

# Michigan Community Foundations' Youth Project (MCFYP) 20th Anniversary Report

March 2013



*"To sum it all up, youth and community  
foundations are a dynamic combination!"*

*– Dr. Russell Mawby*



Community Research Institute  
*Empowering communities with quality research and data*

  
Johnson Center  
at Grand Valley State University



# Executive Summary

It has been 20 years since the launch of the Michigan Community Foundations' Youth Project (MCFYP), a groundbreaking effort to spread youth philanthropy throughout Michigan's community foundations and all 83 counties. In honor of the 20th anniversary, the Council of Michigan Foundations (CMF) commissioned the Johnson Center for Philanthropy at Grand Valley State University to assess the impact of MCFYP. Drawing on surveys, focus groups, archival documents, and interviews with youth participants and adult advisors and leaders, this report documents the impacts on youth, the participating community foundations, and on the Michigan communities.

In 1988, there were 33 Michigan community foundations and one affiliate. That year, CMF approached the W.K. Kellogg Foundation (WKKF) with the idea to fund challenge grants to strengthen Michigan community foundations. The W.K. Kellogg Foundation was interested, but added one important requirement: The community foundations would have to involve youth in philanthropy. Dr. Russ Mawby, then chairman of WKKF, described his vision for MCFYP in a landmark speech in 1991:

*MCFYP gives young people the opportunity to learn generosity in the only practical way: by being generous. It will teach them to meet community challenges by raising funds for good works. It will teach them to be good stewards by giving them opportunities to make the hard decisions on wise giving. It will give them the opportunity to ask, to serve, and through serving, to lead.*

With the grants from WKKF and funding for technical support from the C.S. Mott Foundation, CMF worked with community foundations to develop endowed youth philanthropy programs. Today, there are 86 permanent youth endowments housed in community foundations across Michigan, each managed by a Youth Advisory Committee (YAC). Each YAC consists of approximately 20 young people between the ages of 13 and 17, they are responsible for granting anywhere between \$5,000 and \$100,000 per year in their community. Like any other grantmaking group, the YAC members conduct site visits, review proposals, and hear presentations from prospective grantees. The money they allocate addresses issues such as youth homelessness, lack of educational opportunities, job skills development, and healthy behaviors. They do periodic needs assessments in the community to both guide their grant decisions and to shine a light on youth issues to the broader community.

## Impact of MCFYP on Young People

An estimated 13,500 young people have participated in YACs over the last 20 years. One of the most important impacts on participants was that they felt empowered to make a difference in their communities. Young people were part of designing solutions and the YACs gave them access to the resources, the networks, and the decision-making power to make change. As one former YAC member said, "I didn't just feel like a teenager; I felt like a person with a voice!" Youth grantmaking provided an experience with civic engagement. The skills of expressing opinions, engaging constructively in decisions, and balancing differing needs are all critical for a democracy, and philanthropy nurtured these skills. As a powerful example, when YAC members learned that youth were not eligible to be on the boards of nonprofit organizations, they testified before the state legislature and the law was changed. Being part of a YAC expanded young people's horizons as they learned about the broader community in which they live, and they met young people and adults from varying socio-economic, racial,

and religious backgrounds. It also gave youth access to networks of community leaders and an inside view of the nonprofit sector: "I got into YAC and it's like a whole different world opened up to me." Youth Advisory Committee members describe their personal growth and the practical skills they learned throughout their years on a YAC. The most commonly cited are self-confidence, trust in one's own opinions, networking, and public speaking. Some described the YAC leadership experiences as the most powerful that they have ever had.

From the beginning, MCFYP was intended to develop lifelong values of generosity and service. According to our research, of the 84 former YAC members who filled out a survey, 87 percent report volunteering in their community. This is more than three times the volunteer rate of adults in Michigan and nationally, with both 26 percent reporting volunteering. "The most important thing our YAC has done is foster the mentality of philanthropy, spreading the idea of its importance and how serving others can really help everyone," said one advisor. Another important MCFYP goal was to help develop the next generation of

leaders in the nonprofit and philanthropic sector. Involvement in youth philanthropy exposed young people to the nonprofit sector and gave them skills and networks necessary to envision a future in the sector. As one former YAC member said, "A light bulb went off; I hadn't thought of the nonprofit sector as a potential career." The research found that more than 65 percent of the approximately 250 YAC members who completed a survey believed that serving on a YAC influenced their education or career path in some way. Former YAC members currently hold positions as fundraising professionals, youth development specialists, community activists, and foundation staff across Michigan and the country.

Thanks to two endowed funds held at CMF and created by Dr. Mawby and WKKF, a Mawby intern is recruited every year to serve as lead staff for the annual Summer Youth Leadership Conference. The interns also coordinate regional trainings and YAC advisor trainings across the state, with the help of a YAC program coordinator. Additionally, they help maintain a website with youth philanthropy resources, [www.youthgrantmakers.org](http://www.youthgrantmakers.org).



## Impact on Community Foundations

The architects of MCFYP deliberately chose community foundations as the vehicle for engaging young people in philanthropy. They are the philanthropic organizations closest to the community; there is flexibility in grantmaking and they often play the key role of community convener. Over the years, the YACs have proven to be an asset to the community foundations, influencing them in a variety of ways. The YAC model encourages the members to engage in the community through service and in leadership roles, bringing added visibility to the community foundations. In the words of one community foundation executive: "Our Youth Council members make our organization look really good!" The YACs often brought new partners interested in youth issues to the table, including private foundations, government organizations, and new nonprofits. At times, YACs brought the community foundations into controversial issues, for example, teenage alcohol and substance abuse. Often these are critical but unspoken issues that are necessary to address, and the willingness of foundations to show leadership on these issues adds to their credibility in the community. Many community foundation leaders observed that young people bring a different approach to grantmaking: "While young people may not have the experience, they bring a new energy to the work. ... They don't see limitations, but think outside of the box." And youth can attract assets to the community foundation: "It's really been a win-win-win for our community."

## Impact on the Community

One of the goals of MCFYP is to have an impact on Michigan communities by bringing a sustained focus on youth issues through the permanently endowed youth funds. For some struggling communities, it is powerful to see youth engaging in a positive way. "I'm from an area where we have a lot of at-risk young people and children. ... Our YAC has given [us a] hopeful feeling." And the grants can fill important gaps in funding in communities where cutbacks in education and social services are the norm. Youth Advisory Committee members also see the value of their service and volunteering, both

to give back to the community and to contribute to the positive profile of youth. The existence of a permanent youth fund can create a virtuous cycle in a community where nonprofits plan more youth programming, knowing that there is funding for youth issues. In many of these communities, as community leaders gain confidence in youth leadership they become advocates for youth participation, opening up more opportunities for youth. And, MCFYP was responsible for changing state law so that youth ages 16-17 can serve on nonprofit Boards, opening up even more opportunities for youth engagement. Youth have become representatives on school boards, mayor task forces, and parks committees. Given the high rates of volunteering, the estimated 13,500 young people who have participated in YACs so far are bringing their ethic of service and their leadership to the communities where they live.

## Youth Philanthropy as a National and Global Movement

The work of MCFYP has been adopted broadly both within the U.S. and across the world. Through hands-on technical assistance, published guidebooks, and its annual youth conference, CMF has assisted many other states in creating youth philanthropy programs. In Iowa, the Teens for Tomorrow program modeled itself after MCFYP, and over the last 10 years have granted over \$65,000 and exposed 235 young people to youth philanthropy. The Michigan Community Foundations' Youth Project has also worked with community foundations around the world to increase involvement by youth and create youth philanthropy programs. For example, Canada's youth philanthropy movement began in 1997 with

the Vancouver Foundation, which based its work directly on MCFYP. Today, there are YACs in almost 55 community foundations across Canada. Northern Ireland's Youth Bank has had a close relationship with MCFYP, with members from both sides visiting their respective communities to experience the youth grantmaking, volunteerism and service first hand.

## A Vision and Recommendations for the Future

The Michigan experience with youth grantmaking shows the strength of this model for empowering young people and giving them a voice in their communities. One of the keys to the success was building permanent youth endowments. They provide a sense of stability and continuity for the young people, the nonprofit sector, and the community foundations and ensure that resources will be there for generations to come. Embedding the youth work even more strongly within the community foundations in Michigan is fundamental. Buy-in from YAC advisors and foundation board members will ensure that all of the community foundations are truly invested in youth philanthropy. Currently 50 percent of community foundations have young people on their boards, and that number is growing. As one early observer of YACs said, "As we see time pass, young people are gaining more power in communities." Engaging a diverse group of young people, in terms of socio-economic background, race and ethnicity, and at-risk and high-achieving youth, is an important aspiration for MCFYP. As MCFYP moves beyond its first 20 years, Michigan philanthropic leaders would like to see continued innovation and greater expansion of the influence of the youth voice.



*So many different seeds have been planted in so many youth for the past 20 years. ... We are going to see more people rising to positions of influence who are going to be able to tie it back to these YACs. ... I cannot wait for that!*

# Introduction

This year marks the 20th anniversary of the major challenge grant that launched the Michigan Community Foundations' Youth Project (MCFYP). To mark that milestone, the Council of Michigan Foundations (CMF) commissioned the Johnson Center for Philanthropy at Grand Valley State University to assess the impact of MCFYP. Drawing on surveys, focus groups, archival documents, and interviews with youth participants and adult advisors and leaders, this report documents the impacts on youth, the participating community foundations, and on the Michigan communities.

## History of the Michigan Community Foundations' Youth Project (MCFYP)

In the late 1980s, the executive staff of CMF began discussions about strengthening community foundations in Michigan. In 1988, there were 33 Michigan community foundations and one affiliate. Dorothy Johnson, then executive director of CMF, saw community foundations as a potential vehicle for connecting private national and international foundations with local communities in Michigan. The Council of Michigan Foundations approached the W. K. Kellogg Foundation (WKKF) with the idea to fund a challenge grant for community foundations. The W.K. Kellogg Foundation was interested, but one important stipulation was set by Russell Mawby, WKKF's president and chief executive officer at that time: They would have to involve youth in philanthropy. (See Appendix A for the complete speech by Dr. Mawby)

The timing for WKKF's challenge was good; the '80s and '90s were a ripe environment for engaging young people in grantmaking. National awareness was growing about youth development. Developmental psychologists and other researchers were changing the language and the paradigm from "youth risky behaviors" to "youth as assets." The National and Community Service Trust Act was signed into law by President Bill Clinton in 1993, creating the Corporation for National and Community Service. Americorps and Learn and Serve America were two outgrowths of that national organization. Organizations such as the Search Institute, the National Youth Leadership Council, the YMCA, and the National 4-H Council were actively promoting the necessity of creating nurturing environments for young people.

At the same time, there was a great deal of concern in Michigan about wealth leaving the state. When WKKF made its first grant

## WHY YOUTH? WHY COMMUNITY FOUNDATIONS?

by Dr. Russell G. Mawby

*The following is excerpted from the keynote address delivered by Russell G. Mawby, chairman of the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, at the June 21, 1991, launch of Michigan Community Foundations' Youth Project. More than 300 civic leaders from throughout the state were present for the kickoff in Battle Creek.*

It is a pleasure, indeed, to be with you today for the launching of this initiative in philanthropy, which we believe is one of the most exciting ever undertaken in the state of Michigan. If all of us are successful in our efforts, the next five years will witness, in communities across the state, a series of activities that will help young people develop lifelong values of generosity and leadership and which will at the same time build stronger and more caring communities . . . . So, today, I want to answer these two questions: Why Youth? Why Community Foundations?...

The Michigan Community Foundations' Youth Project gives young people the opportunity to learn generosity in the only practical way: by being generous. It will teach them to meet community challenges by raising funds for good works. It will teach them to be good stewards by giving them opportunities to make the hard decisions on wise giving. It will give them the opportunity to ask, to serve, and through serving, to lead. Tomorrow's governors, mayors, chief executive officers, and executive directors will be trained through the Michigan Community Foundations' Youth Project. Even more importantly, so will tomorrow's Little League coaches, Big Sisters, Cub Scout leaders, Sunday School teachers, and community foundation trustees.

Perhaps here is the real significance of working with youth. Youth grow up to become people who work with youth. When we invest in the development of today's young people, we are really investing in the development of the next generation, and the next, and the next. The ripples spread out from our investment – and where they will end, we can never know.

Now I would like to turn to the question, "Why community foundations?" The shortest and most profound answer to this question is that the most exciting solutions to today's problems are not those coming from Washington or from Lansing. They are those coming from our local communities. Local leaders are the ones who are closest to the problems, and are the ones best equipped to solve them.

Local leaders, of course, cannot solve community problems all by themselves. They need to have arrows in their quivers, and perhaps the sharpest arrow is the community foundation. . . . [Community foundations] are more than money givers. They also serve as conveners for important community meetings, as "honest brokers" to help build teams of organizations that solve problems - in short, community foundations serve as catalysts for change. . . .

To sum it all up, youth and community foundations are a dynamite combination! This initiative will help us identify young leaders of tomorrow. It will help us recruit them. It will give them experience in raising money and it will give them training in the wise stewardship of charitable funds. It will raise fresh money for new needs in communities and permanently endow these funds so that resources will be there for future generations. It will help communities to grow and to ease the pain and the suffering of those who are hurting. It will enrich the lives of uncounted numbers in incalculable ways. It will enable communities to face an uncertain future with an unshakeable confidence in their own ability to deal with their own problem. . . .

Thank you very much, and all the best to you as you set out to shape a brighter future for the young people of your communities and our state.

to CMF in 1988 to support community foundations, with the requirement of integrating youth grantmaking committees, the grant was meant to both capitalize on the latest thinking about youth development and to transfer the value of local giving to the next generation.

Leaders from that time recall some of the community foundation board members as reluctant to trust youth with funds to give away. The two or three initial years when youth grantmaking committees were getting started were an experimental time. One leader commented, “They needed to test that youth would be good grantmakers.” Over time, young people proved themselves and, in 1993, WKKF approved a 2:1 challenge grant of up to \$1 million per community foundation. The funds raised locally were to be placed into a permanent unrestricted or field-of-interest fund, while the WKKF money was permanently endowed to youth funds, to be administered by YACs.

The C.S. Mott Foundation provided additional funds to CMF for technical assistance - hands-on training and support to the fledgling YACs. The design of the YACs was based on research on youth development, and leaders shared experiences and lessons with other youth philanthropy programs such as Indiana’s Youth as Resources program (started in 1986) and youth philanthropy work in metropolitan Washington, D.C. (started in 1985) and Marin County, Calif. (started in 1987).<sup>1</sup>

Between 1988 and 1997, more than \$60 million was channeled into community foundations. In 1991, MCFYP was created as a supporting organization of CMF to best serve the new YACs. In 1997, CMF staff went back to WKKF for an additional \$12 million to complete the successful youth challenges that raised more than \$100 million statewide.

As the Kellogg Youth Challenge drew to a close, the MCFYP board voted to serve collaborative efforts of community foundations by becoming Michigan Community Foundation Ventures. The

board of CMF institutionalized youth philanthropy by creating a permanent MCFYP committee consisting of 12 youth grantmakers from around the state and three adult advisors to guide the work.

Over the years, as community foundations grew in Michigan, the youth philanthropy work grew along with it. One leader described how “The community foundation advisors became more comfortable with how to systematize working with kids. ... There became a real rhythm to the year and how we select people. And, the community got used to applying for grants because they knew the money was there, so grant applications got better.”

There are many spinoffs to this work. *Learning to Give* is a K-12 philanthropy in education program started by CMF in 1997. It used lessons from MCFYP, a curriculum from the Surdna Foundation’s Student Service and Philanthropy Project, and methods developed by teachers in the classroom to create a school-based philanthropy curriculum.<sup>2</sup> There are teachers using *Learning to Give*’s resources all across Michigan and in Indiana, as well as in England, India, and South Korea.<sup>3</sup> The movement in Michigan to allow young people to serve on boards of nonprofit organizations and community foundations had its roots in MCFYP. Now, more than 50 percent of community foundations in Michigan have a YAC member serving as a full-standing, voting board member.

Today, thanks to the permanent

endowments, youth philanthropy is an established part of the foundation infrastructure in Michigan. There are 86 youth funds overseen by YACs in community foundations of all sizes and types in Michigan; these funds grant more than \$2 million per year. Annually, approximately 1,500 middle and high school age youths participate in YACs, with about 500 being new members. By 2003, an estimated 9,000 young people had the experience of participating in youth philanthropy. Ten years later, that total is approximately 13,500 young people, with new members added every year. This report describes the impact on those young people, as well as on the communities and foundations in Michigan.

## Longitudinal Study Overview

This study builds upon the research over the last 20 years about the youth grantmakers who participated in YACs. Formative Evaluation Research Associates (FERA), the primary evaluators of MCFYP over the years, conducted surveys with YAC members throughout the ‘90s. In 2002 and 2003, former YAC members were surveyed to determine the impact of the program on volunteering, career choices, and charitable giving. In 2003, FERA added case studies to their research methodology and interviewed 11 youth grantmakers between six and 13 years after their YAC experience.<sup>4</sup>

The research for this report explored the long-term impact of the YACs on the young philanthropists, the community

Figure 1: Youth Advisory Committee Member Survey: Gender (N=266)

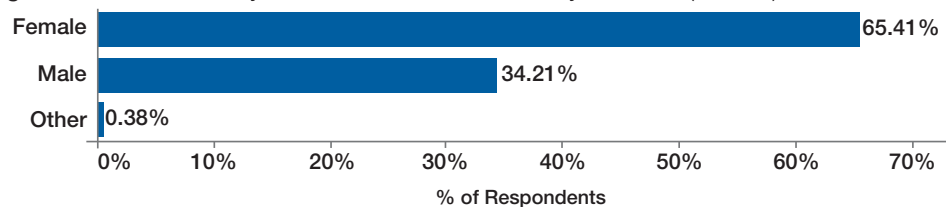
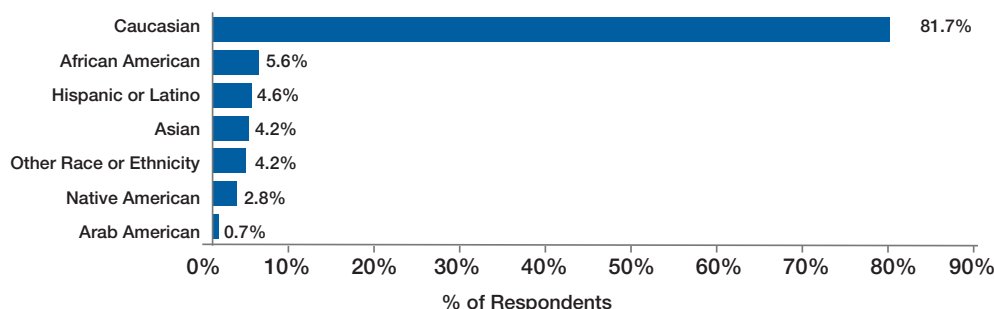


Figure 2: Youth Advisory Committee Member Survey: Race and Ethnicity (N=284)  
(Percent of respondents who identify with a race/ethnicity – respondents can select more than one)



<sup>1</sup>MCF Philanthropic Advisory Services, 2009; Youth Leadership Institute, 2001

<sup>2</sup>Agard, 2002; Collier and Tice, 2004; CMF, 1993; Kurzeka, 2009; Nissan, 2007; Youth Leadership Institute, 2001

<sup>3</sup>Falk and Nissan, 2007

<sup>4</sup>Karin Tice from FERA conducted research over the last 20 years on the effectiveness of MCFYP, its impact on communities and young people, and lessons that can be learned to drive future practice. (See Tice, 1993, 2002, 2003, 2004.)



foundations, the communities themselves, and finally on the expansion of youth philanthropy programs across the United States and internationally. An electronic YAC Member Survey was distributed to YACs across the state, as well as to the e-mail addresses of former YAC members. Youth were encouraged to fill out the survey at YAC conferences, regional trainings, and through Facebook and listservs.

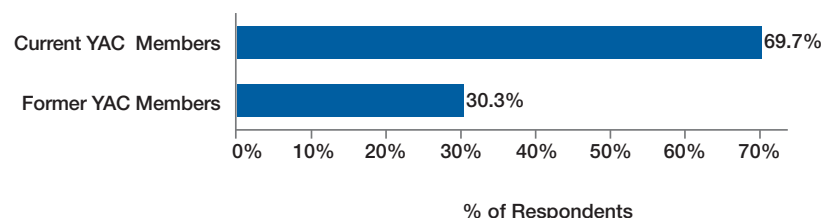
In the end, 285 current and former YAC members filled out the survey. As shown in Figures 1 and 2, almost two-thirds were female, and by a large majority (82 percent), they were Caucasian.

Figure 3 shows that approximately 70 percent of respondents are current YAC members and approximately 30 percent are former YAC members. While efforts were made to reach as many YAC members as possible, the sample of former YAC members is biased in favor of those who remained the most connected to the community foundation YAC work in some way, such as attending the annual youth conference or being active in a listserv. The sample of current YAC members is somewhat biased by having the survey administered at meetings that coincided with the data-collection period, rather than by having a representative sample. However, we do know that: (1) survey respondents represent a wide range of urban, suburban, and rural YACs from all across the state; (2) the gender distribution is consistent with rates of participation in YAC; and (3) the racial composition of the survey respondents is consistent with YAC membership.

A second electronic survey, YAC Advisors Survey, was completed by 51 advisors representing 32 community foundations around the state. Almost 79 percent of the respondents were female and approximately 10 percent were individuals from communities of color.

Phone and in-person interviews provided a deeper understanding of the impact, the challenges, and the stories of youth philanthropy from around the state. Of the 11 individuals interviewed more than 10 years ago, we were able to re-interview four of them. Their stories can be found throughout this report. Interviews were also conducted with 15 other current and former YAC members and YAC advisors. Interviewees were YAC members who

Figure 3: Youth Advisory Committee Member Survey: Current and Former Members



### Joseph: Volunteering is an integral part of my life.

Joseph first joined a Youth Advisory Committee in the eighth grade on the suggestion of a teacher. "I went in not knowing much about it, but quickly I found that I was fascinated by the work that they were doing and excited to get involved in the community." Over the six years he was on the YAC he was given greater responsibilities, eventually becoming YAC vice president and president as well as serving on the MCFYP committee for three years.

One of the most powerful aspects of his experience was the opportunity to work with community leaders. In his small town, the YACs raised the profile of young people. "It really impressed the leadership of the community. ... And it opened up opportunities for young people outside of YAC, because the village elders have seen what young people in high school and in our town can do."

Joseph directly credits YAC and MCFYP with shaping his college and career choices. "They showed me there was this whole field of nonprofits and philanthropy and that I could have a viable career [in this field]. And I'm not the only one who is now working in nonprofits and philanthropy as a result of YAC." Joseph studied public policy in college and works in fund development and foundation relations at his alma mater. His career path included multiple internships and positions in the nonprofit sector doing grant writing, donor marketing, and events development. The networking and leadership skills he learned in YAC have served him in these positions and he credits his early experiences with making him more marketable in the field.

His ideas about "giving back" to his community include the importance of local, place-based giving. He decided to stay in Michigan so he could continue to make a difference in his home state. He sees volunteering as an integral part of his life. He volunteers with the Red Cross as a coordinator of disaster teams, as well as engaging with the different chapters in a leadership position. "YAC showed us that being involved is something you can do throughout your life."

were identified by CMF as having been positively influenced by their experience. At the annual Youth Grantmakers Summer Leadership Conference, we facilitated a focus group with 10 YAC participants and interviewed two individuals from youth philanthropy programs in other states. Finally, our research included interviews with five leaders and founders of MCFYP to get a sense of the history of the program.

### What are Youth Advisory Committees?

When YACs were being developed in community foundations around Michigan, one of the key decisions was to *not* impose a lot of rules. The designers wanted the community foundations to be free to innovate within a general set

of guidelines. The result was that each YAC figured out what worked for their community and their group of young people. Since then, a set of best practices has emerged that guides the structure of the YACs, but there still are few hard and fast rules to allow for innovation. (See Appendix B: Putting Best Practices Into Action.)

Today, there are 86 permanently endowed YACs housed in community foundations throughout Michigan. Each is comprised of approximately 20 young people ages 13 to 17. Each YAC has one or two adult advisors who guide and support the committee in its work. The selection process for getting YAC members varies. In some YACs, the potential members apply and go through an interview process; in others, they are invited by

members, teachers or counselors to participate. Membership recruitment is an important part of the learning process. One former advisor said, “The fact that [the youth] made decisions about who their members were is tough; probably even tougher than making grant decisions! You might want your best friend on, but you need another kind of voice. How do you come to those decisions in a thoughtful and meaningful way? [How do you take into account] who was missing and who needed to be represented?”

The following are the main activities of the YAC's:

**Engage in grantmaking.** Each YAC has a pool of funds to give out as grants each year. A key to success is that the funds are permanently endowed, providing stability to the program and an assurance that the youth will always have funds to give away. The amount available for grants ranges from \$5,000 to about \$100,000 a year, depending on the size of the endowment. As one young person said, “I was amazed that they trusted us with this responsibility.” Some YACs entertain proposals every month, while others have annual or biannual grant cycles. The grant proposals come into the YACs either through general requests for proposals or through personal solicitations. The connections that the young people make out in the community through volunteering, hosting events, and serving on boards help to make them more proactive grantmakers.

Like other grantmakers, YAC members do site visits to organizations or invite potential grantees to present their ideas to the committee. In the application review process, they learn how to analyze a budget, assess feasibility of a project, and develop evaluation questions to determine impact. When needed, they do research on an issue or bring in experts to help them make good decisions about what to fund. Some YAC members described the discussions about proposals as their favorite part of the process. “I remember sitting around with a stack of five or six proposals, discussing the merits of each. The level of interest

from all of my peers to understand ‘how do all of these pieces fit into a program that will actually make change?’ meant a lot to me.” At some foundations, YAC members do a presentation of their grant awards to the adult board of the community foundation a few times a year.

**Conduct a youth or community needs assessment.** Every two to three years, each YAC conducts a needs assessment in the community to understand youth needs from the perspective of young people from all parts of the community. The needs assessment is then used to guide the YAC in making grant decisions and to build an understanding of the issues in the community. In some cases, the youth members are asked to present their findings to schools, government entities, and nonprofit organizations. As one YAC member commented, “I enjoyed knowing that leaders want to hear the youth voice and understand youth issues.”

**Engage in volunteer and community-service projects.** One of the key goals of YAC is to inspire an ethic of volunteerism in the community's youth. Each YAC engages in service projects every year and is generally a source for youth volunteers in the community. Examples include working at food trucks to support low-income families, adopting families at Christmas, and mentoring children at a summer grief camp. Many YACs host events in the community as part of their volunteer efforts. In one community, the needs assessment showed that young people did not have enough safe summer activities, so the YAC funded and helped organize a summer music series targeted at youth. In another, they partnered with the local National Guard to do a fundraiser to support the families. Youth Advisory Committees also fund infrastructure and programs designed to support youth volunteerism, and encourage grantees to include service activities in their programs. One YAC is partnering with the local United Way chapter to encourage youth volunteerism. Youth Advisory Committee members who were interviewed strongly expressed the need for YACs to continue and

even expand the volunteering aspect of the work so that “it’s not just people coming to us [for grants], but us going to people and helping them out.”

**Assist in fund development efforts.** Many YAC members partner with the community foundation board to support fund development. As opposed to traditional youth fundraising activities like bake sales or car washes, YACs build upon their reputation for effective youth leadership to add to their endowment. Youth Advisory Committee members speak at fundraising events and accompany board members to visit potential donors. One adult leader talked about how effective the young people were at convincing reluctant donors to give: “It was very difficult for people to say no to a young person!”

**Serve as community resources and leaders.** Youth Advisory Committee members take on a variety of roles in the community. They are often asked to serve on nonprofit boards and community task forces. In some YACs, members are seen as a resource for organizations wanting to engage youth in their programs. Through their grantmaking, visits to organizations, volunteerism, and fundraising efforts, the participating youth become more visible in the community, thus creating more opportunities for all youth.

## Statewide Support for YACs

Part of the sustainability and success of YACs in Michigan can be explained by the ongoing support provided at the state level. Since 1998, CMF has hosted a statewide MCFYP committee made up of three YAC advisors and 12 YAC members selected from across Michigan. This group serves to coordinate YAC trainings, including the Summer Leadership Conference, the regional trainings, and advisor roundtables. Youth Advisory Committee members who have participated in the statewide committee talk about how impactful it was to “see the big picture of youth philanthropy” and to “interact with key decision-makers across Michigan ... and see the scope to which they could make a difference.” They set the agenda for the annual Summer Leadership Conference



and facilitated other conferences and trainings, including at the CMF Annual Conference.

**Annual Youth Grantmakers Summer Leadership Conference.** The Summer Leadership Conference is a cornerstone activity for YACs around the state. Advisors and YAC members gather from all over Michigan to share experiences as grantmakers, learn about what's happening in neighboring communities, and gain perspective on the impact they have on the state. As one former YAC member commented, "I loved hearing the success stories of other YAC members and former YAC members – what they are doing to change the state for the better." Advisors attend trainings to improve their skills as guides and facilitators of the YACs. Both advisors and YAC members talked about bringing back what they learned from the Annual Youth Grantmakers Summer Leadership Conferences to the work in their communities.

**Other Training and Technical Assistance to YACs.** The Council of Michigan Foundations staff visits YACs around the state for regional trainings, discussing best practices and engaging in hands-on exercises to improve grantmaking and do problem solving. The technical assistance has included exercises where the young people simulate the grant allocation process and reflect on their decisions. Diversity and inclusion in recruitment is a continuous challenge for this work and the technical assistance and regional trainings have addressed this issue. Advisors also participate in conference calls and webinars and subscribe to an advisors listserv to connect to activities across the state.

**Professional development opportunities for YAC members.** The Council of Michigan Foundations has also built opportunities for talented youth grantmakers to continue their involvement beyond YAC membership. In 1997, the Mawby Fund for Kids was established as a permanent endowment fund at CMF to promote involvement of Michigan young people in philanthropy. Over the years, 20 YAC members became Mawby

interns working at CMF. The internship included planning and facilitating the annual MCFYP committee retreat and the Youth Grantmakers Summer Leadership Conference, serving as a liaison to the MCFYP committee, and helping set the agenda for the work into the future. Finally, CMF pulls from their pool of Mawby interns to select program associates at CMF. As one adult leader

in philanthropy at CMF said, "It is an opportunity when I see someone who has gone through the YAC program and made the decision to make the nonprofit sector their career choice to create a pipeline for them and nurture them and keep them in the nonprofit sector."

The next section describes the impact that the program has had on youth throughout Michigan.

### **Kari: My journey has been shaped by philanthropy.**

From her start in a Youth Advisory Committee in 1993 to today, Kari's journey has been shaped by her experience in youth philanthropy. Her father, a trustee of the board of the local community foundation, encouraged her to join during her freshman year in high school. He thought it was something they could do together; little did he realize it would end up defining her career.

The grants they gave away during her four years with the YAC made a strong impression on her. A mini-grant program for fourth-grade students showed her how kids as young as 9 and 10 years old could become inspired by philanthropy. The kids showed her how you can have a "huge impact" with just \$100. In another example, Kari was given the role of coordinator for an adopt-a-family program at her YAC. It was a pivotal experience, opening her eyes to the poverty in her own community. The YAC members ended up adding their own money to further assist the family.

In her second year on a YAC, Kari joined both the youth and adult boards of the statewide MCFYP committee as they were just getting started. As part of the adult board, she found it "phenomenal to be sitting around the table with powerful leaders." And as part of the youth board, she participated in figuring out what the statewide work would look like. "It was a great learning experience at age 14 to help mold the program!"

Kari was also an integral part of the legislative change that allows for young people to serve as full voting members on the boards of nonprofits. "It was a unique experience that I still draw upon today," she said. The group of young people went to Lansing and provided multiple testimonies to legislators and aides and then, "when we made the final presentation, and it was successful, that was such a great feeling because you knew that you were making an impact on future young people for years and years to come and it was going to change how community foundations and nonprofit organizations could be structured."

Throughout college, Kari found opportunities within the philanthropic field. She worked at CMF overseeing and managing the YACs throughout Michigan and providing them with training and technical assistance. Other experiences included helping family foundations prepare their next generation of young people, a role as youth commissioner on the America's Service Commissions; and multiple internships with nonprofit organizations. "It all keeps tying back to what I grew up in, and what I learned through my YAC world."

Currently, she is the director of the League Michigan program of the Michigan Nonprofit Association, a service-learning and philanthropy education program that empowers young people to have a positive impact on their community. The league promotes implementation of the Learning to Give curriculum, which was started by the same people who developed the YAC program, in K-12 schools throughout Michigan. She says she directly uses the good practices she learned from youth grantmaking in her current position.

Kari talks about how her understanding of philanthropy has grown over the years. "We often say that we are training leaders for the future, but they can make a difference now. Even kindergartners can make a difference. If young people are empowered and informed, they will make a difference. We need to provide opportunities for them to make a difference. Then they will work with the next generation to keep the cycle going."

# Impact on Youth

From its inception 20 years ago, the vision of the Michigan Community Foundations' Youth Project was to inspire an ethic of service and generosity in Michigan's young people through the practical experience of giving. This section describes the many layers of impact on youth.

## Responses from the YAC Member Survey

The survey findings provide a breadth of understanding across more than 280 YAC members. The YAC experience itself was highly valued by young people, both currently and formerly participating in a YAC. Figure 4 shows that over 90 percent found the experience "extremely" or "very" valuable. A striking finding is that almost 75 percent of the former YAC members, having some distance from their time on the YAC, report the experience was "extremely" valuable, compared to about 50 percent of those currently on a YAC. A reasonable explanation is that members, as they get older, begin to understand the unique value of their grantmaking experience.

The YAC Member Survey also asked specifically how the experience influenced current and former members. (See Figure 5.) More than three-quarters of the respondents felt that they were contributing and becoming aware of the issues facing their community, as well as learning about how community foundations and the grantmaking process work.

## Empowering young people

Perhaps the most valuable impact on the participating youth was they felt that their voices were heard and that they could make a difference in their communities. One adult leader observed, "So often [youth] are told, 'no'. ... 'No you can't do this. You can do *this*, but not that. ...'" Similarly, one YAC member observed that "Too often youth in the community feel like there is not much they can do. ... They have high aspirations, but do not have an avenue to be involved." Youth Advisory Committees provided youth with that avenue. Youth Advisory Committee members learned they could be part of the solution and had access to resources and networks to make

Figure 4: Overall, how valuable would you rate your experience on the YAC?  
[N=182 current YAC members; N=74 former YAC members]

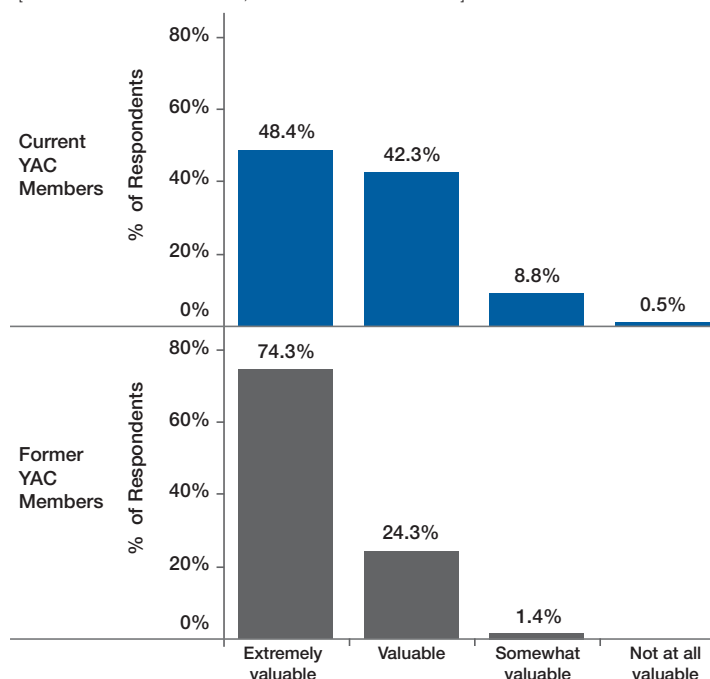
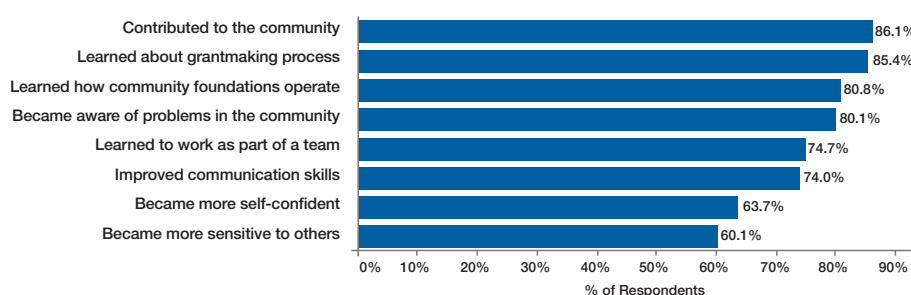


Figure 5: Which of the following statements apply to your experience serving on a YAC?



change. One YAC member said, "Seeing a project in action allowed me to see the tangible effects [of the grants], and encouraged me to continue the work." Having access to money, no matter how small an amount, to direct towards an issue is very empowering to young people. Coupled with the ability to make decisions about how to affect change, one former YAC member described, "I didn't just feel like a teenager; I felt like a person with a voice!" Many made the realization that "I could make a difference in my community no matter what my age was." Young people commented on how engaging in grantmaking went beyond traditional volunteering programs, putting resources behind their ideas. For many this was the most exciting aspect of being part of a YAC. This often changed how young people were viewed by adults and organizations in the community. This is described in the sections on impact on

community foundations and communities.

## Influencing civic engagement

The YAC model is essentially providing young people with an experience in civic engagement, where they participate in decision-making processes to determine where resources will be spent for the public good. As one adult leader said, "YAC gives youth real decision-making power about issues that matter to them and their peers. It provides an opportunity for them to experience how tough and rewarding it is to have to decide where to best invest funds to create positive outcomes for the community." Youth Advisory Committee members described how valuable it was to learn how to express opinions and engage constructively in decision making. "We had to learn how to stand up and give our opinions in meetings ... and if we disagreed, how to do that tactfully and

appropriately.” The ability to express opinions, to engage constructively in decision making, and to balance differing needs is critical for adults in a democracy. Youth grantmaking provides one avenue for youth to build those skills.

One powerful example of civic engagement was when the YAC members discovered that youth were, by law, ineligible to be on the boards of nonprofit organizations in Michigan. The young people prepared and presented their testimony in front of the state Legislature to change the law for youth. The Michigan Youth on Boards Act was passed in 1998, giving young people ages 16-17 the opportunity to serve as voting members on nonprofit boards. One former YAC member who participated in that movement almost 15 years ago said, “Getting that bill passed was such a great feeling because you knew that you were making an impact on future young people for years and years to come and it was going to change how community foundations and nonprofit organizations were going to be structured.” Currently, 50 percent of community foundations have young people on their boards and that number is growing.

### **Learning about the broader community**

Participating in YAC gave young people the chance to learn about the community outside of the confines of their school, family, or neighborhood. Some were exposed to issues facing young people that they may not have experienced themselves. Through the needs assessment and local nonprofits, YAC members learned about issues, such as homelessness, substance abuse, teen pregnancy, and poverty that young people faced in their communities. One former YAC member described how their group became aware of the fact that teens had the highest rate of homeless of any age group in their community. They ended up creating a homelessness awareness project that aimed at raising the consciousness of the community about the issue and identifying ways the shelter system could be improved. “Being on a YAC, I was seeing every aspect of my community. ... It shows you the good and the bad.” And, at the annual summer Leadership Conferences, young people

learned about issues facing communities all over the state, from rural towns to cities. It expanded their horizons and exposed them to young people from different socio-economic, racial, religious, and other backgrounds. One YAC member commented, “I learned that my own personal experiences are not going to be a representation of all my peers.” And it “helps me learn how to work in a group of different kinds of people.” Former YAC members saw this as an invaluable skill as they moved into adulthood.

Youth Advisory Committee members also gained an understanding of the many organizations that exist in their communities that are working on these problems. They see the inner workings of nonprofits through grant proposals and get to see the programs and meet the leaders up close through site visits and presentations. One current YAC member commented, “I always volunteered, but then I got into YAC and it’s like this whole new world has opened up to me.” It allowed these young people to build networks and learn who the influential people in the community are who can get things done. Many former YAC members talked about how they have used these networking skills to engage in their communities as adults.

### **Experiencing personal growth**

Many YAC members joined the group at age 13 or 14 and experienced many personal changes over the course of their

involvement. A YAC advisor commented, “Many of our younger YAC members are able to learn and grow in those first couple of years; many are hesitant to speak or are quiet at first. And then by high school, they are leading the group and making larger contributions to group discussions.” Self-confidence and trust in their own opinions grew for many YAC members as they engaged in difficult decisions, worked closely with adults, and made presentations in their community. One YAC member said, “YACs are the one place where youth are told, ‘You are competent. You are smart. And, you can make good decisions.’”

### **Building practical skills**

Participating in a YAC gave young people very valuable skills that former members say has served them well into adulthood. As grantmakers they learn to create and analyze a budget, assessing how much things cost and how to carry out activities within fiscal constraints. Critical thinking skills were honed through their examination of proposals. They learned how to look at all sides of an issue and to debate the merits of one strategy over another. Youth Advisory Committee members are asked to do a lot of presentations to community groups and their community foundation boards, among others. They found this built their confidence and gave them valuable public speaking skills.





# Lasting Impact on Giving

This research looked at the extent to which the experience with youth grantmaking has a lasting impact on young people as they move into adulthood. The results show that these youth continue to give back to their communities through the giving of “time, talent, or treasure,” as many of the YAC members and advisors described it. Furthermore, they experience a change in mindset about what it means to give back.

## Influence on Volunteering

Figures 6 and 7<sup>5</sup> show the volunteering rates of the former YAC members. Figure 6 shows the results from surveys of former YAC members going back to 1995. The 2012 survey showed that 87 percent of all former YAC members volunteered over the past 12 months. This is in line with the previous research conducted by FERA since 1995, where anywhere from 73 percent to 94 percent of former YAC members recalled volunteering in the previous year.

Figure 7 compares the rate of volunteering for former YAC members to that of other adults. At 87 percent, former YAC members volunteer at more than 3 times the rate of other adults in Michigan and nationwide, showing the powerful influence of early engagement in YACs.

The 2012 survey asked YAC members, both former and current (N=256), to identify their volunteer activities. Almost half (n=134) volunteer for special projects, such as a day long service experience or organizing an event. Fifty-two of the respondents have regularly scheduled volunteer hours and 21 serve on boards of nonprofit organizations. Types of volunteer organizations include soup kitchens, the Humane Society, recycling organizations, hospitals, educational organizations, and religious organizations. Ten respondents participated in Michigan Campus Compact, VISTA, AmeriCorps, LEAGUE, or Learn and Serve. Twenty-one others participated in state or national organizations such as the National Honor Society, Girl Scouts, SADD, and Big Brother, Big Sister.

The in-depth interviews allowed a deeper

Figure 6: Comparison of Survey Results: YAC Former Members Volunteering Over the Past 12 Months (2012 N=84)

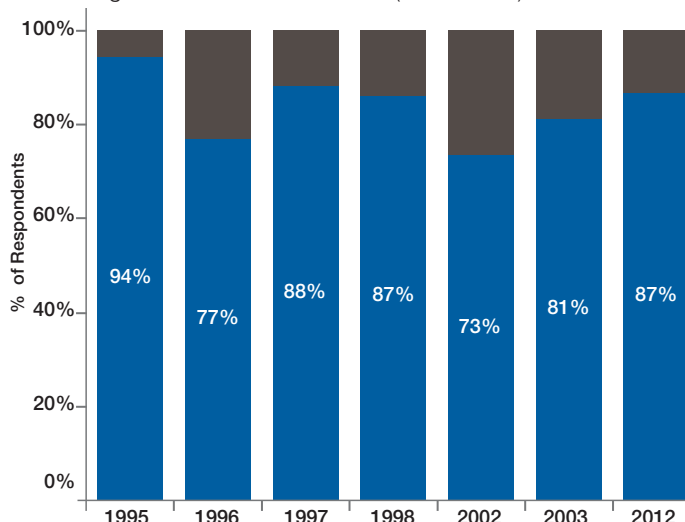
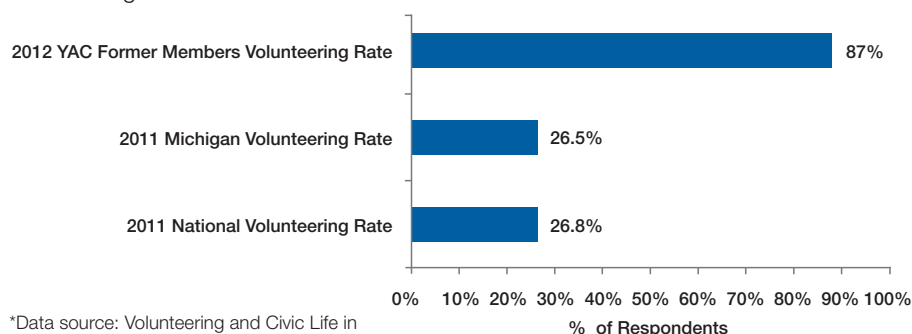


Figure 7: Comparison of National, State and Former YAC Members' Volunteering Over the Last 12 Months



\*Data source: Volunteering and Civic Life in America, 2012. Corporation for National and Community Service.

understanding of the types of volunteer activities engaged in by YAC members. Often, these young people used the special set of skills they learned through YAC, such as fundraising, grantmaking, and project management in their volunteering work. The following are some examples:

- One former YAC member ran the University of Michigan's largest service event, Detroit Partnership Day, in which more than 1,100 students volunteered at organizations throughout Detroit, planting trees and building playgrounds. It not only helped out the city, but exposed the students to a broader vision of Detroit.
- A few former YAC members participate in “giving circles” in their local community foundations. Giving circles are a form of philanthropy

in which a group of people pool funds and collectively decide on the community organizations or projects to which they grant the money. These young people described this as a way to continue their YAC experience, which they missed when they went to college and beyond.

- One former YAC member has started a partnership between her university and nearby residents to get students into the community to maintain community gardens and generally involve them in nonprofit work.
- One current YAC member is in college and is part of a residential community whose focus is on public service. They plan monthly service projects and volunteer their time in the community.

<sup>5</sup>The two figures look at the volunteering rates of only the former YAC members (n=84 respondents), since it is a given that all current YAC members volunteer through YAC.

## Charitable Giving

In terms of donating money, Figure 8 shows that about half of current YAC members and about two-thirds of former YAC members contributed money during the preceding twelve months. Figure 9 shows the amounts that were given; more than 10 percent gave \$200 or more.

Most importantly, perhaps, many of the former YAC members described a change in mindset about what it means to “give back”: “The most important thing our YAC has done is fostering the mentality of philanthropy, spreading the idea of its importance and how serving others can really help everyone.” YAC members learned that you don’t have to have a lot of money to make a difference, nor do you have to be of a certain age. “It has given me a lifelong knowledge that no matter where I end up, I can be engaged.”

Figure 8: Comparison of Survey Results: YAC Member Charitable Giving Over the Past 12 Months

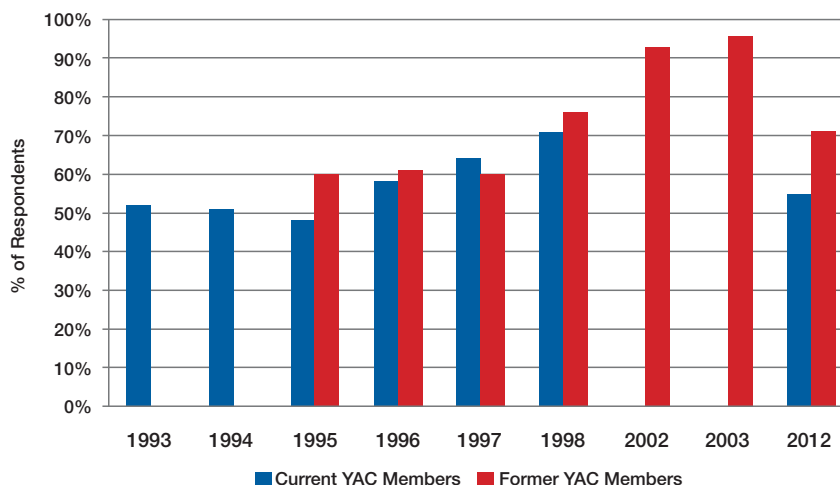
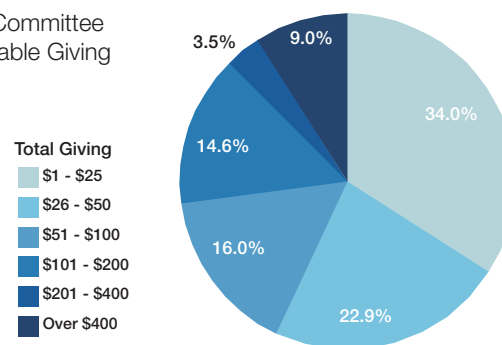


Figure 9: Youth Advisory Committee Members Levels of Charitable Giving (N=144)



### Kasee: Young people should always be our focus.

It’s been almost 16 years since Kasee first got involved with her Youth Advisory Committee as a sixth-grader in a rural area of Michigan. A teacher in her school, seeing her leadership potential, encouraged her to join. She describes her first few years as a real learning experience, figuring out what grantmaking meant and what community foundations were all about. She must have gotten the hang of things, because as a senior in high school she was invited to take on the role of YAC advisor. The community foundation was going through restructuring and had trouble filling the Advisor position. Kasee became the youngest YAC advisor in Michigan at the time. “It was a really great leadership experience,” she said. “We learned to stand up and give our opinions in meetings and how to do that tactfully and appropriately. ... I think my greatest take-home was understanding more about grant writing and the grantmaking process. The youth were responsible for such a large endowment ... and they made the final decisions. [We helped] guide them to make the most appropriate decision, but still left it in their hands. It was a really neat responsibility.”

Even in college, Kasee continued to engage in philanthropy, serving on an adult board of a community foundation: “It was a good experience to see how adults solve problems versus how youth solve problems. The youth typically avoid the political fluff and focus on what is important in their community.” Kasee’s academics were also influenced by her involvement in youth

philanthropy. As an undergrad, she majored in psychology with a minor in youth studies. “The youth studies minor was pursued after having had such an incredible experience with leading my YAC. Young people should always be our focus and my career has been built on fostering their growth and success.”

Kasee has gone on to complete a Ph.D. in school psychology and is doing a post-doctoral fellowship at Johns Hopkins School of Medicine. Her work with youth has continued and she works with kids who have developmental delays and rare genetic conditions with co-occurring problem behaviors. Her primary goal is to enhance the quality of life of all young people. She still volunteers her time when she can by giving presentations in the community and to parent-support groups for youth with developmental needs. She credits her time in the YAC with preparing her for leadership roles, effective communication, and other skills that she has found valuable as an adult. The YAC also brought her career networks and resources that she has used to establish herself. “It opened a lot of other windows.”

In the future, when she is more settled in a community, Kasee plans to be part of a YAC or even to start one. “Youth Advisory Committees are so critical to communities. It’s a way for me to still be involved with youth and step away from my day-to-day career. I would very much love to do that!”

# Influence on Career Choices

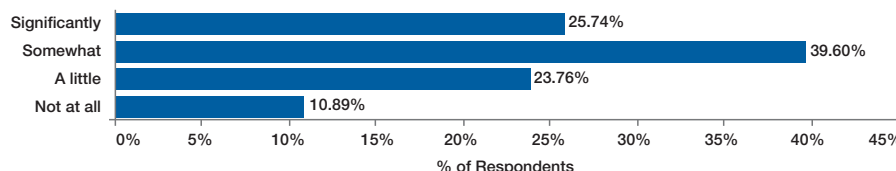
The experience of grantmaking as young people has an influence on career choices. A key challenge for nonprofit organizations in Michigan and across the country is to prepare a new generation of leaders for the sector. A substantial number of baby boomers will be approaching retirement age and the question for nonprofits is: Who will replace them? The Michigan Community Foundations' Youth Project provides young people with a substantive experience in the nonprofit sector. The hope is that some will see the nonprofit world as their career. While this is not the definition of success for the program, the research found that for some young people, their experience with YACs made a difference. Figure 10 shows the extent to which serving on YACs had an influence on the choice of studies or career path. For almost 26 percent of the YAC members surveyed, their experience *significantly* influenced their studies and career choices. For an additional 39.6 percent of the total, their experience *somewhat* influenced their choices.

For some of the young people we interviewed, the YAC experience moved them towards a career in the nonprofit sector and philanthropy. Comments include:

- "A light bulb went off; I hadn't thought of the nonprofit sector as a potential career."
- "My experience with MCFYP changed the trajectory of my career ... The exposure I was given to interact with key decision-makers across the state of Michigan ... allowed me to see the scope to which we could make a difference."
- The YAC experience, "helped me to see some kind of future in [the nonprofit sector] for myself."

The stories of the YAC members who have gone on to careers in the nonprofit sector are varied. Many were on the MCFYP committee, meaning that they were selected to participate in the statewide group that organizes the annual conference and facilitates training and awards programs. Others participated as Mawby interns, where they had the experience of working for CMF and the

Figure 10: To What Extent Did Serving on a YAC Influence Your Education or Career Path?



benefit of the professional networks that came along with it. These were both experiences that supported young people with the interest and inclination to enter the nonprofit field. The following describe the nonprofit careers of some YAC alumni:

- Alex participated in YAC all through high school and eventually applied and was selected for the MCFYP committee. That experience gave him exposure to leaders throughout Michigan. Eventually, he was hosting fundraising events

## Jeanie: How can I help serve others?

Jeanie's passion has always been to make a difference in her community. She joined the YAC in the ninth grade and, she says, "it has pretty much influenced every aspect of my life." She remembers high school as a time when kids would stay in their small groups. Being part of the YAC took her out of the cliques and introduced her to a wider, more diverse world. "I worked with people of different ages, and people that I would not normally hang out with. ... It was the first opportunity to experience their perspective and how they differed from me."

Jeanie remembers one key YAC experience participating in the Youth Summer Leadership Camp. The hosts put together a day long exercise where youth from all over the state were divided into three groups and given differing access to resources to complete the fictional task of crossing a lake. The experience surfaced important issues around individual rights vs. community responsibilities, social justice, and respect for different life journeys. Jeanie describes her time with the YAC as, "putting us out of our comfort zones and challenging us."

She credits her YAC experience, together with her upbringing, for focusing her career aspirations toward the nonprofit sector. She studied organizational behavior in college, continuing to engage in youth philanthropy throughout. Jeanie interned at Youth on Board, an organization that supports a more active role for young people in local, regional, and national decisionmaking, and did a summer internship with the Council of Michigan Foundations.

After graduating from college, Jeanie worked in the area of health promotion, becoming executive director of the Summit Prevention Alliance. She worked with hospitals and health centers to support community-based solutions to health issues. She modeled the youth engagement in her organization on her YAC experience, bringing in youth as interns, having them as members on her board, and conducting trainings in the community on building authentic youth and adult partnerships.

Eventually, Jeanie's interest in health inspired her to go back to school to become a doctor. She is in her third year of medical school and while she is not yet sure of her focus, she entertains the possibility of combining philanthropy and medicine. Even while tackling a heavy school load, she acts as an advisor to a nonprofit organization she helped found called Outdoor Mindset, working with people affected by neurological challenges who share a passion for the outdoors. Jeanie believes she will always find a place in her career and her life to give back to her community. She asks, "When I get to that place [where I can be a mentor], how can I help serve others?"



## Examples of grants provided by Michigan YACs

Interviews with current and former YAC members provided insight into the many grants given out over the last 20 years by Youth Advisory Committees. The majority were tailored to address youth issues, while others supported broader issues that affected youth within the community. The following describe just a few of the impactful grants made possible through YAC funds:

- One YAC gave a grant to renovate a former union hall to create a safe, clean hangout for young people. The YAC pitched in to clean the space and help with programs. They supported after-school activities and band performances and now some of the YAC meetings are held there, along with their annual retreat.
- Another YAC became aware of a city council ban on skateboarding during certain months of the year. "But, they knew enough to not go into the city council with a problem, but rather with a solution to the problem." The YAC worked with the city council and other young people to create a skateboard park, making kids responsible for following rules of safety and security and developing procedures for resolving conflicts. In the end, the young people became problem solvers, "negotiating with the adults ... and bringing resources to the table, saying we will be part of the solution."
- Another YAC gave a grant for a youth farm stand to support a garden that inner-city kids could cultivate, learning lessons in food sustainability and business.
- Every year, this YAC gave out mini-grants to local high schools to support fun and safe after-prom activities. Substance abuse was found to be a big issue in that community and the grant, "served an unmet need of community's youth."
- Another YAC provided the support and leadership for starting a youth center in their community. The process of bringing together the community and, particularly, youth from all over the city in the design and implementation of the center has become a model of engagement. The YAC continues to support youth programming at the center, and has developed an ongoing partnership for addressing youth issues in the community.
- One YAC gave a small grant to a low-income school to put on a play. Through meetings with teachers and students, the YAC funded costumes and set design and, "the kids did so good ... it just really stuck out to me."
- One YAC funded a day camp for kids with special needs. "Watching the kids come out of their shells was a big thing for me."
- One youth group did outreach its first year to organizations all around its metro-Detroit area and ended up getting 24 applications for anything from teen pregnancy prevention and domestic violence to job development, all having to do with teenagers. One of the groups they ended up supporting was Catholic Social Services, helping homeless teenagers to get back on their feet.
- One YAC funded a support organization for children and adults who have lost a loved one, ADAM (Another Day Another Memory). "We've never passed a grant so quickly," said a participating YAC member.

at his university and now works for a nonprofit organization as a community representative: "YAC taught me how to mobilize and engage communities in a way that no other organization can."

- Amy was a YAC member for five years before joining the MCFYP committee in 12th grade and was

"taken aback by the big picture of youth philanthropy." She says she bonded with her fellow MCFYP committee members and continues to connect to them. She is now a professional fundraiser in the nonprofit sector. "YAC and MCFYP gave me the courage and the idea that I could make change, and the

skills that have gotten me to where I could make a difference."

- Joseph's experience with YAC dictated his college choice to study public policy and his career choice to pursue philanthropy. He grew up in Michigan and being on a YAC instilled in him the importance of having local impact - by staying in Michigan and not adding to the "brain-drain." In college, he interned with the Red Cross to do grant writing, but eventually underwent training in disaster relief and became a volunteer disaster relief coordinator. He now works for a university as an associate in fund development, continuing to use the skills he learned through YAC.
- Jeffrey served on a YAC starting in sixth grade and continuing through high school. "Because I was involved in YAC at such a young age, that really helped mold the way that I viewed career or life aspirations. I didn't know in sixth-grade that I'd be heavily involved in a nonprofit. I think through the course of the YAC experience that became a bigger priority for me." He is still involved as a YAC advisor, and is the executive director of a nonprofit organization. He says that being involved in YAC helped him to learn that "problems are one thing ... solutions are another. Identifying solutions has been key in my work and my role in community, as well."

These examples show the potential for YACs to develop future leaders for the nonprofit field. "If you never expose them to it, then you can't really expect them to get involved ... You are laying a foundation of potential for later in life ... We're trying to train the next generation of philanthropists." While there are many examples of young people inspired by their experience to get into the nonprofit sector, some of the adult leaders we interviewed wondered "if it was enough." They felt the pipeline to the nonprofit sector (starting from middle school to high school to college into career) could be stronger. Former YAC members talk about missing their philanthropic activities when they went to college, not finding many similar opportunities." In 20

years if we don't take full advantage of developing young leaders we're missing an opportunity."

Even for the former YAC members who have gone on to work in other fields, the experience changed their perspective on their careers. As one former YAC member commented, "It didn't change what I wanted to do, but it changed how I want to do it." That young person, a law student, talked about how the YAC opened his eyes to the importance of making ethical choices about job opportunities and to finding ways to incorporate his values into his career. A medical student described how "I approach my career differently ... with the knowledge that I don't have to have some prestigious position to create change."

## Impact on Community Foundations

The impact of the program goes well beyond the approximately 13,500 young people engaged in grantmaking over the past 20 years. The challenge grants led to the 86 community foundations across Michigan with permanently endowed youth funds.

The first few years of the YACs were a time of experimentation as everyone discovered how well young people would take to grantmaking. Over the years, the YACs have proved to be an asset to the community foundations. Their value includes:

- enhancing the credibility and visibility of the community foundations in their communities;
- encouraging community foundation leadership on important issues;
- building the effectiveness of foundation investments in youth issues;
- injecting the youth perspective into the community foundations; and
- inspiring individuals to give to the community foundations.

The YAC model encourages youth philanthropists to engage in the community, bringing greater visibility to the community foundations. The YAC members, through service projects, hosting events, and fund development activities, often become known in their communities. In one example, YAC members put on an annual showcase of youth talent. Between 200 and 400 people attend, "becoming aware of the value of the foundation." One YAC Advisor said in the survey, "Our youth council

members make our organization look really good! We can't give them enough credit for being such ambitious go-getters."

From the very beginning, the YACs brought new partnerships to the table. Private foundations, nonprofit organizations, and others with an interest in youth issues connected with community foundations and their YACs. As one leader said, "Our assets have grown because of the YAC, because of the Kellogg challenge, and because of the partnerships that have evolved out of their work. It's been really a win-win-win for our community."

At times, YACs can bring a community foundation into some controversial but critical areas that need addressing in the community. One YAC funded programs related to dating violence and supported a very visible conference on teenage sexuality and the impacts of alcohol and substance abuse. The board had not funded these areas extensively before but was very supportive, and the YAC was able to expand the exploration of these issues in the community. In this way, the YACs contribute to the credibility of the community foundations with the broader community and enhance their role as leaders on community issues.

### Alex: Together we can make a difference.

Alex joined his local community foundation's Youth Advisory Committee almost 17 years ago as a sixth-grader. The seven years he participated in the YAC and eventually on the MCFYP committee have had a powerful influence on his career and his outlook on community. His YAC met monthly for the ongoing review of grant applications. One of the grants that stands out for Alex was for a program called Natural Helpers. This program engaged a peer-to-peer model whereby young people, nominated by their peers, formed a group of trusted individuals to provide help, mediation, and support to young people in the school and community. "Youth helping youth is what resonated with me ... and the idea of young people helping each other was a major focus of our YAC." Alex found the experience of giving out grants a powerful one. "I saw immediate return on investment, which is something I find satisfying ... Seeing the dollars at work and knowing that I was a part of that."

Alex served on the MCFYP committee for multiple terms, before term limits were imposed to give more young people a chance to serve. The leadership opportunities he had there, according to Alex, really changed his life and the trajectory of his career. The exposure he was given to interact with key decisionmakers, both his MCFYP peers and nonprofit leaders,

allowed him to see the scope of possibilities for having an impact: "The greatest part was knowing that we can together make a difference as long as you have the right people on the bus and we're driving the bus in the right direction." The Annual Summer Leadership Conference helped him see the collective impact that young people could have.

In college, Alex put his leadership skills to work on volunteer projects. He was part of creating an annual fundraiser event for the American Cancer Society, serving as the philanthropy chairman. He used his fundraising and organizational skills from YAC, including "making the ask," to increase the amount raised from \$1,500 to \$15,000. The success of the event has continued to grow, and now raises more than \$47,000.

Alex works for the American Cancer Society as a community representative, helping to mobilize communities in the fight against cancer. He builds upon his YAC experience working with a community foundation. He sees community foundations as having the ability to "mobilize and engage community in a way that no other organization can." And that a true value of the MCFYP program is providing the experience of being part of a grassroots movement, which he finds "the best way to make change."

As an example, in one community it is prestigious to get a grant from the community foundation's YAC: "Organizations [get] bragging rights for being a YAC-approved group."

Interviewees also felt that the grantmaking around youth issues became more effective and more impactful because the YACs were involved. As Dr. Mawby was known to comment, "Youth are the experts on youth." As such, leaving the grantmaking decisions in the hands of the youth committee was thought to make the youth programming more resonant with the current needs and issues. As one community foundation leader said, the YAC has "influenced the direction that we go in with regards to what we should be paying attention to ... and the [needs assessment] gives us the opinion of the young people about what's really important to them." In one example, the community foundation board was surprised that their needs assessment showed that substance abuse was the top issue for youth. "We thought, 'For goodness sakes, aren't we over that?' ... but as each generation goes by, we need a reminder of what is important for developing strong young people."

In some cases, members of a community foundation's board of trustees serve as YAC advisors. This provides a constant communication loop whereby the trustee can bring his or her experience working with the YAC, and the insights from youth, into the board room. As one leader said, "it helped to address the generational gap between boards and staff and the [youth] community." And the Michigan Youth on Boards Act, passed in 1998 brought YAC members onto the boards of 50 percent of community foundations in Michigan.

Many YAC advisors and leaders talked about how young people approach grantmaking somewhat differently than adults. As one leader commented, "While young people may not have the experience, they bring a new energy to the work ... they don't see limitations, but think outside of the box." The fact that the youth grantmakers generally do not have political connections to the organizations requesting funds or to community leadership gives them a different perspective on the work. As one former YAC member described, "I felt like,

## Profile of a good YAC advisor

In every Youth Advisory Committee, there is at least one, usually two, adult advisors who guide and support the activities of the youth committee. In some cases, the advisor is part of the board of trustees at the community foundation, while in others they are staff or volunteers. The annual Summer Leadership Conference provides training opportunity for new advisors and to share experiences and good practices for all advisors. In the interviews and focus groups, we asked young people about their experience with their advisors and their perspective on what makes for a good YAC Advisor. The following are their responses: "An effective YAC Advisor..."

- **empowers young people to take the lead:** Over and over again, YAC members expressed that a good advisor "knows when to step in and when to let us go." The advisor's role is to help keep the group on track and moving with all of the activities, but not necessarily to take the lead on those activities. As one YAC member commented, "The advisor needs to understand youth empowerment and [that] their job is to guide the group. If they view their role as being in charge, it prevents promising outcomes."
- **encourages young people to pursue their passions:** Some YAC members said their advisor gently pushed them to take on greater leadership roles and supported them to take initiative around their particular interests.
- **provides the tools and skills for the young people to be successful:** Keeping the group moving requires project-management skills, logistical tools, group facilitation, and networking capacity. Youth Advisory Committee members described how a good advisor helps to develop those skills in the youth members through modeling and support.
- **models professionalism and dedication:** Many YAC members talked about their advisors as role models both personally and professionally. Particularly, advisors can model commitment to the community and how an adult can help serve others.
- **is a stable part of the YAC:** Some YACs have faced the challenge of having different advisors every year. This makes it difficult for the YAC to gain a solid footing and for the members to get the support they need to carry out their goals. Searching for advisors willing to make a long-term commitment to the YAC is one recommendation from the YAC members. The other was to encourage community foundation leadership to take into account the YACs as they make decisions about changes at the organization.
- **sets high expectations for the young people:** As one YAC member described her experience, "Whenever I would talk to my advisor, I never felt like I was 16. ... Having the expectation that I was a competent individual encouraged me to act that way. Being treated like I was mature set the tone for the experiences that I was capable of handling."

as a young person, I was shielded from the politics and could say what I needed to say."

The energy, visibility, and credibility brought to the community foundations by the youth grantmakers is attractive to potential donors as well as inspiring to family and friends. Youth Advisory Committee members commented that just talking about what they do encourages their family and friends to get involved

and spreads the word about the power of philanthropy. In one example, two siblings were involved in a YAC and through their example, their parents decided to get involved. They set up a fund at the community foundation to give out youth grants and support the work of the YACs.



# Impact on the Community

Communities in Michigan have also benefited from having these permanently endowed youth funds. Having a YAC in a community seems to bring a sustained focus to local issues affecting their youth, as well as an avenue for young people to be part of addressing those issues. Specific benefits to the community found by this research include:

- Adults in the community see young people engaged in positive activity.
- Youth issues are addressed through grantmaking.
- Permanent and more substantive opportunities for youth engagement are created.
- YAC members become a reliable source for youth voice and youth volunteers in the community.
- Nonprofit organizations are encouraged to do more youth programming.

Many towns in Michigan are struggling with economic hardship and lack of job opportunities; youth problems can sometimes go along with that, including crime and violence. Youth and adult leaders alike expressed eloquently the ways in which the YACs can serve as a counterpoint. “I’m from an area where we have a lot of at-risk young people and children, and lots of violence and high crime rates. At this point, the adults have lost trust in youth. ... So, I think our YAC has given not just a hopeful feeling, but [has shown] that not all youth are in jail or are murderers. YAC has shown that youth care [and that] you need to include youth because youth are also part of the community.”

People in the community see YAC members engaging in volunteer projects, visiting nonprofit organizations, speaking articulately at meetings, participating in decisionmaking on local issues and generally as a positive force in the community. As one former YAC member said, “Civically engaged young people wanting to make a difference in their community with a collective vision and collective voice places youth in a very positive light ... and counteracts the

negative image in which young people are often portrayed.”

Several young people talked about how they saw this shift in adult perception of youth take place before their eyes in their own committee meetings. One described this experience: “Adults come in for an interview [with the Youth Advisory Committee], and they don’t exactly know what [to expect]. They think they are about to enter a boardroom of adults, and they walk in and it’s a bunch of kids; it takes them a minute to gather their thoughts. ... But when they’re finished, they are thinking, ‘Wow, I just presented to a bunch of kids and I have complete confidence in them.’ The immediate impact of that experience is incredible.”

The grants given out by YACs have an important impact in their communities. Economic hardship has led to cutbacks in educational and social programs for youth in many Michigan towns. Advisors and YAC members talked about how the grants have been able to keep alive critical programs that target at-risk students, low-income students, and young people with disabilities. One young person commented, “YAC grants fulfill a lot of goals within the school system and local nonprofits.” The existence of a permanent fund for youth issues creates a virtuous cycle in the community: Nonprofits and other organizations propose more youth programming, knowing that there is a potential funding source for this work.

To encourage greater youth engagement in the community, many of the YACs ask the nonprofit organizations requesting funds three questions as part of their grantmaking process: (1) Is there a young person serving on your board? (2) Was there a young person involved in designing the program? (3) Was there a young person involved in writing the grant application? Simply asking these questions is a way to influence the thinking and broaden the potential for more youth engagement.

Youth Advisory Committee members were also quick to point out the value of the direct service they do in the community through volunteering. “Our community service is really important. ... So it’s not just people coming to us [for grants], but

us going to them and helping them out.” The youth-needs assessments conducted every few years by each YAC has come to serve a wider purpose in some communities. Youth Advisory Committee members share the results broadly to organizations such as the school board, the mayor’s office, Kiwanis, and the Rotary Club, and they use the results to guide their youth programming. As one YAC member said, “I enjoyed knowing that leaders want to hear the youth voice and understand youth issues.”

Youth Advisory Committees have opened up new opportunities for youth throughout Michigan. They are often the “first stop” in a community for engaging youth leaders. “When someone is looking for a youth representative, naturally they will go to the YAC and ask for someone to serve on some type of task force, committee, etc. ... The community has somewhere to go.” Young people have become representatives on school boards, mayoral offices, library committees, parks and recreation committees, and many nonprofit organizations throughout these communities. As community leaders — or “village elders,” as one YAC member put it — become impressed with the youth leaders, they advocate for engaging youth in other ways. Youth Advisory Committees have been invited to partner with other funders or government entities, bringing their unique youth perspective. The following are some examples:

- Youth Advisory Committee members were invited to participate in local committees to redistribute funds acquired from a major tobacco settlement.<sup>6</sup>
- The Department of Civil Rights provided matching grants to YACs to promote civil rights and diversity.
- The Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan Foundation provided matching grants to support anti-smoking campaigns.<sup>7</sup>
- Recently, MCFYP received challenge-grant funds from the Kresge Foundation to create College Positive Communities. Youth Advisory Committees around the state vied for those funds by proposing activities that will

<sup>6</sup> Youth Leadership Institute, 2001

<sup>7</sup> Garza and Stevens, 2002

increase the college-going rates in their communities.

- The Detroit Pistons' *Come Together* program partnered with CMF and MCFYP to reward young people in Michigan for their involvement in philanthropy and community service. Ten YACs around the state are given grant funding to support community projects. These winning projects will also be publicized on the Detroit Pistons' Facebook page.

Over time, these opportunities have grown and continue to grow as communities in Michigan realize the potential of what they have in their youth philanthropists.

## Youth Philanthropy as a National and Global Movement

While the impact of the program can be seen most directly in Michigan, it has also circled outward to other states and even other countries. The following are two specific examples of how youth philanthropy is growing in other states. In Iowa, Teens for Tomorrow was started in 2002 by the Community Foundation of the Great River Bend whose CEO and Board were exploring how to bring youth philanthropy to their community. They modeled their program after MCFYP, using the YAC resources and best practices found on the website. They started by familiarizing themselves with the needs of their community. One of the community foundation staff members talked about how their young people were introduced to the reality of the challenges in their community: "bubbles started to burst" as the young people learned about what their nonprofits dealt with everyday. In 2009, three Iowa youth and their advisor attended the Summer Leadership Conference in Michigan and came away passionate about what youth leadership could do in their community. Over the last 10 years, Teens for Tomorrow has granted over \$65,000 and more than 235 young Iowans have been exposed to youth philanthropy. Nonprofits in the area are recognizing more and more that young people are important to engage and are the next generation of leadership. Today, Teens for Tomorrow is getting

### Jennifer: Build a life of service.

Jennifer was part of the very first Youth Advisory Committee at her community foundation. She's from a small, blue-collar town, and it seemed like a good opportunity to meet new people. "It wasn't until I left my community for college that I realized what a unique opportunity it was to be part of the YAC."

She describes loving every part of being on a YAC: from the needs assessments, to the team-building exercises, to the social side of the experience. She believed in the proactive aspect of the grantmaking process, understanding that the needs of young people in the community helped the committee to make important funding decisions. The grantmaking itself felt like an important responsibility that she and her peers took very seriously. By reading through the grant applications, she learned about the projects and programs being implemented in the community and especially liked interviewing the nonprofit leaders who had applied for funds from the youth committee. "It was great to see adults presenting to a group of young people. We asked thoughtful questions and we were given thoughtful answers. We were respected." She credits her advisor with providing the right balance: while most of the time she let the young people lead the process, she was good about stepping in when they needed "a bit of guidance, reasoning, or grounding."

Jennifer recalls her advisor pushing her to challenge herself. She presented allocation decisions at the community foundation board meetings, emceed a YAC event, spoke at fundraising dinners, and applied for and was accepted to the statewide MCFYP committee. Through MCFYP, Jennifer learned about the diversity of challenges confronting Michigan communities. In MCFYP, "We were taken very seriously; what we said mattered, and they trusted us."

When it came time to think about college and career decisions, her mom suggested she pursue work in the nonprofit field, noting how much she enjoyed her time with the YAC. Jennifer says, "It was such a great realization, I had my answer, and I never looked back." She went on to get master's degrees in nonprofit management and philanthropic studies from Indiana University's Center on Philanthropy. Since then, Jennifer's personal and professional goals have focused on a life of service. She served as a Peace Corps volunteer and now works for the Clinton Global Initiative. She subscribes to the idea of giving of her time, talent, and treasure; from donating money to causes she is passionate about to volunteering as a mentor for young people. And, she says, "I know the seeds of service were planted in the YAC."

75-100 youth applications to participate —far more than they can accept—and two affiliates are starting their own youth grantmaking programs. Over time they see the number of affiliates growing.

As another example, in rural Kentucky, youth philanthropy is a fairly new idea. The Foundation for Appalachian Kentucky was wrestling with the challenge of how to encourage young people to stay in the area. The diverse and forward-thinking community foundation board realized that service, volunteerism, and opportunities for youth engagement could help create a sense of place for young people. Their research into different models introduced them to MCFYP. The staff developed a comprehensive package based on the MCFYP model of how youth philanthropy

could work in their community. They have sent young people to the summer conference and CMF staff traveled to Kentucky to do an orientation and training with young people. As an adult leader commented, "The light bulb moment was when [they] could give examples and make it real." Since then, they have started their Youth Leadership and Philanthropy Initiative, creating a youth advisory board with 12 young people recruited from three local schools. They are fundraising, attending leadership and team-building programs, and organizing community service projects. Through all of this work, they are trying to send the message to their young people that no matter what their economic situation, they have time, treasure, and talent to give.

Michigan Community Foundations' Youth Project has gained nation-wide recognition as a leader in youth philanthropy and there are many more examples of their influence on existing and new youth philanthropy programs. The leaders of MCFYP have made a concerted effort over time to share what they have learned with others. "We've always felt very blessed that we had this amazing multi-million dollar investment both in Michigan community foundations and in our youth programs. We were never shy about sharing that with the rest of the country." The design process included formative evaluation and research to keep a feedback loop open to continue to improve the program. Dissemination efforts included presentations in Michigan, nationally, and internationally and documents on lessons learned and best practices shared through websites and other networking opportunities.

The Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation created a Youth Advisory Board in 1997 based on MCFYP and CMF has worked closely with the Lilly Endowment,

which funded the Youth As Resources program<sup>8</sup> and the Giving Indiana Funds for Tomorrow initiative<sup>9</sup>. Regional and statewide initiatives have emerged in Arkansas, California, Washington D.C., Kansas, Indiana and New York.<sup>10</sup> And beyond these, YACs exist in Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Georgia, Illinois, Massachusetts, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Texas, Virginia, Washington and Wisconsin.<sup>11</sup>

The Michigan Community Foundations' Youth Project has also worked with community foundations around the world to help create youth philanthropy programs. The Michigan model was the basis for the Caripollo Foundations project in Lombardy, Italy.<sup>12</sup> Canada's youth philanthropy movement began with the Vancouver Foundation in 1997, which based its work directly on MCFYP<sup>13</sup>. Today, there are YACs in almost 55 community foundations across the country. Northern Ireland's Youth Bank has had a close relationship with MCFYP, with members from both sides visiting their respective communities to experience the youth grantmaking, volunteerism

and service first hand. One former YAC member and advisor described being in Ireland and participating in their grantmaking process. The group of young people only had a small amount of money to give, but "the impact that they thought ... they would have on their community was incredible. The attention to detail was so keen and the competition for a few hundred dollars was unbelievable." He went on to say, "I think the best part of it was young people in Michigan, young people in Ireland... all had a keen interest in making their community better. Where you come from didn't matter; the young people had hope for the future and I think that was the best part of it." The Youth Bank model, inspired by MCFYP, has gone on to inspire models in the Czech Republic, Ghana, Russia, Slovakia, and South Africa. Youth Bank has also partnered with foundations to replicate its model in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia, France, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Palestine, Romania, and Turkey.



<sup>8</sup> O'Neill, 1990

<sup>9</sup> MCF Philanthropic Advisory Services, 2009; Tice, 1993.

<sup>10</sup> Tice, 2003

<sup>11</sup> Council of Michigan Foundations, 2009

<sup>12</sup> MCF Philanthropic Advisory Services, 2009.

<sup>13</sup> Oates, 2002



## A vision and recommendations for the future

The experience with youth grantmaking in Michigan shows the strength of this model for empowering young people and giving them a voice in their community. It goes well beyond a traditional youth engagement model, putting resources and power behind the young people's ideas. They felt empowered to make change and the experience gave them the tools to engage in civic life well beyond their youth grantmaking experience. The research found that they continued to volunteer at more than three times the rate of other adults and the experience has influenced their career choices, for some leading to a career of service. The influence on the community foundations was also profound, increasing their credibility and visibility in the community. And, for the communities as a whole, the existence of a youth endowment created a virtuous cycle whereby the more that adults and nonprofit organizations were exposed to the work of the young leaders, the more opportunities were created for youth.

One of the keys to the success was building permanent youth endowments. The Michigan Community Foundations' Youth Project leadership has seen other youth philanthropy programs without endowments use up their initial funds, leaving youth with the skills and a desire to engage in grantmaking, but without the funding to continue to do so. The endowments provide a sense of stability and continuity for the youth, the nonprofit sector in that community, and the community foundation. Nonprofits are inspired to do more youth programming knowing there is a permanent source of funds. And, the community foundation leaders are more likely to invest staff time and resources into the youth work knowing that the youth fund will always be there.

A recommendation from leaders and youth members alike was to embed, even more strongly, the youth program within the community foundations in Michigan. Buy-in from YAC advisors and foundation board members is key, so that all of the foundations are truly invested in the idea of youth philanthropy. This has evolved over the last twenty years as young people proved themselves to be good grantmakers, and then good board members, and finally good

community leaders. As a former YAC member and advisor commented on his own community foundation, "YAC is not a token youth project, but a very legitimate part of the foundation... We try not to have 'silos'... and to integrate it the best we can." The advisors role is often to provide continuity for the YACs, given the inherent turnover of youth members as they graduate from high school and move away or start college. Investing in advisors who can serve over the long term is an important piece of the model. The need to create consistency across Youth Advisory Committees so that every YAC member has a powerful experience was mentioned by some as an important challenge. One former YAC member talked about the need to "preserve institutional knowledge, including lessons learned, and to maintain the student driven aspects", so that the experience at each YAC is not solely dependent on which foundation you are at or which advisor you have. It is a balancing act to allow for flexibility so that each YAC can shape itself to its particular community needs and at the same time develop standards.

Getting all community foundations to allow young people on their boards is an important goal for the future. It is a process, and young people and advisors talked about the hesitancy of some board members to give young people more

power by allowing them as full voting-members. Currently more than 50 percent of community foundations have young people on their boards and that number is growing. Marketing the work of the youth philanthropists and getting the YAC members more visibility in the community makes youth engagement seem more inevitable. "As we see time pass, young people are gaining more power in communities."

From the very beginning, engaging a *diverse* group of young people was a value and an aspiration for MCFYP. The founders wanted the YAC program to move beyond the class presidents and honor students, to engage at-risk kids, kids who may not be perceived as leaders, and youth from many different schools or even out-of school. The benefits of a diversity that goes beyond race, into socioeconomic status and life experience are threefold. For one, as this research has shown, MCFYP provides a pipeline for young people to get into a career in philanthropy. Youth from a variety of backgrounds should have the opportunity to be youth grantmakers and someday to become adult grantmakers. The field of philanthropy already struggles to diversify its leadership, and MCFYP can break this pattern by engaging diverse youth through the pipeline. Secondly, the experience for the youth



members is enriched by having diverse viewpoints among them. One adult leader commented that, “youth learned to respect, appreciate and understand that everybody has value and everyone’s opinion is worthy of listening to.” And finally, the grantmaking is different when there is a diversity of life experiences helping to determine priorities and make decisions about community needs. A young person from a lower socio-economic background or a youth from a minority community may have a different perspective of the situation of kids in that community. “Make sure that committees are representative of the community they serve.”

Leaders talk about needing to continually reinforce diversity with community foundation leaders, youth members and particularly advisors. Advisors can set the tone for their Youth Advisory Committee, including the process of recruiting new members. As one leader commented, “Diversity doesn’t just happen by itself... I worry that the deep commitment to diversity can get lost over time.” Recent efforts of CMF include sessions at the annual Summer Leadership Conference, and toolkits and trainings to help advisors raise awareness about issues of diversity and inclusion and to recruit diverse young people into philanthropy.

As MCFYP moves beyond its first twenty years, Michigan philanthropic leaders would like to see continued innovation and an even greater expansion of the influence of the youth voice. Some see potential for YAC members to build skills in advocacy and participate in policymaking. Getting more youth on boards is one step towards that. Others would like to see a strengthening of the pipeline from school to high school to college to career, so that there is a natural handoff from one stage to the next, with opportunities to gain experience in the nonprofit field all along the way. As one former YAC member and advisor described, “So many different seeds have been planted in so many youth for the past 20 some years and you know at some point, we are going to see more and more people rising to ... positions of influence who are going to be able to tie it back to these YACs... I cannot wait for that!”

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## **WHY YOUTH? WHY COMMUNITY FOUNDATIONS?**

**by Dr. Russell G. Mawby**

**Chairman**

**W.K. Kellogg Foundation**

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(The following is a keynote address delivered by Dr. Russell G. Mawby, Chairman of the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, at the June 21, 1991 launching of the Michigan Community Foundations' Youth Project. More than 300 civic leaders from throughout the state were present for the kickoff event in Battle Creek.)

It is a pleasure, indeed, to be with you today for the launching of this initiative in philanthropy, which we believe is one of the most exciting ever undertaken in the State of Michigan. If all of us are successful in our efforts, the next five years will witness, in communities across the state, a series of activities that will help young people develop life-long values of generosity and leadership, and which will at the same time build stronger and more caring communities.

If we do well, these next five years will truly leave their mark on Michigan. It will make our state a better place in which to be born, and to grow up. Since the first announcement of this initiative was made, many people asked me why the Kellogg Foundation, which could have directed these resources in any number of ways, chose to commit them to youth and to Michigan's forty-five community foundations. So, today, I want to answer these two questions: **Why Youth? Why Community Foundations?**

First, I would like to address the question 'Why Youth?' As new, as exciting, and as daring as it is, the Michigan Community Foundation Youth Project has precedents in our Foundation's history. For example, from 1931 to 1948, the Kellogg Foundation supported the Michigan Community Health Project (MCHP) in seven south central Michigan counties. This was a comprehensive community development project that consolidated rural schools, built modern hospitals and health departments, and encouraged volunteers to help deliver essential services.

The children served by the Michigan Community Health Project are only now beginning to retire. Most are still active in their communities as volunteers, and many are still going strong in their chosen careers. It has been sixty years since the Kellogg Foundation began to support MCHP, and forty-three years since our support ended. And society is still reaping the benefits from it. So, I don't think of MCHP as an 18-year project. I prefer to think of it as a 60-year, 70-year, or 80-year project.

If we look at the Michigan Community Foundation Youth Project in the same light, we realize that this is an initiative that will still be paying social dividends in the year 2051 and perhaps well beyond. In fact, the direct beneficiaries of this program will still be making contributions to society for most of the next century.

Of course, it is not given to us to know the long-range consequences of many of our philanthropic actions. But we can guess that working with youth will be like a stone thrown into a pond; the ripples keep expanding far beyond our time and place, far beyond our ability to measure or perhaps even envision. The Kellogg Foundation chooses to work with youth because we continue to believe that our generation has an obligation to express our gratitude to the generations that came before by helping the generations that will come after. We recognize no limits on what can be achieved, what deficiencies can be eliminated, and what good and decent things can be accomplished, if we but give our young people the tools to do the job -the opportunities to fulfill their potential.

## **WE ARE INVESTING IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE NEXT GENERATION.**

The Michigan Community Foundation Youth Project gives young people the opportunity to learn generosity in the only practical way: by being generous. It will teach them to meet community challenges by raising funds for good works. It will teach them to be good stewards by giving them opportunities to make the hard decisions on wise giving. It will give them the opportunity to ask, to serve, and through serving, to lead. Tomorrow's governors, mayors, chief executive officers, and executive directors will be trained through the Michigan Community Foundation Youth Project. Even more importantly, so will tomorrow's Little League coaches, Big Sisters, Cub Scout leaders, Sunday school teachers, and community foundation trustees.

Perhaps here is the real significance of working with youth. Youth grow up to become people who work with youth. When we invest in the development of today's young people, we are really investing in the development of the next generation, and the next, and the next. The ripples spread out from our investment - and where, they will end, we can never know. Now I would like to turn to the next question, "Why Community Foundations?" The shortest and most profound answer to this question is that the most exciting solutions to today's problems are not those coming from Washington or from Lansing. They are those coming from our local communities. Local leaders are the ones who are closest to the problems, and the ones best equipped to solve them.

## **YOUTH AND COMMUNITY FOUNDATIONS ARE A DYNAMIC COMBINATION.**

Local leaders, of course, cannot solve community problems all by themselves. They need to have arrows in their quivers, and perhaps the sharpest arrow is the community foundation. Community foundations are the most community-based of all philanthropic institutions. They are also the most flexible; they can support a wide range of initiatives to improve the community, from economic development to social services, from recreation to health care, from ecumenical church projects to neighborhood development. But community foundations are more than money givers. They also serve as conveners for important community meetings, as "honest brokers" to help build teams of organizations to solve problems; in short, community foundations serve as catalysts for change. Since they serve all of the nonprofits in the community, they can bring all of them together to make things happen. Since the trustees and staff of community foundations live in their communities, they can help new initiatives with their personal involvement, as well as with funds.

When we look at the Michigan Community Foundation Youth Project, we can see all of these roles of the community foundations being called into play. In addition, we see community foundations as manufacturers of new philanthropy and new philanthropists. They are the generators, if you will, turning out new givers by helping the community to raise, manage, and disburse charitable funds.

The Michigan Community Youth Project combines all of these functions of the Community Foundation:

1. Each community foundation will raise money to meet the match with the help of a local committee.
2. Each community foundation will endow permanent field-of-interest funds.
3. Each community foundation will form an advisory committee that will involve youth, thus teaching fund-raising and stewardship.
4. Each community foundation will serve as the meeting place and the think tank for new initiatives in the community.

Thus, this initiative will help community foundations to become all that they can be, and when this happens, it is a fair bet to say that the communities in which they live will become all that they can be as well.

To sum it all up, youth and community foundations are a dynamic combination! This initiative will help us identify young leaders of tomorrow. It will help us recruit them. It will give them experience in raising money and it will give them training in the wise stewardship of charitable funds. It will raise fresh money for new needs in communities and permanently endow these funds so that resources will be there for future generations. It will help communities to grow and to ease the pain and the suffering of those who are



hurting. It will enrich the lives of uncounted numbers in incalculable ways. It will enable communities to face an uncertain future with an unshakable confidence in their own ability to deal with their own problems.

**Why Youth? Why Community Foundations?** Perhaps the most succinct answer to these two questions comes from the eloquent pen of Abraham Lincoln. We must remember, however, that he wrote these words nearly a century and a half ago, so I have had the audacity to edit Mr. Lincoln, changing from the masculine singular to the plural, changing "child" to "children", and changing "he" to "they". So, to paraphrase Mr. Lincoln:

"Children are the persons who are going to carry on what we have started. They are going to sit where we are sitting, and when we are gone, attend to those things which we think are important. We may adopt all the policies we please, but how they are carried out, depends on them. They will assume control of our cities, states, and nations. They are going to take over our churches, schools, universities, and corporations. The fate of humanity is in their hands".

It has been a great pleasure to welcome you to Battle Creek today for this launching. A mere 16 months from now, in November, 1992, the Council of Michigan Foundations will be holding its annual conference in Battle Creek. We look forward to seeing all of you here again at that time to share good news of your accomplishments in the Michigan Community Foundation Youth Project. Thank you very much, and all the best to you as you set out to shape a brighter future for the young people of your communities and our State.



### A Community Foundation Youth Advisory Committee Manual

Between 1988 and 1997, 86 endowed youth funds were created by community foundations throughout Michigan as a result of the W.K. Kellogg Foundation's Youth Challenge to the Council of Michigan Foundations. Each community foundation agreed to creating a Youth Advisory Committee (YAC) as a permanent advisory committee of the community foundation with the primary responsibility of making funding recommendations for grants from the community foundation's endowed Youth Fund.

In addition, the Kellogg Foundation supported three other main goals for the YAC:

- To assess needs, assets, and priorities for area youth,
- To promote youth volunteerism and youth leadership,
- To increase the size of the Youth Fund through fund development activities.

Best Practices are operational standards for Community Foundation Youth Advisory Committees updated in 2007 by the Michigan Community Foundations Youth Project (MCFYP) Committee.

This **YAC Best Practices Manual** is intended to provide YAC members and YAC Advisors with specific strategies they can use to work toward Best Practices.

This manual can be used as a supplement to "Track Our YAC: A Tool for Assessing Our YAC's Progress Towards Best Practices," an assessment tool for YAC members and Advisors to identify specific areas in which the YAC can improve.

A set of YACer Best Practices is also available to help guide individual YAC members.

### Best Practice 1: Meeting Frequency

Meets a minimum of seven times a year.

**Explanation:**

A YAC's effectiveness is greatly increased when participants have the opportunity to develop meaningful relationships with other members.

**Recommendations for YACers:**

1. Have an agenda for each meeting. YAC members should develop the agenda and run the meetings.
2. Have food available at each meeting.
3. Decide on a YAC calendar, and stick to it.
4. Have a consistent meeting place, time, and location.
5. Remind members about up-coming meetings or events through email, a phone tree, or mailed reminders.
6. Plan fun activities in addition to the YAC meetings.

### Best Practice 2: Membership

Has a minimum of 12 members ages 12-21 who reflect the many forms of diversity found in the local youth community.

**Explanation:** The YAC should strive to annually recruit new diverse members to become an integral part of its activities. A diverse YAC has members who vary in age, race, ethnic background, school, socio-economic level, personal/family history, interests, and academic/physical abilities. The size of the YAC can vary to fit the local community it serves, but a core group of at least 12 is vital to ensure that the YAC reflects many forms of diversity found in the local youth community. The median size of the 86 Michigan YACs is 20.

**Recommendations for YACers:**

1. Assess the diversity of the local youth community to insure that the membership of the YAC is representative of that community.
2. To expand the YAC's diversity, come up with new and creative approaches to recruitment.
3. Develop an application form or conduct interviews with potential new members.
4. Target 13-15 year-olds for recruitment. A multiple year experience has the greatest impact on members and improves their ability to contribute as grantmakers.

## Best Practice 3: Advisors

Has two trained YAC advisors provided by the community foundation who are knowledgeable and supportive of youth development and youth leadership.

**Explanation:** Two YAC advisors allows for greater flexibility and accountability. YAC advisors should be skilled in the area of youth development, be familiar with legal issues associated with youth work, and understand the operations of the local community foundation. The advisors should take advantage of

training and technical assistance offered by Council of Michigan Foundations and others to increase their understanding of philanthropy and youth leadership.

### Recommendations for YACers:

1. Advisors should relate well to youth, be flexible, and be comfortable with ambiguity.
2. Advisors should provide support, not leadership. YAC members should organize, plan, and run YAC meetings.

## Best Practice 4: Orientation and Training

Holds an annual orientation for all new members and encourages all members to participate in training opportunities that will strengthen their skills in philanthropy.

**Explanation:** Orientation is critical in providing context for new youth grant-makers. It introduces the concepts of philanthropy, endowment, foundations, grants, and non-profits. It also provides an ideal opportunity to demonstrate one of YAC's cornerstones: youth leadership. Equally important is on-going training made available through organizations such as the Council of Michigan Foundations, which expand the grant-makers' understanding of philanthropy and youth leadership.

### Recommendations for YACers:

1. Current YAC members should plan and lead the new member orientation.
2. Include a grant-making simulation in your orientation.
3. Be sure to explain the YAC's relationship with the community foundation and role as a grant-making committee, and the importance of the needs assessment, community service, and evaluation.
4. Provide a "cheat sheet" of the acronyms and phrases that new grant-makers must know.
5. Check [www.youthgrantmakers.org](http://www.youthgrantmakers.org) for sample training tools.

## Best Practice 5: Assessment of Youth Issues

Assesses critical issues of area youth at least every three years.

**Explanation:** An understanding of the local youth community allows youth grant-makers to make informed decisions. Assessing the status of local youth may impact how proposals will be solicited (responsive or pro-active), which grants will be funded, or the types of community service in which the YAC engages.

### Recommendations for YACers:

1. Consider the pros and cons of different approaches to collecting information, including conducting surveys, focus groups, individual interviews, using existing data from other sources, or other means.
2. Consider partnering with other local youth-serving organizations to gather information.
3. Make sure that you are gathering information from youth who represent the many kinds of diversity found in the local community.

## Best Practice 6: Grantmaking

Annually engages in a grantmaking process that is responsive to the critical issues of area youth.

**Explanation:** The grantmaking process includes development of grantmaking priorities (based on the results of the needs assessment), soliciting grant proposals, reviewing grants, making grant recommendations to the Board of Trustees, and evaluating the impact of grants on the local youth community.

### Recommendations for YACers:

1. Review and update the grantmaking process and materials each year.
2. Proactively seek grantees that involve youth in the development, implementation, and evaluation of projects and offer volunteer opportunities for youth in the project.
3. Encourage site visits by YAC members to potential grantees.
4. Consider making mini-grants in addition to large grants.
5. YACs that have no grant funds available can use their assessment of critical issues to guide engagement in community service projects or other community activities.



## Best Practice 7: Evaluation of Grantees

Evaluates the effectiveness of each grant annually.

**Explanation:** An internal evaluation effort will help the YAC analyze its grantmaking to determine how the grants are impacting youth needs, assets, and priorities. A self-evaluation provided by grantees can insure accountability and help inform future grantmaking decisions.

**Recommendations for YACers:**

1. Develop an evaluation process that helps determine the community-wide impact of grants made by the YAC.

2. Require grantees to submit an oral or written report so you can better understand how grant funds were used as well as the impact the grant had on the community.
3. Encourage site visits to evaluate the effectiveness of the funded program.
4. Seek feedback from young people who were directly involved in the funded program.

## Best Practice 8: Participation in Community Projects

Participates in a community youth project annually.

**Explanation:** Philanthropy is defined as "giving time, talent, or treasure for the common good." As yet another way for young people to be philanthropic, participation in community service is a cornerstone of YAC. It is a learning experience for YAC members, supports the community, and also increases the visibility of the YAC and community foundation.

**Recommendations for YACers:**

1. Consider doing a service project with a grantee (it's a great way to evaluate the grant at the same time!).

2. Use information from the needs assessment to select community service efforts.
3. Share opportunities for community service involvement with fellow YAC members. Obtain a list of volunteer opportunities from the local Volunteer Center.
4. Participate in the local "Make a Difference Day."
5. Let the local TV station or newspaper know when you are working on a community service project. It could be great publicity!

## Best Practice 9: Fund Development

Engages in fund development activities to assist with the continual growth of the endowed youth fund and the community foundation annually.

**Explanation:** New sources of gifts for the Youth Fund insure that additional grant funds will be available, allowing future YACs to be responsive to youth needs in the community. Unlike fund raising, which virtually all young people have experienced, participating in fund development provides a more accurate view of the various strategies to grow a community foundation.

**Recommendations for YACers:**

1. Identify and implement a fund development strategy: Why should someone support YAC? Who might support YAC? How should the YAC approach prospective donors?
2. Get all YAC members and community foundation trustees to contribute to the Youth Fund!
3. Help out at receptions and fund-raising events for community foundation donors.

## Best Practice 10: Youth on Board

Has at least one YAC member serving as a voting member on the community foundation Board of Trustees.

**Explanation:** Michigan law allows for youth age 16 and older to serve as voting members on nonprofit boards. A young person on the Board of Trustees of a community foundation provides adult members with a valuable perspective and the young person with a valuable leadership opportunity.

**Recommendations for YACers:**

1. Community foundation trustees, staff, and young people

must be accommodating and flexible in terms of openness, training, meeting times, etc.

2. Try a mentoring or "buddy" system partnering adult and youth trustees to increase understanding and allow for a greater comfort level.
3. If possible, two youth trustees are ideal. If only one youth trustee is possible, create a "shadow" trustee; a youth member who attends all the meetings without a vote, who will take over the trustee position after a period of time.

## Best Practice 11: YAC/Community Foundation Relationship

Interacts with community foundation Board, Staff and Donors at least twice a year on a formal and informal level.

**Explanation:** Establishing relationships between YAC members and trustees, staff, and donors increases understanding of the various roles in the community foundation. It can also generate discussion about the ways in which youth and adults can work together for the benefit of the community as a whole.

### Recommendations for YACers:

1. Ask to attend the annual meeting and other special events of the community foundation.
2. Encourage formal recognition of YAC members by trustees, and staff.
3. Work together on a joint community service project.
4. Ask about opportunities for youth to volunteer within the organization.

## Best Practice 12: Communications and Publications

Has activities highlighted by the community foundation's annual report, web site, newsletters, public presentations and other communication tools.

**Explanation:** Communications provide increased understanding of the YAC and youth as resources to the broader community.

### Recommendations for YACers:

1. Develop and maintain a YAC website or the YAC page on the community foundation web site.

2. Offer to speak to community groups on the issue of youth leadership and philanthropy.
3. Prepare press releases about requests for proposals and grants that your YAC awarded.
4. Prepare and present public service announcements on local TV and radio about youth leadership.
5. Do the morning show on the radio station that your friends listen to.

## Best Practice 13: YAC Self-Assessment

Conducts an annual self-assessment to reflect upon its strengths, challenges, use of Best Practices and opportunities for improvement.

**Explanation:** A self-evaluation allows members to reflect individually and as a group on membership, diversity and recruitment issues, training needs, grantmaking, YAC structure and group dynamics. The relationship with the community foundation and with the adult YAC advisors should also be assessed.

### Recommendations for YACers:

1. Develop a process for identifying how the YAC could improve its activities.
2. Consider different methods for evaluating your YAC: surveys, discussion in large or small groups.
3. Survey YAC alumni to find out how their YAC experience has impacted them after they left.

## Best Practice 14: Conference and Trainings

Participates in and attends the Youth Grantmakers Summer Leadership Conference, Regional Trainings and Advisor Roundtables.

**Explanation:** YACers from around the state have different experiences, and it is important they learn from peers. CMF trainings enable YACers to meet and collaborate regionally in grantmaking and community service and learn about new initiatives in Michigan.

### Recommendations for YACers:

1. The Summer Leadership Conference is always the 3rd or 4th weekend in June, so keep your calendar open!
2. Require the YAC president and executive committee to attend the Summer Leadership Conference.
3. Advisor Roundtables are free and are done via conference call for easy access.
4. If you have a topic or issue you'd like addressed at a future training, email the youth program associate.

For more information, contact Program Associate for Youth at  
616.842.7080 or  
[info@youthgrantmakers.org](mailto:info@youthgrantmakers.org), or visit [www.youthgrantmakers.org](http://www.youthgrantmakers.org)

## Key Findings

- Serving on a Youth Advisory Committee influences education and career paths.
- Having a Youth Advisory Committee can attract assets to a community foundation.
- The Michigan Community Foundations Youth Project was responsible for changing state law so that youth ages 16-17 can serve on nonprofit Boards.
- Building permanent youth endowments provides a sense of stability and continuity for the young people, the nonprofit sector, and the community foundations and ensures that resources will be there for generations to come.

For more information, contact the Council of Michigan Foundations at  
[www.michiganfoundations.org](http://www.michiganfoundations.org)

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