

## **IS LEADING YOUTH RIGHT FOR YOU?**

Critical to involving youth in your community is the attitude you have. Seeing young people as an important resource, valuing their abilities, and listening to their ideas opens doors for them to participate. As a leader in your community, you will have opportunities to include youth. Seeing young people as a significant constituency and community participants enriches all.

### **Do you want to work directly with youth?**

Do you wonder about working with youth? Do you worry that you might not be capable of dealing with the many challenges they present? When considering working with youth, here are a few things to ask yourself:

- Do you like and respect young people? Although this seems a simple question, answering it honestly is key to your success in this line of work.
- What about young people do you like? Think about the qualities you notice in youth around you or that you can identify.
- Do you like learning from youth? Are you open to new ideas and eager to think differently?
- Do you gain energy from the energy of young people? Teenagers are active and inquisitive. Does this energize you or aggravate you?
- Do you remember your adolescence? What was it like for you? What was it like for your friends? Remembering your own experiences and those of your friends will help you relate to the experiences of the youth you work with.
- Are you patient? Teenagers require a lot of patience!

## **Would you rather support youth and their work?**

Many community leaders prefer to support youth work than work directly with youth. What are signs that you might not be the right person to work directly with youth?

- Do you need personal validation from young people? They are usually more focused on themselves than on you, and your role is to be there for them. If you want to be liked by youth, perhaps working directly with them isn't as fulfilling as helping those who do.
- Do you prefer to be directive and in control? Teenagers need to be taught and encouraged to take control themselves, and if letting go of control might be hard for you, it may be better not to work directly with adolescents.
- Do you find yourself easily drawn into power struggles with youth? Getting into "win-lose" situations is frustrating for everyone involved.
- Do you like situations to be highly organized? As young people learn to take responsibility, some chaos usually occurs; helpers need to have tolerance for disorganization.
- Do you need quite a bit of time to build trust with others? Youth need to know that you trust them until or unless they give you reasons not to trust them.
- Do you prefer adult conversation? Talking with youth often entails more listening than dialog, and often it is imperative that you hold your tongue.