Apathy is Boring's Five Youth Friendly Principles

The five Youth Friendly principles are taken from Apathy is Boring's Youth Friendly Guide. The first edition of the Youth Friendly Guide was co-written in the 1990s by Apathy is Boring co-founder and president Ilona Dougherty at the age of 16, alongside several other youth as part of the Canadian Environmental Network's Youth Caucus. This guide has created the foundation for the youth friendly practices used by Apathy is Boring.

The five Youth Friendly principles are:

1. Set out clear expectations and honest limitations

For an organization to truly engage youth, their voices must be included from the beginning of any project, their participation clearly recognized, and the work they do attributed to them. It is important to be clear about who makes which decisions, when and how decisions will be made, and what the expectations and limits of the actions being planned are. It is also important to be honest and realistic with youth about time and resources that the organization has available to dedicate to engaging youth. Youth need realistic timelines and clearly defined responsibilities so that they know what is expected of them. This should include proper lead-time, space for reflection, and time for trial and error.

2. Encourage creativity and difference

When setting up partnerships with youth, organizations need to take into account the reality of youth cultures and lifestyles. Youth need access to role models that encourage creativity and individuality. Remember that youth, regardless of how they might dress or their personal style, need to be respected for their abilities, their knowledge, and the diversity they bring to the process. It is crucial to empower youth to speak out when they encounter any form of discrimination within the organization. Organizations must ensure that there are effective mechanisms in place to deal with concerns or problem areas and that all adults have been briefed about youth friendly practices.

3. Make connections between generations

Partnerships work best when connections are made with other demographic groups who have parallel experiences, interests, resources, and networks to share. It is important for youth to be able to work with, learn from, and share their knowledge with people their own age and with adults. Youth should be taken seriously and not marginalized because of their age. Once youth and adults are engaged in a true

partnership, understanding and empathy begin. Both groups have different skills to bring to the table and it is important that the two recognize these assets in each other.

4. Provide mentorship and support

Setting up mentorship is a good way of ensuring that communication flows effectively between all those involved in an organization. Mentors should be people who are experienced in the subject matter and are trusted or even chosen by youth. Remember that they don't always have to be adults. Allow space for cooperative relationships to occur between youth with different levels of experience. Youth also need proper support within an organization. It is important to take into account that youth often have other commitments and are not always able to participate in projects because of financial constraints. Ensure that support – financial and otherwise – is available to assist youth to participate in all aspects of decision-making.

5. Communicate openly and follow up

Communication often means being patient and hearing all of what someone has to say, even if you don't agree. It also means making sure there is space for youth to ask lots of questions and voice concerns. Youth must feel that their opinions and contributions count. That means actively listening to youth, treating them as equals, and implementing their ideas and suggestions. Good communication also includes following up after the fact. Make sure youth know where their input has been used and what will happen next. Youth friendly organizations always ask youth what they got out of their experience and celebrate successes with them.

These principles influence each other and should be understood as flexible categories. At different times, different principles may be more important to an organization.

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