to put their point of view.
6. Carry it out!

15. Being Assertive

Being assertive will help you express your views and feelings without having to be an aggressive or passive member in your Youth Forum. Being assertive does not mean that you will always get things your own way, but it does mean you will be able to handle most situations with confidence and a high level of self esteem.

Assertiveness means all these things:

- Recognising what you need and asking openly and directly for what you want
- Recognising and respecting the rights and needs of others
- Relating to others openly and honestly
- Being responsible for your own actions
- Not needing to go for 'win' or 'lose', but being prepared to compromise
- Having the ability to resolve conflict and difficulties in a way that seems fair to all
- Having the ability to give and receive criticism in a positive and constructive way

One of the early tasks of your Club Forum could be to agree a Charter for Assertive Behaviour for members. Here are some ideas to start you off:

- Everyone has the right to voice their own opinions
- Everyone has the right to be listened to with respect
- Everyone has the right to be treated on an equal basis
- No bullying or threatening behaviour
- No making fun of other people

Add any more that your Forum feel are necessary.

16. Getting Your Message Across

Effective speaking

As an active member of your Club Youth Forum you will inevitably do a fair amount of speaking in front of others. There will be occasions when you will want to make a particular point, raise an important issue, or propose a course of action. If you can present yourself and your views with confidence you are much more likely to get your message across. You are also much less likely to have those dreaded nerves if you plan your public speaking by following this step - by - step checklist.

1. The purpose of the speech

Is it to give background?
Is it to give detailed information?
Is it to put forward a new point of view?
Is it to teach a particular skill?
Is it to outline a proposed course of action?

2. The audience

Will they be interested and friendly? How much do they know already? How fast can they take things in?

3. The time allocated

How much time do I have to make my point ?

4. The subject matter

What should I include?
How much must I tell them?

When you have answered these questions you need to collect and arrange your material into

- **Introduction**
- **Main theme**
- **Conclusions**

You can then think about your presentation along these lines:

Introduction: Get them interested! How?

- Make it important for them personally
- Arouse their curiosity by asking a question
- Make a statement about the most important aspect of the subject
- Show some enthusiasm!

Main theme:

- Know it so well that the audience can follow you
- If it's complicated, offer audience 'support' (e.g. "I have four main points to make", etc.)
- Put your points in order, remembering there is a limit to what an audience can take in.

Conclusion:

- Re-state the main points; do not worry about repeating yourself
- Keep it crisp, clear and positive- this is what the audience will take away with them

If you remember the famous formula for successful speeches...

**"Tell'em what you're going to tell'em;
Tell'em;
Tell'em what you've told'em"**

you won't go far wrong!

5. Putting it all together

When you have decided what you want to say and how you want to say it, here are some final 'points you may want to consider:

- Is there a clear pattern?
- Are my ideas in the right order? i
- Does it sound natural? !
- Does it fall within the time allotted? I
- How should it be written out?
- (In full, on small cards, on 'cue' cards)