

*Empowering* **YOUTH**  
*for School and Community*  
*Change*

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# **Conclusion**

## ***Empowering Young People: What's Next?***

What if the world was a place in which all youth felt valued because they were meaningfully engaged in something that mattered to them? What if all young people felt empowered to make their communities and schools better places to live and learn? Grounded in the experiences and opinions of Indiana HarmonyVISTA volunteers, this book has focused on how adults can be allies in empowering youth to take action in their schools and communities. It has been about the “what” (ideas, events, etc) and “so what” (why it matters) of youth voice and empowerment. Youth voice is “the ideas, opinions, involvement, and initiative of people considered to be ‘young.’” Youth empowerment is young people using their voice to transform themselves and the world they live in. When young people are empowered, they gain confidence, build leadership and problem-solving skills, and understand the importance of helping others. When young people take on active roles and become decision-makers, they help communities and schools better meet their needs. When young people meaningfully engage in service and leadership opportunities, they are more likely to be civically engaged as adults. This guidebook used five central themes of the HarmonyVISTA Project’s work and demonstrated how these themes are central to youth empowerment.

### ***Relationships***

It is important that adults partner with youth to create opportunities for them to be meaningfully engaged, make decisions, and take on active roles in activities. This can be done by forming trusting relationships with and among youth. Icebreakers and teambuilding activities are ways to help individuals get to know one another. Some strategies for forming connections with youth include listening, asking open-ended questions, and stepping back.

### ***Youth-Driven Work***

Meaningful connections between adults and youth help youth feel comfortable to lead projects for school and community change. Youth-driven work means that young people are forming ideas, planning projects, making decisions, and implanting their ideas. When youth lead the way, it doesn’t mean that adults should step back and do nothing. In fact, the role of adults in youth-driven work can be very crucial, but youth should help determine the kind of support they need from adults. When youth tell you what they need, it helps them feel empowered because adults are telling them what they need and it ensures that you’re role is truly the most helpful.

### ***taking Vision into Action***

One role adults can play is helping youth visualize the kind of change they want to make. What is and isn’t working in your communities? What would you like to change? What steps can you take to make a change? Adults can work with young people to determine the necessary steps for taking vision into action.

### ***Parent and Community Engagement***

Adults can also help engage parents in helping with community projects. Building partnership with parents and other community partners strengthens your project and establishes a network of people with time, talent, and resources to share.

### ***Reflection and Celebration***

Reflection and celebration are also two essential components of youth empowerment. Reflection helps to make meaning out of the work you do and helps to impact future choices. Celebration acknowledges and validates the hard work you’ve done. Reflection and celebration can be done throughout a project or at the end. However, the most important thing is that reflection and celebration are not forgotten.

### ***Where do you go from here?***

Youth empowerment can be merely a buzzword if youth are engaged in a token manner. Empowerment is about asking questions that will help lead young people to develop their own answers, to create solutions to problems, and to make changes in their lives, school, and communities.

The next step is up to you. Now is the time to explore what authentic youth voice and empowerment is by taking action. This book has provided tools, tips, stories, and strategies on building relationships, empowering youth to take action, establishing partnerships with parents and community members, and reflection. Please take these ideas and adapt them in your work.

Make these activities your own. Make meaning from them. Make changes.