

# YouthConnect!

A Youth-Led Community Service Initiative

## Peer Education

*As a supplemental resource to PASE's YouthConnect! Manual for Youth-Led Community Service, we offer a series of Profiles on Youth-Led Community Service Projects. The local projects profiled were planned, executed and documented by the staff and young people involved with the YouthConnect! Initiative in 2003-2004. The MONY Foundation and the AOL-Time Warner Foundation supported this collaborative initiative.*

*The PASE Profiles of Youth-Led Community Service Series provides concrete examples of youth-led projects in seven different categories: Intergenerational Service, Youth Councils, Environmental Stewardship, Peer Education, Arts- and Media-Based Service, Advocacy, and Service Learning. Of course, there are other categories of community service but these have been selected to illustrate to the reader the breadth and scope of this youth development modality.*



P A S E



PARTNERSHIP FOR AFTER SCHOOL EDUCATION

project profiles

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*“While the products [educational workshops] are important, a holistic youth development philosophy reminds us that process is equally important. We are leading our youth through activities and lessons related to communication/public speaking, curriculum development, community outreach, cultural literacy, self-esteem, socio-political issues, and critical thinking.”*

*--Shreya Janssens-Sannon, Program Coordinator  
South Asian Youth Action (SAYA!)*

## **WHAT IS PEER EDUCATION?**

Peer Education means youth teach youth about youth-relevant issues using youth-friendly methods. A contemporary modality, Peer Education bridges the generational gap that often exists between student and teacher. Peer Education benefits youth because peers share similar problems and points of views and are more apt to listen to each other. A youth from South Asian Youth Action (SAYA!) says Peer Education allows you to “learn from your peers who can see where you’re coming from.”

## **WHY CHOOSE PEER EDUCATION AS A COMMUNITY SERVICE MODALITY?**

Peer Education is a wonderful tool for youth development. It allows youth participation at every level. Youth who work as peer educators gain respect from peers, which increases self-esteem and self-confidence, and they learn invaluable skills such as public speaking.

## **THE FOLLOWING PROJECT PROFILES OFFER CONCRETE ILLUSTRATIONS FOR HOW PEER EDUCATION CAN HELP DEVELOP THESE PARTICULAR DEVELOPMENTAL ASSETS\* AND SKILLS IN YOUTH:**

**Positive Peer Influence:** As peer educators, youth are role models for each other and for workshop participants.

**Planning and Decision Making:** Youth can be involved at every level of the process from identifying the issue they want to address, to creating the workshops, to identifying venues, and delivering the workshop. They learn how to plan ahead and make choices.

**Self-esteem:** Having their own voices heard raises each young person’s self-esteem.

**Youth as Resources:** Youth assume useful roles in the community because as peer educators they are working with other youth to address important issues.

**Communication Skills:** Youth practice writing, debating, facilitation, and public presentation skills. Peer Education can also help youth acquire greater fluency in English and confidence in speaking publicly as English Language Learners.

**Media Literacy:** Youth develop and critique media as part of the process of developing content for their workshops.

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## PROJECT PROFILE CITIZENS FOR NYC'S (CNYC) "OPEN YOUR EYES PROJECT"

### DESCRIPTION:

Youth offered free educational workshops and developed media in an effort to foster relationships among people of many different backgrounds and to spread the message of unity and non-violence to other local youth.

### GOALS:

- 1) To build solidarity between immigrant and non-immigrant youth of New York City by having them identify shared problems
- 2) To educate and empower participants
- 3) To imbue youth with a lasting commitment to social justice

### ACTIVITIES:

The Open Your Eyes initiative began with an application process to recruit participants. Ten young people were chosen to be peer educators. "The fact that the youth vary so widely in age, as well as ethnic, educational, cultural, religious, and residential backgrounds makes our project even stronger than we had hoped," says Sophie Nurani, Assistant Director of Youth Unlimited, CNYC's youth support center.

*We, the members of the Open Your Eyes Project, are youth of different ages, genders, religions, and ethnicities, who are motivated to change negative views about immigrants and reduce general prejudice. We will do this by offering free educational workshops and developing media to spread our message of unity and non-violence to American-born youth living in the diverse communities of New York City. Ultimately, we are working towards a better America, on welcoming people from all places and offering them safe and happy lives.*  
- Open Your Eyes Mission Statement

In the initial phase of the project, youth engaged in research activities to identify issues pertinent to young immigrants in New York City and shared a relevant article at every meeting. The purpose of this was twofold: 1) to ensure that everyone spoke in front of the group, and 2) to accumulate more information about the conditions of immigrants in New York City. The young people used this research to identify communities in which to target their workshops. This process took six weeks, with meetings once a week.

Next, the youth participated in "Training for Trainers," workshops designed to help youth improve the format of the workshops they were developing, and to give them facilitation pointers. Staff made use of pre-existing contacts to identify speakers and collect materials for trainings. Guest trainers from the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and the Asian-American Legal Defense and Education Fund (AALDEF) met with the youth participants to further educate them about civil liberties. Udi Ofer from the ACLU discussed everything from the Patriot Act to the Japanese internment during World War II as examples of how American civil

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liberties have historically been violated. These guest presentations as well as other materials from books and documentaries gave the young people the necessary information to add substantive content to their workshop. The trainings took approximately one month, with the group meeting two times a week for three hours each session.

Youth participants developed post-workshop surveys, creating questions that would yield meaningful results about how the workshops impacted participants. In one of their planning meetings, youth decided that their surveys would not contain hard-to-answer-questions, such as “What did you learn from this workshop?” Instead they decided to focus their questions on specific lessons learned from the workshop, how the workshop changed their peers’ perceptions, and if participants anticipated a change in their own behavior toward immigrants after attending the workshop.

Prior to presenting their workshop, youth learned about different outreach strategies. They were responsible for identifying neighborhoods and choosing agencies to target as recipients of their workshops. After generating a list of agencies, youth created flyers and made phone calls to schedule workshop dates.

Because the youth have no trouble interacting on a professional level, they saw no need to develop a phone script for their outreach efforts. They simply constructed a bulleted checklist of topics to refer to before making the calls. It was decided that workshops should be scheduled during regular meeting hours because those were the times all of the young people had set aside for this program.

The young people enjoyed leading workshops more than could be anticipated. After spending so much time on planning their project, they each felt committed to ensuring that it would be successful. The young people also seemed much less nervous once they were actually presenting to their peers. After each workshop, youth processed informally, making general comments to each other about how each segment had gone. Formal processing took place during normal workshop hours. Dividing into two or three groups, the youth examined the evaluation forms and made a list of changes they thought should be implemented. They also tallied the overall responses, so that they could present their achievements mathematically (e.g., 76% of respondents felt that their knowledge about civil liberties increased greatly.)

## **OUTCOMES:**

The two areas of self-improvement most commonly identified by participants in weekly written evaluation forms were more self-confidence in public speaking and increased knowledge on subject matter (gaining more facts from staff, articles, guest speakers).

Staff observations indicated youth got to know one another well and treated each other with great respect and kindness. By the end of the year, every single member, even the shy ones, participated orally.

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## PROJECT PROFILE

### SOUTH ASIAN YOUTH ACTION'S (SAYA!) "ANTI-BIAS INITIATIVE"

#### DESCRIPTION:

Youth created workshops for their peers with the purpose of spurring public dialogue on bias and racism.

#### GOAL:

1) To raise youths' awareness and ability to use media as a vehicle for public education and social change

#### ACTIVITIES:

In 2001, youth at SAYA! created videos that spoke about their experiences and community concerns post-September 11th. Youth showcased the video, "Arising from 9/11," at numerous venues. Several young people then became enthusiastic about the idea of using the existing videos and other media as the basis for an outreach and educational campaign.

*"Training was relevant and experiential, filled with participatory activities. Assignments ask youth to apply the knowledge they have gained. Experiential learning is more active, applied learning is more relevant, and in-the-field learning affords our youth a diversity of peers and philosophy."*

*--Shreya Janssens-Sannon, Program Coordinator  
South Asian Youth Action*

The four young women selected to be Peer Educators attended media literacy training before developing their workshops. Meeting on a weekly basis, participants discussed topics such as the power of media. The Project Coordinator facilitated discussion with questions, such as: Who controls the media? How much money is involved? What messages are being sent by the media and received by the public? What are ways to create different messages? As a follow-up assignment, the youth were asked to monitor and evaluate what they watched on television. At the end of the training, Shama Shah wrote: "I define Media Literacy as the ability to 'read' television and mass media. Media literacy education teaches people to access, analyze, evaluate, and produce media." The media literacy training took approximately one month to complete.

Concurrent with the media literacy training, participants attended film festivals for the purposes of presenting their films in public and gaining exposure to other youth-developed media and documentaries. At all of these events, youth spoke about the messages behind their videos, the production process, and broader contemporary social issues. This was a valuable opportunity for youth to test and develop their skills as peer educators: they "learned by doing" rather than learning presentation skills and public speaking in an isolated workshop setting.

During the workshop planning sessions, youth divided into groups and did a number of

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preparatory activities, including choosing the video that they would eventually use for their workshops, brainstorming topics that related to the video, identifying goals for the workshops, and planning activities that best met those goals.

For example, youth made a film that dealt with issues facing the South Asian community after 9/11. They identified the major workshop themes, such as discrimination, INS detention, hate crimes, prejudice, diversity, unity, and youth activism. Youth then brainstormed a list of goals for the workshop including participants understanding what discrimination is, what it feels like from other people's viewpoints, what South Asians went and are still going through, and how they can take action. Youth designed activities that allowed them to meet their goals, including true/false quizzes, agree/disagree activities, discussions, and role plays.

Youth created detailed agendas, compiled all supplementary materials for their workshops, and then practiced delivering the actual workshop. The practice presentations helped youth to strengthen facilitation skills and to make minor alterations to content or directions.

## CHALLENGES AND SUCCESSES:

The greatest challenge for SAYA!'s Anti-Bias Initiative was keeping to the original timeline. It was not anticipated that youth would have interests that required staff to extend the media literacy component of the program. Originally, it was scheduled for one week but staff extended it for two more weeks because they felt that the media literacy skills would help youth become critical media consumers and enable them to better spread this awareness to their peers.

Another challenge was outreach and the delivery of workshops. Because the group spent so much time developing the content, they had much less time to identify venues for the workshop or to secure logistical arrangements so these responsibilities were assumed by the Program Coordinator.

## OUTCOMES:

The Peer Educators became more familiar with using video as a catalyst for social and political discussions. They also learned to speak in front of large and small groups and to improvise and interact with the workshop participants as they facilitated discussion.

Preliminary findings indicate that the workshops were rated overall at 7.5 on a scale of 1-10. Regarding the subject matter's relevance, average workshop participant response was a 3, on a scale of 1-5.

Workshop participants identified action steps they could take to address the issue of discrimination, such as creating a workshop themselves, talking about discrimination, and joining a group that expresses similar anti-discrimination views. This outcome was of particular importance since one of the primary goals of the Peer Educators was to inspire youth to action.

***Narrative contributions for the above profiles were made by the following youth practitioners: Sophie Nurani & Theresa Thanjan (CNYC), Shreya Janssens-Sannon (SAYA!)***