

A Statement about Youth Empowerment

(from *SLD Youth Events Manual*, adapted from Anya Brebner YAC 2002)

Youth Empowerment in YRUU is not about advisors giving power to youth, or about youth taking power away from the advisors. It involves youth finding the power within themselves to take responsibility for their actions. Advisors are usually hesitant about youth handling this sort of power, and although it is much simpler for an advisor to organize youth group affairs, valuable lessons are learned by youth who are willing to take the time to organize these affairs themselves.

An important thing to remember is that youth learn from their mistakes. Lessons are learned and skills are acquired whether or not the final outcome of an action is a positive or negative one. Youth empowerment teaches youth communication, organization, and social skills that help them grow in the YRUU community and help them reach out to their own congregation as well as society as a whole.

What does this mean?

(adapted from an unknown source in my files)

There are three types of power, *power over*, *power with* and *power within*. *Power over* is often abusive power, like when a teacher gets sexually involved with a student or when a boss uses his/her authority to silence those under him/her. But *power over* often gets a bum rap. It is often appropriate to use power over. For example, when a mother pulls her child out of the path of an oncoming car when he has run into the street to fetch a ball. Our young people have experienced *power over* from their parents and teachers and other adults and authority figures and this has been an important part of their learning about who they are and how they are expected to act in this society. It is an important part of their development.

What we do as advisors is not to perpetuate the experience of *power over* that they have had with these adults, but to work with our youth in a model of *power with*. This is a model where we work with the youth, recognizing their own internal power or *power within*, to help them grow into responsible, mature adults. This *power within* is the inherent worth and dignity that every individual possesses and is expressed in their own ideas, opinions, feelings and decision-making. It is to honor youths' voices and explore with them the possible pros and cons of the ramifications of their

behaviors to help them make good choices. It is not telling them what to do, or when, but honoring their decisions even if we feel it might not be the best decision. Youth also learn from their mistakes.

Of course this doesn't mean that we never step in to use our inherent *power over* to influence the youth. Like the parent with the child who ran into the road, we must step in anytime the youth are in imminent danger to insure the youth's safety. After danger has passed, we can turn it into a *power within* situation where in the youth discuss the danger and actions to be taken in the future to ensure safety.

You, as the advisor are accountable for understanding the effect of your power. Due to your age, experience and the position the congregation has bestowed upon you, you are always in a situation of having more power than the youth. What you do with that power is paramount to your effectiveness and the health of the youth group.

How do Advisors implement youth empowerment:

(below are from the SLD, by Jeff Lamicela, with the *added by me)

As an advisor DO:

- *Listen more than you speak, speak from a place of love and trust
- *know who the host youth leaders and adults are in the event you have questions/concerns.
- be a reassuring presence
- know the schedule and rules
- delegate to and problem-solve with youth
- protect facility property in a friendly manner
- socialize, drawing youth and yourself into the community
- advise, suggest ideas, ask questions without directing
- get adequate rest before the Sunday drive home. You are entrusted with the safe travel of yourself and those who ride with you.

Try to AVOID:

- *primarily focusing on negatives in situations
- monopolizing or dominating
- acting hastily
- being or acting like a one-dimensional "cop" or "*babysitter"
- overreacting to little things
- ordering youth around
- adult cliques
- doing it (whatever) by yourself-involve others!
- NOT HAVING FUN

KELLY MASTERS, UUCB YPC 11/07