

# Creating Community Change: Challenges and Tensions in Community Youth Research

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In recent years, a growing number of organizations have come to recognize the value of supporting young people in strengthening their communities. Communities, too, have begun to pay attention to the importance of ensuring that youth find their roles meaningful. To this end, communities walk a difficult path of both supporting youth in their personal development through such involvement and ensuring that such efforts provide better outcomes for the community as well.

More specifically, significant interest by communities in supporting youth involvement has come in the form of having youth conduct research through, for example, asset mapping or youth-led evaluation. Practitioners and researchers have come to argue that this type of research can generate both reliable and immediately actionable data that can contribute to decision-making and change in communities. As a result, we have come to expect that this type of research and the data it generates not only will provide positive experiences for the youth involved but also contribute to meaningful change in communities.

But how do these assumptions hold up? How does community youth research really work in practice? How do communities address the challenges and negotiate the tensions?

## A City's Search for Knowledge

Over the past decade, Redwood City has increased and improved its collaboration across agencies and institutions, most recently around a *community collaboration for youth* agenda. Both financial and human capital has been leveraged to create increased services, supports, and opportunities for young people and their families in the city. School-based family resource centers have been created and after school programs implemented at multiple schools, to name a few efforts. However, involvement of young people in community decision-making remains relatively scarce, save for a couple of agencies that support youth in leadership and governance roles and the city's Parks and Recreation Department, which has developed an active youth advisory board to increase social and recreational activities for the city's young people.

To increase youth participation, the city's collaborative body, Redwood City 2020, and the Gardner Center partnered to support the development of more meaningful roles for youth involvement in the community while generating new and more locally relevant knowledge about the perspectives of the young people adult city leaders had proposed to serve.

## A Partnership's Approach to Community Youth Research

The work began with the Gardner Center supporting a group of 13 middle school eighth graders in an after school project: The students would use the social science research methods of their choice to identify the services and supports their peers would need at a new school-based family center. As community youth researchers, or CYRs, youth would continue to be involved in the ongoing delivery and evaluation of those services in partnership with adult staff at the center after the assessment process was complete. Adult planners of the center expressed enthusiasm and willingness to examine the new data and use it in partnership with youth. Thus, the community youth research process began to identify youth needs and resources and to support the CYRs in learning about their peers' perspectives, views, and attitudes in general about growing up in Redwood City.

Our approach to the community youth research process rested on several assumptions. Our partners and Center staff believed that scientific research data would be a valuable, reliable, and necessary input into informed community decision-making. Furthermore, we agreed that in order to generate such data about youth, we had to obtain the data *directly from* youth. In order to obtain such solid data, we planned to support the involvement of young people who would not only collect the data but also develop the research question, select the tools, analyze the data, generate findings, and develop concrete recommendations and actions. Local planners of the family center wanted to see the data and expressed willingness to work with the young people to use it. As a result of these conversations with community partners, we subsequently came to assume that there was also wider community support in seeing the value

## A Live Case Study: Youth Research in Action

This report describes the promising practice of community youth research in the context of a live example in Redwood City, California—a mid-size city in the San Francisco Bay Area. We will illustrate how community youth research was defined, approached, and used, and how participants worked to overcome the challenges. Written by the lead adult facilitator of the community youth research project, this article does not intend to provide a model or framework for what community youth research should look like, but rather takes the reader through one city's journey in supporting meaningful youth involvement. Furthermore, it outlines potential challenges and strategies other youth and adult researchers, policymakers, and funders may encounter and apply in this work.

of youth as resources, contributors, and partners in the community. Therefore, we expected that the community at large would be supportive of such efforts. As planners of the project, we viewed the youth's community research for the family center as an entry point in introducing the community to how youth research could be used as an ongoing practice to inform better decision-making with and for youth in the city.

In preparation for launching the project, we tried to make the project meaningful for the youth by:

- Structuring it in a way that youth would be involved in almost every step of the research process (but questioning how much we had already framed the research question or charge for them)
- Drawing from the youth development literature of "best practices" in working with young people (but wondering how applicable those practices were to this particular group in this context)
- Working to make the process as "youth-centered" as possible (but questioning how much that could really happen when we as adult facilitators were also acting as participants in this effort)
- Trying to draw on our strengths as a university partner in sharing our research tools and concepts with the community and the youth (but wondering how we would address the tensions that came with doing research in the community, particularly those tensions that might arise in the little-explored realm of doing such research in partnership with youth)

Despite our best intentions, not everything worked out the way we expected or planned—particularly in respect to the roles youth would take on and how their data would be used.

### **What Did the Youth Researchers Accomplish?**

So what happened? Did anything change in the community as a result of the youth research? Redwood City leadership was willing to test its own

## **Moving from Research to Action**

We had expected the CYRs to identify particular needs of young people at their school; however, their findings raised broader community issues expressed by their peers that the family center could not address by itself. For example, youth respondents identified which neighborhoods had nothing fun to do for youth, which neighborhoods were perceived to have more gangs and drugs, and which ones had problems with transportation, as well as other citywide issues. As adult facilitators, we realized that such diverse findings would present opportunities as well as challenges in terms of how the CYRs would be able to transform their data into action. These issues presented themselves most visibly in three areas: differences in scope of the findings, differences in the areas of influence and audiences for which youth developed actions, and differences in purpose and expectations youth and adults had about the data that was collected and the roles the CYRs would play.

1. **Differences in Scope** – The youth's findings covered a wide range of issues of concern to young people. Youth respondents were not only interested in issues that one would expect youth to focus on (such as hangouts and fun things to do), but they raised concerns about the cost of living, housing, transportation, and other issues that affected the broader community. The challenge here came in deciding which issues to address first and how the CYRs could develop an action plan to address the problems they had identified.
2. **Different Areas of Influence and Audiences** – The broad scope of their findings gave the CYRs a great opportunity to present them to multiple audiences, ranging from the city council to school officials to teachers and adult residents. The challenge, however, for the CYRs came in differentiating what level of influence their audience had in addressing a problem and in framing their recommendations to policymakers in a way they would find actionable (especially considering adults' limited experience in working in partnership with young people).
3. **Different Purposes and Expectations** – In developing their strategies and recommendations, the youth also began to identify different purposes for their work. Not only did they develop specific recommendations for community improvement (such as their proposal to the city council for a pedestrian ramp in a neighborhood divided by a freeway), but they also shared with city leaders information from youth's perspective not necessarily connected to a particular action. Beyond advocating for a particular action to fix a problem, youth argued for wider inclusion in decision-making. They expressed to leaders why youth's perspectives were important and shared information that raised issues of inequality in access and support for young people in different parts of the city. The CYRs challenged the expectations that the adults may have had in thinking that youth would take action only on projects they had organized themselves and that they would not necessarily advocate for larger institutional changes requiring action by adults in partnership with youth.

beliefs and abilities to attempt this partnership with youth in hopes that it would achieve better results both for the youth involved and for young people in the city in general. Policymakers in the community invited youth to share their findings and recommendations as well as to participate in other community dialogues, but because of some of the problems we've outlined, many of the specific recommendations were not acted upon. Despite this significant setback, however, an environment did surface in Redwood City that further promoted the importance of young people in the community and drew attention to youth not only as a subject for discussion but as a resource for direction that would improve services and supports for young people in the city.

The work of the two cadres of community youth researchers and adult allies has, in fact, led to the formation of a team that has increased both the visibility of youth involvement and awareness of its importance in generating better outcomes for youth. The team's work has made some significant, concrete gains for young people in Redwood City. The formation of such a strong and visible team of young leaders also speaks to the significant impacts we observed for the youth researchers involved in the project. Youth said they felt "lucky" to have had the opportunity to invest their time in a project that they felt benefited the community. They felt that they, as eighth graders, had made an important contribution to the city and made a case to people they deemed to be in power, such as the mayor. They recognized the various skills they had built, from research skills to speaking in public, and the confidence they had gained. Furthermore, they highlighted how the development of positive relationships with adult facilitators in the project as well as community members had a broader impact on their personal lives. For example, a couple of youth who were struggling in school shared with project staff that some of their teachers seemed to treat them differently now that they had seen that the youth were doing something productive for the community and using skills the teachers had not seen them use in class. Youth felt that they

were not only generating important information for decision-making but also learning about themselves, their peers, and their community.

Now in its third year, the project has continued to involve a significant number of young people from the earlier cohorts, both in citywide efforts as well as locally as mentors to the next cohort. We are currently in the process of supporting youth governance at the family center as well as in different parts of the city, as city leaders recognize the value and strength in partnering with youth and young people continue to see their involvement as meaningful and important. Young people are coming to see themselves in roles they once thought were unrealistic or inappropriate and are now involved in various activities even without the benefit of receiving stipends for their work.

On a community level, youth and adults in Redwood City have worked to increase the relevance of the services currently being provided to youth and have helped mobilize additional services and resources to more youth who need them. The assessment process helped secure funding of \$400,000 for the family center and has raised the bar for subsequent community assessment efforts in terms of the level of youth involvement and decision-making these processes are expected to have in making the services and supports relevant to the respective youth. For example, in the second year, community youth researchers consulted family center staff on what a wing of the family center should look like, dialogue topics they could include, and the type of publicity that might be appealing to other youth. Youth in the project have served as consultants to a resource guide for youth currently in development. Planning is under way to expand civic engagement and community-building efforts for both youth and adults in other schools in Redwood City, and this project is being used as one model for that effort.

Furthermore, we also have begun to see a paradigm shift, both in adults recognizing the importance of youth being at the table as well as youth understanding the complexities of effecting change and understanding the

challenges faced by adults. Increasingly, partners in the collaborative have reported feeling revitalized by seeing the young people involved, particularly in community dialogues that have examined issues of equity and resource allocation across the city. Youth have begun to take a more optimistic view of creating change in their community now that they feel they are being listened to by adults. They are working on holding adults accountable to their statements about youth and making city bodies more representative of the community in terms of age as well as ethnicity, socioeconomic background, etc. Careful work is under way to support both the youth and adults in this new step forward while ensuring that youth's roles are meaningful and well supported with clear pathways for involvement, growth, and partnership. This process will involve both human capital in terms of adult allies and trainers to help reshift engrained practices that aren't always supportive of community members (much less younger constituents) and also funding that will support core work with youth in supporting them to reframe their expectations and goals for themselves as being leaders of today, not the future.

In terms of policy, the change has been much slower. Bylaws and statutes have made it difficult to develop formal opportunities for youth involvement at this level, especially for those youth under the age of 18. Furthermore, immigration status has prevented a significant number of young people from participating in processes that require U.S. citizenship. Since the project's inception, one commission of the city council has involved young people as advisors to an annual youth organization funding allocation process. Though the youth's role is "advisory" at this point, we expect that with additional training and support, future work will become more substantive. Community youth research can prove to be a promising practice in supporting more flexible and varied roles for young people to be involved in making changes in their community, especially for currently disenfranchised youth who can get involved with efforts to eliminate institutional barriers.

## Challenges and Tensions

While the youth and adults did begin to come together and make significant gains over time as a result of this work, positive changes in the community seemed to come more as a result of the community youth research *process* than as a result of the actual data and recommendations that the young people made. (This is not a bad thing altogether, since youth came to find value in both.) The year we started this work, the community first had to recognize the need for and the value of the youth data before being able to make sense of it and act on it. And we needed time to look at the challenges and tensions inherent in the work to see how we could address them and make the data more meaningful for Redwood City and for others who may find similar challenges.

Some of the tensions described in the following section were not necessarily new to us, but we aim to present how a particular community attempted to negotiate them. Some of the challenges outlined here surfaced more as a product of starting a new project, while others had more to do with doing community research, and yet others can be more commonly attributed to challenges in youth and adults working together. Those listed are by no means all-inclusive of those faced in every community youth research effort, specifically, but we aim to share some general observations based on our experience in Redwood City. Most of these tensions and suggested strategies to help negotiate them revolve primarily around two key concepts of community youth research: research and action. We believe playing closer attention to these challenges could have helped make better use of the data than we have so far.

### Research Challenges:

- ***Building on Youth's Skills***

The application of conventional research methods can't be assumed to happen easily when used in a community setting, particularly in the case where the research process is squarely in the hands of youth. Efforts constantly must be made to draw youth's strengths into the process as well as to provide the

necessary support to build on previous skills and experiences. In our research process, we intentionally encouraged youth with a range of academic backgrounds, interests, and skills to participate, and it was our belief that we had a stronger team because of these differences. We also made sure to pay attention to the different ways we would need to support our diverse group.

Challenges came in a number of areas, particularly in the data analysis; youth who were less strong in mathematics or reading seemed to struggle more. Interestingly enough, though, these young people sometimes provided the most insightful thoughts when examining various social issues. The challenges also came in supporting the various types of learning at play. First, the youth were becoming familiar with the research process of collecting and analyzing data. Second, they were trying to sort through the data and analyze it while also negotiating thoughts based on their own experiences, in order to make sense of their findings and identify possible solutions. Part of our effort to address these challenges was to identify as early as possible in the process what activities excited youth the most and what they felt comfortable doing, so that we could offer appropriate support. We began paying more attention to why some youth were not engaged in a particular task and developed a

blend of activities—some written, others oral; some in small groups, others in large groups—so that youth could engage in the ways they felt most comfortable while still being exposed to other types of learning experiences they found more challenging. Furthermore, we tried to foster a cooperative environment in which everyone was expected to support one another in learning and working toward a common goal.

- ***Negotiating Questions of Reliability and Validity***

Special areas to pay attention to in conducting community youth research are the assumptions and concerns that arise regarding questions of the validity and reliability of the data. Though there are competing opinions already in academia about which tools and practices yield the most reliable results, one assumption of conventional research is that the data collected is for the most part reliable. Issues of reliability become further amplified, however, when the data are gathered by young people for community action. This type of research, for example, can often be perceived as “messy” — messy for the university researcher, that is. Generally, and this held true in our case, the data communities look for is not expected to be “purely scientific,” but communities hope that it will identify some of the most prevalent problems affecting youth, possible connections to root causes,



The Redwood City YELL Project team (academic year 2001-2)

and ideas for change. Despite this flexibility, however, we often noticed tensions among youth, adult facilitators, and policymakers on what type of research was appropriate and the level of detail it should involve. Several youth valued the qualitative data of their own experiences in the video documentary, for example, while most policymakers asked questions about the survey data.

We as project staff believed that youth involvement in the process actually made the tools more reliable. The CYRs in Redwood City, for example, constantly revised their questions, redefined problems as they went along, and worked to address them along the way. When the methods didn't fit their needs, youth came up with other methods beyond the conventional survey and interview tools, such as a video documentary and photography component that documented their surroundings.

Although having youth design the process did lend itself to greater access and reliability, there was some price to pay for this value. Although the youth received an 85 percent return rate on their survey questionnaire (a number rarely seen even in academic circles), the 800 surveys the youth collected was still a relatively small sample considering the city's middle school age group of approximately 3,000. Adult policymakers, for example, wanted greater access to specific recommendations and problems posed by different respondents, but here came the challenge of protecting confidentiality and having to make do with the high level of anonymity that resulted from the design youth developed. Some of these tensions are difficult to negotiate, but at the very least, youth need to be supported in discussing these issues and come together with adults to address them the best way they can.

In regard to what type of data is valid, every stakeholder in the process has her or his own view.

Some perceive it to be quantitative, others qualitative, or both. People have different ideas of who the "expert" is that should provide the information communities need. In the case of Redwood City, project staff stressed the importance of both qualitative and quantitative data, as well as the value of personal experience, and observed research both as data and as a way for youth to challenge themselves on their own assumptions. Though adults and policymakers had requested research articles on youth development from academia, they also were excited to see new research conducted directly of youth by youth. Thus, in Redwood City, the mere fact that data was being collected this way was exciting to adults as one of a few times where youth's voices and perspectives could come across clearly in the information. Adults could ask general questions to youth about the data as well as ask them about their personal experiences with a particular community problem. However, when it came time for the youth to answer questions on their data, such as they did in their first presentation to the city council, they at times—most likely out of nervousness or lack of preparation—resorted to talking only about their personal experiences.

We could have addressed this challenge, in part, by providing more practice opportunities for youth to answer impromptu questions about the data and more occasions for the teens to present their own experiences (such as they did with the video documentary). Another major challenge, as previously stated, was for adults to understand that the youth's information was not all intended for action but was nevertheless perceived as valid by youth for adults to understand what youth were thinking. Thus, describing explicitly what type of data would be presented and for what purpose could have created clearer expectations for adults from the beginning.

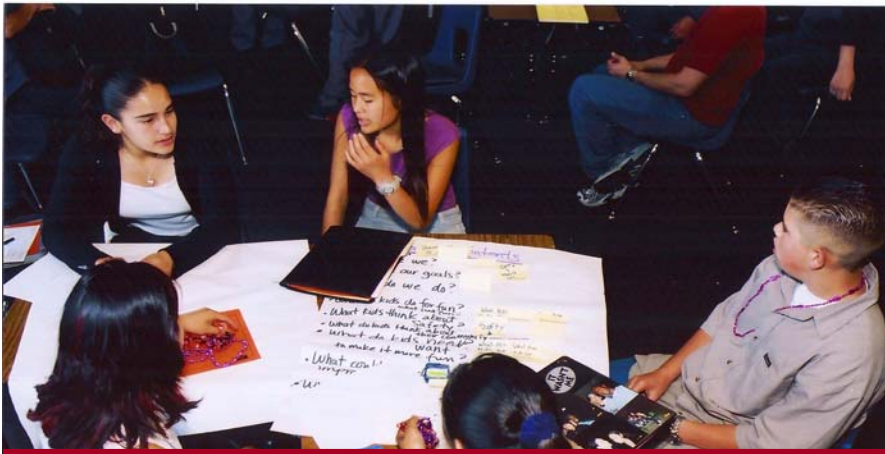
- ***Aligning Youth's Research Goals with Community Goals for the Research***

A major tension in developing this work is aligning and bridging the difference in what research questions youth and adults think are worth pursuing. In the case of this project, for example, adult planners for the family center (including project staff) had framed the question in our mind as "What services do youth need at this school that will improve their lives?" In contrast, youth came up with "How can we improve Redwood City for youth?" Adults wanted to find out what they could do to young people directly, while the youth were trying to find out what could be done in the community that ultimately also could be better for them. Youth were identifying a need for adults to understand their perspectives, while adults wanted to find out how to fix problems youth said they had. The tension existed in trying to bring both sets of goals together in a way that personally addressed the needs and expectations of the young people but also provided adults with clearer expectations on what information would be collected and what recommendations would create visible impacts. Thus, those doing the research and those receiving the data must come together from the beginning to begin thinking creatively about the type of information they hope to generate.

**Action Challenges:**

- ***Aligning the Research Timeline with Community Action Timelines***

To the degree that this can be accomplished, the research timeline and the community action timeline should be aligned with multiple time points for them to converge. This connection also can facilitate the convergence of the research goals between youth's and adults' views. In our experience, the research process was a lengthy one, and though we tried to align the timelines, the research process inevitably took longer. Other community mapping projects, for example, involve a larger number of



Redwood City YELL Project youth researchers working with a project facilitator during one of the twice-per-week sessions.

youth over a shorter period of time to increase the turnaround for action. However, we did not have the staff/volunteer capacity or logistical means to support youth in this path. Furthermore, our process involved not only collecting data but also supporting youth in forming an identity as a team, learning and thinking critically about their environment, and preparing them for leadership roles that could be ongoing over the long term. This alignment for us was even more difficult since there wasn't a visible critical mass of adult allies or young people in the decision-making bodies to advocate for concrete entryways for youth involvement and therefore the use of the data into decision-making. Having the structure (spaces and places) for young people to share power with adults from the beginning of the research process can further support that convergence.

- **Connecting Research to Action**

A major tenet of participatory action research on which a great deal of this work is based is that the research is carried out for the purpose of action; that is, knowledge is created for action. In the case of Redwood City, the research had been intended to produce information that youth and adults could use to implement youth services at a local school. However, when youth began to identify broader problems, they directed

their attention and recommendations to city leaders for action. Seeing the challenges in making institutional change, youth shifted their focus from following up on specific recommendations to a broader purpose of advocacy for youth involvement. Despite the gains seen from youth doing this kind of work, the question remains whether the youth would have felt more of a sense of personal accomplishment if they had seen some of their recommendations actually applied or if they had been better supported to develop additional strategies for them to act themselves.

Adults in this community (both staff and city decision-makers) also had some expectations of what it meant for the young people to be community youth researchers. For example, they expected the data to be presented in a formal way, to point to specific problems, and to provide recommendations that either youth alone or adults specifically could directly act upon. Adults wanted to act on the recommendations, but were surprised by how the data actually was presented. Adults in different school and community governance settings invited young people to be involved in various service projects and put the responsibility back on the youth to do something more visible that showed what they had done. In the case of the youth advocating for more routine street

cleaning, for example, they were met with an invitation to take part in a city clean-up day. Although this was a start, this was not what the youth had expected in terms of institutional change. Thus, in some settings, it became a back and forth conversation of who should take more visible action first. Without the necessary preparation for this kind of reaction, young people can find it very disempowering.

With the city not having a significant history of being presented with youth's ideas in such a public way, it was difficult for youth to identify who could make real changes to the problems they had identified. By the same token, adults were not prepared to work with youth in this capacity of solving problems together and may have set higher, perhaps more unrealistic, or different expectations than what the youth felt they were able to do alone in creating that change. Thus, young people needed greater preparation and support to help them identify their spheres of influence, how they could translate findings into action, and if need be, how to access the resources or allies to make change happen. More important, however, adults may have needed more information in advance about the process, the research questions, and the expectations young people had about their work. This could have been clarified, for example, earlier on in conversations between the two about expectations and potential research questions.

Therefore, part of our work as staff could have included more support in matching findings with clear actions, possibly some that supported youth in making more measurable short-term impacts in addition to the longer-term institutional ones. Adults needed greater resources to support them in working with youth and leveraging their own power and resources to support the young people in these efforts. Adults need to take the time to value the effort young people are making and support them in group

action and roles they want to take (whether it be as institutional change-makers or in direct community service). Much more work also needs to be done in identifying where and how data is to be shared and used so that youth and adults in partnership can more readily follow up on the recommendations proposed as a result of youth research.

- ***Building Organizational Capacity to Support Youth in a Variety of Roles***

If there is true flexibility and willingness to support youth in action they want to take, then the organizational capacity, both in the organizations directly supporting youth and the institutions with whom they interact, must be in place to successfully support youth in various roles. In community youth research, these roles can take the shape of researcher, organizer, advocate, coordinator, evaluator, advisor, and policymaker, to name a few. The young people in our project didn't develop visible community projects in the first year beyond action in advocacy not because they didn't see themselves in other roles such as organizer and project leader. The youth *wanted* to play important roles in their particular neighborhoods and had been introduced to their potential role in governance in planning for their involvement in the local family center. However, because some key staff members in the youth-adult partnership did not become involved and those who did didn't have the necessary human support to be mentored to work with young people as the research process was taking place, this limited connections between the youth and adults at the family center. Staff also was conflicted as to how to support the youth in their approaches to various ideas for action. For example, would adults in the community feel that trust was broken between the Gardner Center and the city should staff support youth in actions adults might deem

subversive or challenging to those in visible positions of power?

Our concerns also grew as we considered funding. Would funders support this kind of organizing over simply hearing how the youth assessment had leveraged services for 1,000 young people? As it is, funders often question the cost effectiveness of projects like these (too much money for such as small group), and are cautious about the "leap of faith" they take when community outcomes around this work aren't completely predetermined. This was a tension that still hasn't been so easily negotiated but possibly could have been if the effort was supported by a local community group that didn't have the affiliation the Gardner Center had to the city as a university partner.

In light of the challenges, project staff needs to be both flexible and prepared to support youth in these roles or at least be clear about the limitations and tensions and outline the degree to which they can support them. Adults in institutions also need to be supported in having both the organizational capacity and philosophical orientation to recognize the value of youth in these multiple roles. However, one must also recognize the limitations and tensions in doing this work, especially when adults embark on a practice that hasn't always been supported and are often doing it in an under-funded environment.

In sum, organizations and institutions need the necessary infrastructure to support young people and the adults in meaningful and long-term partnership that not only benefits youth but also provides clear roles and opportunities and paths for engagement of other members of the community. This infrastructure can come by having the necessary people, skills, resources, expertise, and will for this kind of change. As we noted previously, Redwood City

did not have all these components to help support a long-term, meaningful youth-adult partnership on a citywide level and is working now to support that as city leadership negotiates other pressures within the community. For example, high family mobility rates of youth who do become involved and frequent turnover of adults in decision-making positions further complicate the sustainability of such efforts. All these issues have made it hard both for the youth to identify where they could influence change and for policymakers to be able to act on the recommendations together with young people. One strategy to buffer this impact is to have a critical mass of allies within institutions to push forward even the thought of involving youth. It is safe to say that the visibility of the community youth research process in Redwood City, for example, played a significant role in actually developing a case for young people to be seen as resources, leaders, and contributors to their community.

One final caution in supporting meaningful youth involvement also involves the use of "youth voice" in outlining community needs. A danger lies in such use becoming tokenistic, particularly when substantive changes directly affecting youth are not made as promised once resources are leveraged or funding is awarded. The goal gets lost when the projects, supports, or services that get implemented are not appropriate for the needs youth originally expressed. This can easily happen when youth are not supported and included as equal partners in the implementation, coordination, and evaluation phases following the research process. We have learned firsthand that we cannot create roles *for* youth but to co-create with them those roles they deem meaningful and extend our support or partnership where both agree necessary.

## Conclusion

Although a significant portion of this paper addresses the challenges and tensions involved in this work, we do not want to end by underestimating the value that community youth research brings to creating meaningful change to strengthen communities. Over the past few years, Redwood City has put itself “on the map” as a city that no longer does “business as usual” but is taking brave and creative risks to improve the lives of its young people. Through this process, youth and adults are learning by doing and coming closer together in ways that continue to re-energize themselves and others in the community—from parents to service providers to teachers, policymakers, and other young people. Redwood City is working to make community youth research its own and has opened itself to take a candid and reflective look at its efforts and work to strengthen its approach. The results are showing not only in greater resources and services but also in the number of opportunities that are surfacing for young people and that youth themselves are creating in playing a more active role in shaping their community.

*For more information about the Gardner Center or this community youth research project (Youth Engaged in Leadership and Learning), please visit our website at <http://gardnercenter.stanford.edu>.*

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The John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities was founded upon the values, principles and vision of John Gardner — a strong belief in society’s potential and in the potential of individuals as well as institutions; a commitment to renewal; and the optimism to think in possibilities, rather than obstacles.

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