

Springboard: A hands-on guide to developing youth friendly centres



Inside this guide ...

Insight

Setting the scene ... building a firm foundation 3

Inspiration

Back to basics ... building up a rationale 5

Involvement

Identifying key stakeholders ... building up community participation and support 10

Implementation

Building successful service delivery ... make it happen, make it work 12

Integration

Building momentum ... integrating SRH with recreational activities 14

Impact

Removing barriers to access ... building an entry point for information and services 15

Inclusion

Addressing gender issues... building equality between males and females 17

Interaction

Reaching out ... building services in the heart of the community 18

Innovation

Investing in young people ... building empowerment and participation 19

Information

Time for reflection ... building on experience 20

Imagination

Addressing sustainability ... building blocks for the future 21

Appendix 1

Building an accurate picture ... capturing research data 22



This toolkit is part of IPPF's *Inspire* pack, which offers standards, guidelines and self-assessment tools on a variety of strategies and activities that contribute to rights-based and comprehensive sexual and reproductive health programming for young people.

Insight

Setting the scene ...

building a firm foundation



IPPF/Chloe Hall, Mauritania

Building on theory, research and practice

In 2002, the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) began a research project – the Youth Centre Study – which aimed to identify, document and disseminate the best practices and lessons learned from youth centre projects in Botswana, Burkina Faso and Ghana.¹ Using data collected through regular monitoring and evaluation, as well as in-depth qualitative data, this study has provided a great deal of insight into how youth centres are viewed by the young people who constitute the target population of the centres and the communities in which they are located. The study also explored challenges such as how to achieve balanced use of services, how to meet the needs of young people and how to foster youth participation.

The existence of a variety of youth centre projects among Member Associations means that IPPF is uniquely placed to examine the impact and efficacy of the youth centre model. Findings from the study also give IPPF the opportunity to contribute to the global debate on this issue and to examine some current controversies in the sexual and reproductive health (SRH) sector about the value of youth centres.

What is a youth centre?

A youth centre is a youth friendly place or venue which aims to serve a specific group of young people. Young people can go to the centre to access information and services which address their needs and wants, including sexual and reproductive health needs as well as other needs, such as life skills and recreational activities. There are many components of a youth friendly service and the lesson learned from successful services is that with the right attitude and understanding of young people's sexuality and sexual and reproductive rights, high quality youth friendly services can indeed be provided.

SRH services provided in youth centres should be youth friendly and therefore be based on a comprehensive understanding of what young people in that particular community want and not just what providers believe they need: in other words, respectful of the realities of young people's diverse sexual and reproductive lives; a service that young people trust and feel is there for them and their needs; and supportive of young people's sexuality so that they have a happy, healthy and safe sexual life regardless of gender, sexual orientation, (dis)ability, income level or marital status.

Youth centres provide the relevant combination of the following services and activities:

SRH-related activities

- SRH counselling
- contraceptive provision (including emergency contraception)
- sexually transmitted infection/HIV prevention, counselling, treatment and care
- HIV testing
- pregnancy testing
- sexual abuse counselling
- (sexual) relationship counselling
- safe abortion and/or abortion-related services

¹ The full report *Youth Centres: A Relevant and Effective Model for Meeting the SRH Needs of Young People?* by Ceinwen Giles is available on request from IPPF.



- information, education and communication activities, and behavioural change communication activities such as quizzes, debates and workshops

Non-SRH activities

- indoor and outdoor games
- library
- Internet facility
- snack shop
- training in life skills
- training in vocational skills
- career development activities
- music and film shows
- festivals
- treatment for minor ailments

A youth centre can be a static or mobile building, big or small, separate or part of another venue of the Member Association.

Young people should have ownership over the centre and should be involved at all levels of decision making, implementation and monitoring activities.

Although youth centres have the potential to meet a wide range of needs, they should not be considered a panacea for the provision of sexual and reproductive health services and information to young people. Instead youth centres should be viewed as one of many possible programme responses to adolescent sexual and reproductive health issues.

Data from the three countries included in this study indicate that youth centres are highly valued by young people who feel that the centres are able to meet their recreational as well as sexual and reproductive health needs. Young people see youth centres as key catalysts for change which have facilitated an increase in the availability of SRH information and services. These services and information have brought about a better understanding of sexual and reproductive health issues – such as protection against sexually transmitted infections, HIV/AIDS and unwanted pregnancy – as well as changes in behaviour. Youth centre users noted that the centres increased both their knowledge of, and access to, contraceptives and condoms.

The underpinning strategic framework

IPPF's underpinning strategic framework includes the goal of making sure that all adolescents and young people are aware of their sexual and reproductive rights, are empowered to make informed choices and decisions about their sexual and reproductive health, and are able to act on them.

Underlying all of IPPF's work is a rights-based approach which seeks to strengthen the commitment to and support for sexual and reproductive health and rights and the needs of young people, and promotes the participation of young people to identify, develop and manage the programmes that affect them.

A hands-on guide for building up youth friendly centres

These guidelines aim to offer a set of practical suggestions, building on the results of the Youth Centre Study. In particular, they give:

- practical ideas and suggestions for staff and the organization about the kind of programme activities which can contribute to high quality and effective sexual and reproductive health youth centres
- a clear idea of what staffing, programmatic and policy issues need to be addressed – and how – in designing and improving youth centres, addressing the specific sexual and reproductive health needs of young people who are vulnerable and under-served

- recommendations and practical tips on how the youth centre can be linked with other activities for young people and the community at large

These guidelines have been designed for IPPF's Member Associations and other organizations that are planning to get involved in developing a youth centre, as well as those who want to improve and enhance their current youth centre activities.

IPPF hopes that by highlighting the strengths and weaknesses, as well as the lessons learned from existing youth centre models, others in the sexual and reproductive health field will be energized and enabled to replicate the successful aspects of the projects while also viewing youth centres within the broader context of community acceptance of, and advocacy for, the sexual and reproductive health and rights of young people.

What next?

Having completed your initial fact-finding through the experience of other organizations and research studies, you are now ready to move onto the next step – to develop a rationale for having a youth centre ...

Inspiration

Back to basics ... building up a rationale

Laying the foundations: strategic thinking and planning

Youth centres can be an excellent and effective way to provide sexual and reproductive health information and services to young people.

Firstly, however, there are several questions that an organization must ask itself. These relate to:

- the target group (age, gender, sexuality, HIV status, economic status and so on)
- the needs of the target group
- the ability of the organization to develop youth friendly programmes which meet those needs
- the resources available

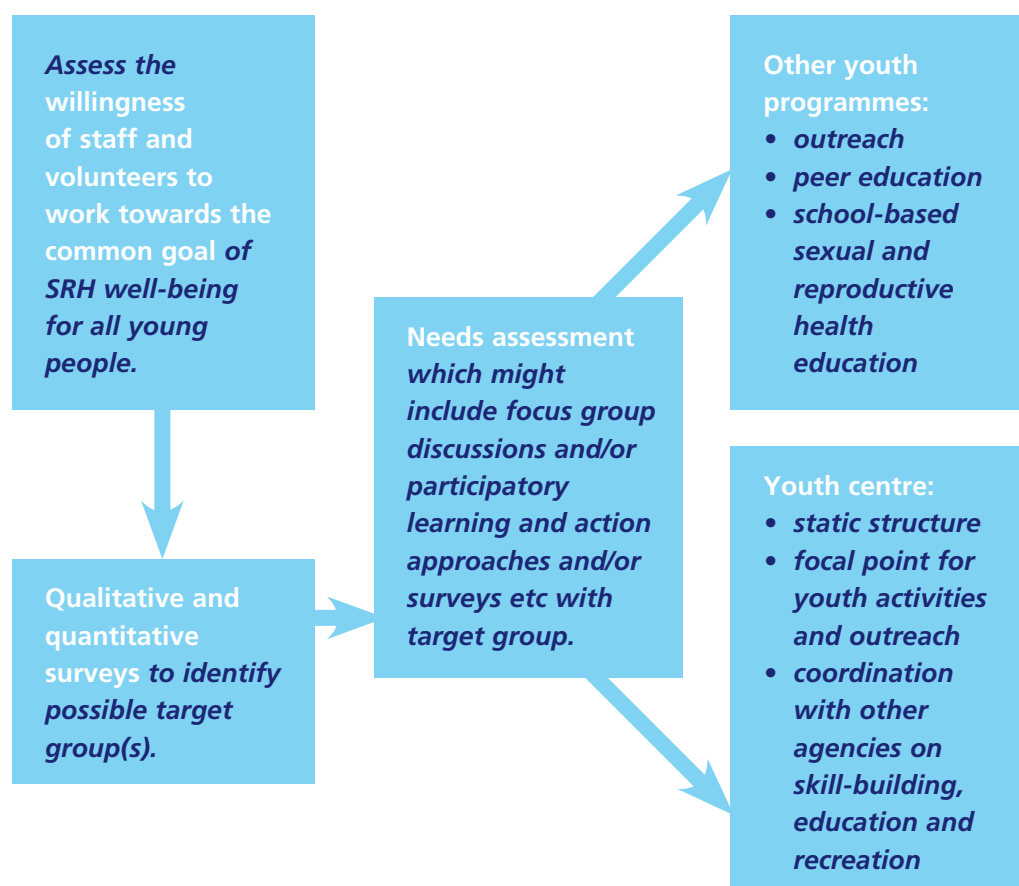
This rationale can be summarized as part of a flow chart for broader youth programming which aims to identify whether or not a youth centre is the most appropriate response to the needs of the target group. (See page 6.)

Youth centres as catalysts for change

Rather than an end in themselves, youth centres should be viewed as a catalyst for change.

At the **micro (youth) level**, if they are developed in partnership with young people, youth centres can be a useful way to provide young people with SRH information and services as well as providing them with a space to develop broader life skills. Youth participation should be considered non-negotiable – with young people viewed as equal partners in developing the centre, its activities and its management.

At the **mezzo (community) level**, youth centres present an important opportunity to facilitate community change and to open a dialogue within the community on adolescent SRH issues. A number of projects have demonstrated that wide-scale community change and acceptance of young people's SRH wants and needs is possible when parents and community and religious leaders are trained on



youth SRH and enabled to support youth programmes. Moreover, it is becoming increasingly apparent that service uptake by young people is stimulated more by community acceptance of young people's needs in relation to sexual and reproductive health and rights than by creating new youth services.

At the **macro (national and/or political) level**, youth centres should be seen as an important advocacy tool which can be used by organizations and communities to lobby for change. A successful youth centre – which engages young people and their communities in young people's sexual and reproductive health and rights – provides an ideal platform from which to advocate for the improvement of national youth policies and for the inclusion of young people's wants and needs in health service delivery policies and guidelines. Youth centres can also provide a place from which new and innovative policies and practices can be implemented, with feedback provided to relevant policy makers and practitioners in the SRH field.

Strengths of the youth centre model ... when it can work

Safe, friendly, available and accessible

Youth centres can offer an effective strategy to provide young people with youth friendly SRH information in a private and safe space, and increase discussion on SRH issues within communities.

If youth centres are perceived as friendly places, through which young people can access SRH information and services, they will act as key agents for change within the community. Improved knowledge, together with better access to condoms and contraceptives, is likely to lead to a decrease in rates of sexually transmitted infections, teenage pregnancy and abortion.

The availability of information and organized communication activities encourages young people to speak more openly about SRH issues, consider testing for HIV/AIDS and increase their use of condoms.

Youth centres should meet expressed wants and needs: young people often have few other options for recreation and affordable clinic services.

Action Recruit staff who demonstrate a commitment to young people's sexual and reproductive health issues.

Action Work with young men and women to make sure that they have equal access to clinical and non-clinical services; this may mean doing research into the differing needs of males and females.

Mirroring young people's needs

Youth centres can be a valuable resource for young people and communities, and provide a 'second home' where young people can relax, feel safe and have fun.

Youth centres vary widely in terms of target group, size, types of activities and the mechanisms developed for fostering youth participation. However, centres are greatly valued by young people and are perceived to play an important role, not only in providing sexual and reproductive health information and services, but also in providing a space to enjoy recreational activities and interact with other people their own age.

Youth centre services can be classified into two broad categories – behaviour change communication activities and clinical service delivery:

- behaviour change communication activities may include non-clinical services such as individual and group counselling, debates, lectures, film shows, quizzes and drama
- the service delivery component may include regular and emergency contraception, diagnosis and treatment for sexually transmitted infections and reproductive tract infections, pregnancy tests, cervical smears, antenatal care, abortion-related services and treatment of minor ailments

Youth centre programmes can meet other non-SRH needs: for example, relaxation and entertainment, meeting new friends, increasing community cohesion and developing useful skills. These needs are met through providing services such as a library where young people can study, training in life skills, a computer centre for recreation and learning computer skills, open areas and space to just hang out or play indoor games, outdoor space for physical games and small snack shops selling food.

Recreational activities are often rated highly by users who feel that youth centres provide a unique space within the community for them to gather, play games and 'avoid bad friends'. Youth centre libraries are also greatly appreciated for their quiet environment with access to books which would otherwise be unavailable. Libraries may also be useful in some areas because the electricity at the centre means that young people can study at night.

Action Research is needed to gain insight, not only into the wants and needs of young people, but also in understanding which people and institutions they believe can help them attain their goals – and the barriers they face in trying to access them.

Reshaping knowledge, attitudes and behaviour

Youth centres have an important role to play in relation to knowledge, attitudes and behaviour among young people and communities. These include changes in SRH-related knowledge and changes in behaviour. Youth centres and their outreach programmes can act as major catalysts for change.

While some young people may have some knowledge on sexual and reproductive health issues, gaining even more knowledge is a concern for most young people. This includes topics such as reliable information about contraception, HIV/AIDS, symptoms of sexually transmitted infections, and how condoms help to prevent transmission of HIV and sexually transmitted infections.

Youth centre programmes and services can motivate young people to use condoms and other contraceptives more consistently, practise dual protection, and empower young men and young women to feel less embarrassed about carrying condoms.

When young people gain more knowledge about the 'reality' of HIV, this often leads to a positive change in their behaviour towards people living with HIV/AIDS and a corresponding decrease in prejudice and discrimination.

Education activities can raise awareness of the consequences of teenage pregnancy, especially in relation to female school drop-outs.

Youth centre activities can enable boys and girls to develop strong and respectful friendships and can decrease shyness among young people when discussing SRH issues.

Action Consider why more males than females pick up condoms from youth centre clinics.

Forging relationships through advocacy

Youth centres can provide a platform to advocate at policy level for the provision of SRH information and services to young people and their inclusion in policies and government programmes.

Youth centres can be viewed as an advocacy tool because they can serve as a model of how to provide services; how to work and talk with young people; and can demonstrate, in a real and tangible way, how young people can be advocates.

Action Make sure that structures to facilitate youth participation are in place before the programme gets started and make sure that young people are aware of how they can participate in these structures.

Added value of collaborative partnerships

Youth centres can provide the infrastructure and a base where other projects can be located, and where innovative ideas can be tested and shared with other partners.

Partnerships with other governmental and non-governmental organizations engaged in recreational programmes, health care provision, vocational training and young people's SRH may allow for reduced expenditure through cost and activity sharing as well as sharing space.

Weaknesses and limitations ... when it doesn't work

Meeting challenges with innovation

Youth centres can't reach everyone – information and service provision work best when they are targeted at specific groups. No one youth centre can cater for both sexes, all ages and all groups with specific needs (such as vulnerable groups).

The youth centre approach does have its weaknesses but many of the difficulties could be resolved with better research and programme planning. For example, youth centres can't reach everyone, particularly as what attracts one group may put another group off. Therefore, knowing that information and service provision work best when they are targeted at specific groups, participatory needs assessments should be used to ensure that the right young people are reached with the right services.

Moreover, while males tend to dominate recreational activities, not all youth centre programmes are utilized by boys. All-female recreation activities can be popular and girls may, for instance, be very interested in learning more about the games available. So, rather than dismissing the youth centre approach as female unfriendly, more thought needs to go into understanding the recreational needs of females and developing activities that meet those needs.

Age also plays a key role in influencing patterns of use in youth centres. Research suggests that many youth centre users are often in their twenties and not in their early teens. Exploring means of attracting the youngest of the young can be a useful strategy in this case.

Action Carry out in-depth research into possible target groups and how they might be reached.

Action Work with the selected target group to identify whether a youth centre is the best way to meet their needs.

Action Work with young people to develop programmes that target their needs and are appropriate for their age group. This may mean developing several different programmes at the same time.

Action Ensure that girls have access to recreational activities – and that they are empowered to participate.

Action Establish both qualitative and quantitative baseline indicators to help with programme planning, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation.



IPPF/Chloe Hall, Denmark

Potential agent for change

Youth centres won't automatically increase uptake of sexual and reproductive health services just because people like the recreational activities.

Youth centres can be expensive to build and maintain. So, given the rather limited opportunities for cost recovery, organizations need to expand their understanding of how youth centres can be developed and what they can achieve. Indeed, these centres should be viewed as catalysts for change at three levels: micro (the youth population), mezzo (the community at large) and macro (the broader, national, level).

Community commitment

Youth centres can't convince everyone in communities that addressing the sexual and reproductive health needs of young people is a good thing – there will always be an ongoing need for advocacy.

Youth centres cannot be successful or sustainable without a strong commitment from the community and it is vital that any organization seeking to establish a youth centre focuses its energies not only on young people, but on the community in which they live.

Increased availability of SRH information and services is not always viewed positively and many people may blame a perceived increase in rates of sexual activity on the increased availability of information.

While these perceptions certainly provide pause for thought, it is vital to note that SRH information and services have the potential to lower rates of sexually transmitted infections, unwanted pregnancy and unsafe abortion.

Action Baseline and endline data on rates of sexual activity can be used to determine whether or not there has been an absolute increase in rates of sexual activity or whether the increased availability of services and information has made people more aware of SRH issues and thus more willing to discuss them – something which might lead to the perception that there are higher rates of sexual activity than there were previously.

Reaching out

Youth centres won't be used just because they exist. SRH and recreational activities need to be marketed in surrounding communities.

Don't assume that making services available will mean that people will use them. All services and activities – both clinical and non-clinical – need to be explained in clear language and publicized in places where young people hang out.



Action Have opening hours that meet the needs of target groups – for example, opening during school hours is not appropriate if most of the targeted young people attend school during the day.

In the heart of the community

Youth centres need a reasonably sized local population to be worth it; for example, a city or small town. A small or dispersed population may not be suitable for a youth centre project.

If a youth centre aims not only to provide sexual and reproductive health information and services, but also to engage parents and community members in SRH issues and building skills among young people, a large multi-purpose centre may not be necessary. Smaller, simpler structures may function as focal points for youth activities and a platform from which to launch outreach activities, such as mobile clinics.

It may not be necessary for youth centres to continue indefinitely and a time-bound youth centre model may indeed be more appropriate if concrete outcomes and goals are established at the outset. Additionally, successfully engaging communities in setting up and managing youth centres from the very beginning may mean that the communities are more willing to take them over when donor funding ends.

Action Think about the cost and availability of transport if the youth centre is located on the outskirts of a town or village. Don't build a youth centre in a difficult-to-reach location.

What next?

At this stage your initial thinking is complete. You have weighed up the pros and cons, and the strengths and weaknesses of the youth centre model. The next step is to put theory to the test, and put research into practice ...

Involvement

Identifying key stakeholders ...

building up community participation and support

Building alliances: message received, and understood

A number of factors need to be considered before a youth centre can succeed in meeting the needs and wants of young people.

The first factor is to be aware that parents, and community and religious groups are key to the success of youth centres and their programmes. These groups can work both as enabling and inhibiting factors for young people's participation and attendance, so structures to encourage support should be built in from the outset. In doing this it is crucial that the values of the organization which include the protection and promotion of adolescent sexual and reproductive health rights are not compromised.

Young people often face resistance from their parents who may worry about the type of information they receive at youth centres and who may be struggling with the notion that their children have sexual and reproductive health needs. Many parents and community members, for example, may believe that the programme is 'spoiling the children' by 'encouraging' them to have sex.

However, the investment in the local community that is symbolized by the youth centre is often greatly appreciated. Parents, teachers, health workers and community leaders may be extremely

supportive of efforts to contribute to youth development in the areas of education or training, health and recreation. Sexual and reproductive health problems such as teenage pregnancy, unsafe abortion and HIV/AIDS are also often key priorities for communities as well as non-governmental organizations. Developing strong and positive links with communities will be successful where they encourage discussion on these common concerns, listen to and address community needs, and advocate for the sexual and reproductive rights of young people at the same time.

In addition, gender differentials linked to cultural constraints can also limit young women's activities outside the home so there is a need to raise parents' awareness of the youth centre's programmes, so that they will understand their value and allow their daughters to visit the centres.

Ongoing advocacy and dialogue play an important part in generating support, ownership and sustainability for the project.

Shared spirit of cooperation: working hand in hand with young people

The second factor is that youth centres should develop clear ways to enable the participation of young people right from the start. Setting up administrative structures which involve young people is the key to promoting youth participation. This includes structures such as youth advisory boards but could also mean making sure that management committees have a number of key positions designated for young people. This also fosters a shared spirit of cooperation among management, staff and young people.

Young people are more than willing to participate in programme development and management when they are given the opportunity, and when they are treated as equal partners. Attention needs to be given to the full integration of young people into youth programme development if youth centres are to meet the needs of their target groups.

It is not enough, however, simply to establish youth advisory boards – they must be promoted among young people with the benefits of their participation made clear.

Advocacy checklist ... some tips for generating support and ownership

Do

- ✓ Talk to opinion, religious and community leaders and explain the aims and the benefits of the youth centre.
- ✓ Develop partnerships with community groups and recruit those who support young people's sexual and reproductive health programmes to advocate on behalf of the youth centre and, for example, sit on project committees.
- ✓ Establish steering committees that will monitor, advocate on the project and take strategic decisions about the youth centre and ensure that all the different parts of the community are represented.
- ✓ Establish networks of parents, religious leaders and opinion leaders who can support the project through educational and advocacy activities.
- ✓ Encourage supportive community members to work with peer educators to help them deal with community concerns, for example through their attendance at peer education activities or by going directly to community members who have raised issues about the youth centre and discussing their concerns with them.
- ✓ Design activities that encourage communication about sexual and reproductive health in other community forums (such as schools and churches) and between parents and young people.

Don't

- ✗ Don't forget that young people can only get involved in the youth centre if their parents and other adults support it.
- ✗ Don't allow adults to dominate the services. Make it clear that they are primarily for young people and refer as many as possible to adult services in the area. Develop good links with other adult health centres to address barriers to their use by the adult population.
- ✗ Don't treat young people as free labour and use them to fill in for staff shortages without adequate compensation.



Implementation

Building successful service delivery ... make it happen, make it work

Turning ideas into reality: building up services

There are many practical considerations to think about when developing youth friendly services. It can be useful to draw on the experience of other organizations, and to be aware that there are a number of different youth centre models. One size does not fit all.

Take-up of services offered by youth centres can vary by season, gender of clients, age and service offered.

Combining clinical services with recreational activities

Examples from the Youth Centre Study

The youth centres included in this study varied in nature.

In **Ghana**, the Planned Parenthood Association of Ghana runs youth centres in the capital city, Accra, as well as the towns of Sogakope and Mepe. In all three locations purpose-built 'Young and Wise' youth centres were set up as part of a larger project targeting the under-served population in the country's Volta Region. Designed as multi-purpose centres, these youth centres combine clinical services with recreational activities, a library, an Internet café, skills training and audio-visual facilities. Peer educators and staff conduct advocacy and outreach activities. Adidome, the fourth Ghanaian site included in the study, does not have a youth centre but has been the focus of outreach activities with clinical services provided either in the field or through referral to local government health service clinics.

In **Botswana**, the Botswana Family Welfare Association runs youth centres in Kanye and Maun which feature a youth clinic, a small library, counselling services and recreational games. Each centre has small, temporary buildings but makes good use of its outside space for activities, making the centres more cost-effective to establish and maintain. The centres focus on clinical services, and extended outreach activities through peer educators and youth community-based providers. There is a strong focus on HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention.

In **Burkina Faso**, the Association Burkinabè pour le Bien Etre Familial runs youth centres in Ouagadougou and Bobo-Dioulasso. Both centres feature a youth clinic as well as information, education and communication activities, and youth focused activities such as drama and study clubs.

Checklist ... some tips for finding a good location

Do

- ✓ Find somewhere that has good transport links.
- ✓ Find somewhere that is close to where young people live, pass through or go to school on a regular basis.
- ✓ Find somewhere that has some space for indoor and outdoor activities.

Don't

- ✗ Don't have neighbours that don't like noise and constant activity.
- ✗ Don't choose a place where young people will find it difficult or expensive to get to, or where it is unsafe to leave in the evening.
- ✗ Don't build an expensive youth centre where there is a highly dispersed or small population.

Checklist ... some tips for organizing the centre

Do

- ✓ Find out what times young people want to come, and organize opening hours and activities around these.
- ✓ Design the physical layout of the centre to be practical and easy to manage the different activities.
- ✓ Make sure that the clinic has enough space and a relatively private entrance that young people can enter without feeling self-conscious.
- ✓ Employ youth friendly staff. Remember that youth-friendliness isn't about age, it is about attitudes towards young people. Staff should be approachable, respectful, good communicators and non-judgmental.
- ✓ Set aside times to treat male clients and employ male medical staff.
- ✓ Provide staff training on youth issues and give them opportunities to discuss their views and values.
- ✓ Have clear policies on how different ages should be approached, for example that all young people should be given condoms if they request them, regardless of their age or marital status.
- ✓ Ask young people about prices charged to find out what is reasonable.

Don't

- ✗ Don't mix activities that are not compatible, for example one large room containing a library for study (needing quiet) and a space for playing games or watching TV (likely to be noisy).
- ✗ Don't allow staff or volunteers to impose their views on young people: for example "I didn't give him a condom because I didn't think he was responsible enough to use it."
- ✗ Don't allow anything in the youth centre to jeopardize confidentiality of services.
- ✗ Don't charge too high prices for services (recreational or clinical) which might deter some young people from using them.



IPPF/Jenny Matthews, Nepal

Integration

Building momentum ... integrating SRH with recreational activities

Wants, needs, dreams and aspirations

Think about this key issue

The aim of the youth centre is to improve sexual and reproductive health. If it takes a lot of the organization's budget and all of its project staff's time to organize recreational activities – it's not worth it. If sexual and reproductive health can't be integrated into the centre's activities, why do them?

Young people obviously have a large number of wants, needs, dreams and aspirations – some of these relate to SRH and some do not. Young people repeatedly voice their desire to be successful in life. They want to have a good education and see it as a key tool which would enable them to obtain a good job, community respect and the ability to support a family.

Children are a frequently stated desire among young people. In some cases, having children is described as something that would bring community respect and would also enable them to be taken care of in old age.

Good health is also a widely stated aspiration of young people. Perhaps as a result of seeing the devastation which has resulted from HIV/AIDS, young people may be very aware that good health is a prerequisite to attain all other goals.

Desire for information and services

Many young people express a clear desire for more sexual and reproductive health information and services. They identify a wide range of issues including contraception and condoms, teenage pregnancy, abortion, abstinence, prostitution, rape and sexually transmitted infections that they would like information about. They often link unwanted pregnancies with having to drop out of school, or risking infection and death through unsafe abortion.

Communication about sexual and reproductive health is another frequently stated desire. One example is girls aged 10 to 14 years who express their need to communicate with their parents about sexuality and who hope their parents will be 'good listeners'.

Another example is women who want to be able to discuss SRH with their husbands – particularly important as they may need their approval to use contraception. The needs of women aged between 20 and 24 highlight the necessity to develop different programmes for different age groups.

Young people often make links between sexual and reproductive health, education and jobs: women may be less vulnerable to involvement in commercial sex work or exploitative relationships if they are able to obtain an education and work independently outside the home.

Action points ... steps to check out

- ✓ Think about activities and services that young people will enjoy and will meet their needs for education, entertainment and so on. They must also be reasonable in terms of cost and time taken to organize them. Libraries, computer classes, indoor and outdoor sporting activities, music, space to hang out, small shop/kiosk, film shows, careers advice and skills training are all popular.
- **Do** Provide basic computer lessons for those who otherwise wouldn't have access to computers; for example, working with a partner organization to devise a curriculum and exams may be a good option. Such activities help to build skills and self-esteem.

- **Don't** Design a course in computer studies which takes half the project officer's time to administer and examine.
- ✓ Think about the links between SRH and the activities. For example, sport is about being healthy and so is sexual and reproductive health; and films often cover themes that are relevant to SRH such as love and relationships.
- ✓ Plan sexual and reproductive health activities that will fit in with the recreational activities. For example, provide information about SRH during breaks in sporting activities or films, practise using the Internet by looking at SRH sites, require every library user to take one SRH book alongside the others they have chosen, and include SRH topics in curricula for computer or other skills training.
- ✓ Make the links with services; for example, refer to services available, opening times and where they can be found. As well as providing SRH information, hold activities in the clinic to get young people feeling comfortable about going there, and provide condoms in all areas in the youth centre where it is easy for them to be picked up discreetly.



IPPF/Chloe Hall, Ethiopia

Impact

Removing barriers to access ... building an entry point for information and services

Building up a client base: enabling and inhibiting factors

Young people are not a homogeneous group but a diverse population. Each young person has a unique social, cultural and economic identity that impacts on their sexual and reproductive well-being. It is crucial that programmes address the realities in the lives of vulnerable and marginalized young people. Young people living in poverty remain hugely under-served and identifying effective means of reaching them is of the utmost importance. Vulnerable young people are stigmatized by many factors, including their age, sexual orientation and HIV status. This can damage their self-esteem and result in sexual risk-taking.

The relatively low cost of services, both clinical and non-clinical, the belief that they can speak confidentially to a counsellor or nurse, as well as the availability of recreational facilities (in communities which often do not have any other similar facilities) are frequently identified as factors which encourage young people to use youth centres. Services need to be affordable, accessible and acceptable.

At the same time, young people identify a large number of barriers in accessing youth centres, as defined below.

Define the target group

'Youth' is a very general term which encompasses many diverse groups of males and females between 10 and 24 years of age who may be in or out of school, have different income levels, have physical or mental disabilities, be living with HIV/AIDS, and be gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender. Each of these groups will have different needs and wants both in terms of clinical services and the other activities that will attract them to the centre.

Setting up a centre which seeks to meet the needs of all young people runs the risk of failing to meet the needs of any specific group and limiting the number of people that will want to use the centre overall. Activities that are ideal for reaching 20–24-year-old young out-of-school men may



IPPF/Christian Schweiz, Thailand

actively discourage 15–19-year-old disabled women. Confusion among staff, youth volunteers and the community about who the centre is for also makes it harder to reach your real target group.

Define accessibility

Opening hours need to reflect the hours young people have available for recreation. In some areas, this may mean that the centre needs to open on Saturdays if the target group finds it impossible to access the centre during office hours.

Having to pay for services can still be a barrier for some young people, even if the costs are relatively low.

Define logistics

Travel difficulties – both the distance young people have to travel to the centre as well as their inability to secure transport – is another barrier to using youth centres.

Define the opposition

Parents can also act as key barriers. Many young people are barred from going to the centres because their parents do not understand the sorts of programmes on offer and are worried about the information their children might receive.

Additionally, young people may fear that attendance at youth centres will brand them as ‘spoilt’ by the community at large who may view their attendance as a tacit admission of premarital sexual activity.

Having to remain at home to do household chores is another barrier frequently cited.

Define young people’s agenda

Some young people may not feel comfortable accessing services through a youth centre – or may not see the need for one. It is therefore vital to work in consultation with them to understand the types of services they want and the way in which they want them to be delivered.

Action points ... steps to check out

- ✓ Be clear about the primary target group the organization wants to reach, for example 15–24-year-old out-of-school youth, and design programme activities around them.
- ✓ Identify groups that are not using the services that the organization wants to target, for example 10–14-year-olds.
- ✓ Survey them to find out what barriers there are to their attendance, for example are older males bullying or intimidating younger adolescents at the centres, or are women finding it difficult to integrate with other centre users, many of whom may be male?
- ✓ Survey them to find out what activities they would like to do, for example somewhere quiet to do their homework.
- ✓ Give the group its own time and space at the youth centre, for example have specific sessions such as after-school homework clubs in the library that are aimed and marketed just at them.

Inclusion

Addressing gender issues ...

building equality between males and females

Gender equity: a crucial component

Youth centres provide youth friendly spaces where young people can relax and socialize, which might give them more opportunity to interact with their peers of the opposite sex. This can be a very good thing as it can improve communication between the genders and increase their ability to discuss SRH issues.

Think about these key issues

It is vital to create an environment that encourages respect between the sexes and is safe and comfortable for both young men and young women. Where centres are dominated by young men and/or are seen as places for young men to find girlfriends, this will be intimidating to young women and act as a barrier to their attendance.

There are several practical steps that can address this issue. These activities aim to empower young women and improve their communication with young men. It is also important that project staff and youth volunteers are made aware of this potential problem and are given guidance about how to deal with it.

Action Youth centre activities can be designed and implemented just for young women. For example, having girls-only clubs and girls-only days encourages girls to see the youth centre as 'their' space and feel comfortable at other times when young men are around.

Action Education activities should also deal with these gender issues. In Ghana, for example, this was done by addressing the topic of 'boy/girl relationships'. This can cover what it means to have a boyfriend or girlfriend, how couples communicate with each other and discuss their relationship and sex. A range of educational activities should be included to allow young people to discuss potentially embarrassing issues both in single sex groups and, when they are more confident, with each other.

Action Make sure that there is always some kind of supervision at the youth centre by a staff member or a responsible young person to intervene if they see situations where young men are acting in an intimidating way.

Break out of the gender stereotype

Think about how the activities of the centre are going to reinforce or address gender stereotypes. If sewing is provided as an activity for the girls and computer classes for the boys this will reinforce gender norms. Sometimes this isn't what young people want – girls often want to learn computing too. Use events and opportunities at the centre to tackle gender issues. For example, hold a women's event where female role models come to talk to the young women at the centre and where the issues are then aired and debated. The role of the young men is to look after the guests for the day, taking on the role of serving drinks and food, and showing people round the centre.

Evidence shows that young men dominate the purchase of condoms. This is not a bad thing in itself but why do young women feel that they can't buy, carry and suggest condom use? This should be a specific topic for discussions and education sessions with young people.

Feedback from those who run youth centres indicates that, generally speaking, young men use the recreational activities whereas young women use the clinical services. Try targeting specific activities at the different groups. For example, one idea to consider is having girls clubs and girls days at the youth centre at particular times when girls know they won't have to compete with boys for sports equipment or computers and so on. This gender split in use of activities and services should not be viewed as an argument against youth centres in general; rather, it provides a challenge for organizations to consider who they are targeting, and why.

Action points ... steps to check out

- ✓ Why do so many young women not come for the recreational activities – is there a need to talk to their parents to encourage them to come?
- ✓ Make sure that girls know how to play the games on offer. Recreation facilities may be male dominated, in part, because girls are not familiar with the games, not because they lack interest in the games.
- ✓ Look at why young men don't generally use the clinical services – are they put off by having a female service provider? Is it possible to have a sessional member of staff to come in and provide 'well man' clinics? Another strategy is to encourage girls to attend consultations together with their partners if they choose to.

Interaction

Reaching out ... building services in the heart of the community

Meeting the needs of the under-served

Rather than seeing youth centres as a panacea for providing SRH information and services to young people, it is useful to view them as one of many possible programme responses to the wants and needs of young people. These responses might include youth centres, but could also include one or more of the following outreach services:

- youth friendly mobile clinics or health workers
- a large network of peer educators
- integrated sexuality education programmes with links to schools and hospitals
- integrated life skills and SRH programmes

Action points ... steps to check out

Do

- ✓ Create a strong network of peer educators in the community that can refer young people to the centre, raise awareness about it, and provide information and contraceptives to those who can't access it.
- ✓ Identify where the young people to be targeted hang out and target those places with SRH information and publicity about the youth centre. For example, for out-of-school young people, how about reaching them through employers via apprentice schemes?
- ✓ Build good links between the centre and the community, and between the centre and outreach work.

Innovation

Investing in young people ... building empowerment and participation



Participation: the driving force for young people

Young people have clear ideas of the benefits of participation for them as well as for the youth centre programmes.

For example, young people say that their participation makes them feel as though they are a part of the organization and that it has increased their knowledge on sexual and reproductive health issues. They also note that youth participation can bring about benefits at the community level as it enables more and younger people to be educated on SRH issues.

Sharing a common purpose

Young people are also aware of a number of barriers which inhibit their participation. A significant barrier to participation noted by young people is an administrative structure which does not encourage them to be active in programme management. Young people noted that this could be overcome by integrating youth into the management system, consulting youth leaders and facilitators before decisions are made, and diversifying the activities on offer at the centre.

Discussions on the level of participation by young people reveal that while there is a moderate level of satisfaction, young people often feel that they are not active participants in running the centres or developing its activities. Additionally, some young people report being used as staff when there are personnel shortages.

Participation checklist ... some tips for involving young people in decision making

Do

- ✓ Set up a management committee which involves young people in leading the development and implementation of the youth centre.
- ✓ Make the role of committees very clear and market them to young people, encouraging representation from different groups that attend the centre (boys/girls, different ages, different geographical locations and so on).
- ✓ Have written job descriptions for different youth volunteer roles, such as peer educator, supervisor of activities (for example librarian) and committee members.
- ✓ Help young people to use their volunteer experiences to get paid employment by providing references, certificates (for example from training) and by encouraging their employment at the Member Association or organization where this is possible. The latter could be casual or permanent work.
- ✓ Provide support and incentives for volunteers, for example small gifts or prizes for good performance, covering food and transport costs (or providing bicycles), arrange regular meetings, and encourage volunteers to discuss their problems and solutions with each other.
- ✓ Set up systems to continually encourage new young people to get involved, for example information sessions in communities and schools about becoming a peer educator.



IPPF/Pedro Meyer, Brazil

Don't

- ✓ Don't invite suggestions and comments and then not provide feedback. Young people want to be taken seriously. If their suggestion cannot be implemented, go back and discuss it with them and see if there is anything else that can be done, for example fundraising to enable an activity to happen.
- ✓ Don't assume that because young people are peer educators that they are really participating – young people need to be involved in decision making too.
- ✓ Don't allow one group of young people (for example all friends or all from the same background) to dominate the running of the centre as this is likely to discourage new people from coming as they might not feel welcome and included.
- ✓ Don't use young people as unpaid workers when there are shortages of staff.

Defining their own agenda**Example from the Youth Centre Study**

In Ghana, a youth advisory board was set up in each of the centres in Accra, Mepe and Sogakope. These committees, which were made up of young people, were responsible for planning and managing the youth centre activities aimed at increasing utilization of the centre by young people.

Youth advisory board members were also present on other committees. They made up 50 per cent of the total membership of local steering committees which were site-specific committees responsible for overseeing and supporting project implementation and community level advocacy. Young people were also represented on district project steering committees (the highest decision making body) in Mepe and Sogakope, and were in charge of monitoring, advocacy and strategic planning. Finally, the clinic management committees, which provide advice on managing the youth centre clinics, also had a number of young people as representatives.

Information

Time for reflection ... building on experience

Reflection, insight and fine-tuning

Monitoring the progress of the youth centre is vital. This allows organizations to check whether objectives are being met, and that the services still meet the needs of young people.

It also allows for adjustments to be made to the facilities and services, and offers a chance for reflection, insight and fine-tuning. In addition, monitoring is important for organizational accountability, and to maintain the credibility and integrity of services. Young people should be involved in data collection and in analyzing the results.

Monitoring checklist ... some tips for monitoring the progress of the youth centre**Do**

- ✓ Maintain a simple data collection system to monitor who is using the different activities, for example by age and gender.
- ✓ Consider having attendance sheets in the different parts of the centre (library, main space, outdoor games) where young people tick boxes each time they come.

- ✓ Gather the information together regularly (weekly or monthly) and compare the trends over time. Discuss the results at meetings of staff and youth volunteers.
- ✓ Have a suggestion box for young people to make comments, regularly take out the suggestions, act on them and provide feedback to young people.
- ✓ Do occasional surveys to ask more about the quality of the services, and what young people like and don't like. Include groups of young people who don't use the centre to find out why they don't.

Don't

- ✗ Don't collect information in a way that reduces privacy and confidentiality. For example, don't record the names of people who ask for condoms.
- ✗ Don't collect data for the sake of it: only collect data which are useful and which tell you how the centre is performing.

Imagination

Addressing sustainability ...

building blocks for the future

Sustainability checklist ... some tips for maximizing consolidation and continuity

Do

- ✓ Investigate ways to cover the one-off cost of obtaining land and buildings, for example donation of land or other resources from the community, local authorities or government.
- ✓ Look at low-cost options for creating space, for example using outside space for most activities (where the climate allows) with cheap, mobile structures for clinical services and libraries.
- ✓ Make small charges for activities or services that can be used to cover maintenance and repair of games and sports equipment.
- ✓ Encourage young people to get involved in resource mobilization by coming up with ideas for sub-projects and specific activities to be funded, developing proposals and approaching small scale funders such as local businesses.
- ✓ Encourage real ownership by the community which might result in allocation of some resources to the project (for example time, providing refreshments for meetings).

Don't

- ✗ Don't disrupt the main aims of the youth centre in order to increase sustainability, for example hiring out the main spaces of the youth centre to other organizations at times when young people want to use them.
- ✗ Don't start expensive activities that will have to end when project funding comes to an end.
- ✗ Don't over estimate the amount of money that can be generated through charges for services. Such income can make a valuable contribution but experience shows that it will never cover the full costs of running the centre.

Appendix 1

Building an accurate picture ... capturing research data

Turning theory into practice: blueprint for success

The Youth Centre Study primarily used participatory learning and action approaches to examine the strengths and weaknesses of the youth centres involved in the study as well as the changes which had occurred over time in the target communities.

Participatory approaches offer a creative way to investigate issues which are important to people and communities – and to plan, implement and evaluate development activities. The common theme is to promote interactive learning, shared knowledge and analysis which is flexible, yet structured. Participatory learning and action approaches allow for activities to be organized in such a way that, while they have structure, they are also fluid enough to allow for emerging ideas or theories to be captured.

Data can be triangulated by collecting service statistics from youth centres and clinics, as well as comparing qualitative data with quantitative data collected through anonymous surveys on sexual behaviour. In addition, baseline and endline data can be used to corroborate some of the qualitative data collected.

Action

Using the above research methodologies, adapt the following objectives as a framework for your research.²

Building the case

- Assess the changes and perceptions of change in relation to sexual and reproductive health knowledge, attitudes and behaviour among young people and communities in the target area and the role of the youth centre in that change.
- Assess the relevance of the youth centre model in meeting the sexual and reproductive health needs of young people in the context of each Member Association or organization.
- Establish patterns of youth centre use.
- Assess the performance of youth centre programmes in improving the availability of and accessibility to quality gender sensitive and youth friendly SRH information and services.
- Assess the level of youth and other community participation in and support for the youth centres.
- Analyze the costs and benefits of different youth centre models and components.
- Assess the experience of and potential for sustainability.

² As part of IPPF's Youth Centre Study, a full set of guidelines and participatory tools were developed to collect and analyze data about youth centres. If you are interested in implementing something similar, these documents are available from IPPF on request.

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Springboard: A hands-on guide to developing youth friendly centres

IPPF is a global service provider and a leading advocate of sexual and reproductive health and rights for all. We are a worldwide movement of national organizations working with and for communities and individuals.

The existence of a variety of youth centre projects among Member Associations means that IPPF is uniquely placed to examine the impact and efficacy of the youth centre model. Findings from an IPPF study contribute to the global debate on this issue and examine some current controversies in the sexual and reproductive health sector about the value of youth centres.

These guidelines aim to offer a set of practical ideas and suggestions for staff and the organization about the kind of programme activities which can contribute to high quality and effective sexual and reproductive health youth centres. They also give a clear idea of what staff, programme and policy issues need to be addressed – and how – in designing and improving youth centres, addressing the specific sexual and reproductive health needs of young people who are vulnerable and under-served. The guide also offers recommendations and practical tips on how the youth centre can be linked with other activities for young people and the community at large.

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