

## Introduction to Building Community

Creating a safe space in which youth feel a sense of belonging is not just important for how youth feel, it's also good for growth and learning! In the Building Community workshop you will consider why sense of community and belonging matters in your youth program and how to set things up to foster positive peer relationships.

The cool thing about employing Building Community strategies is that they're fun *and* make group management easier. This book contains a few pages about why building community is important, and then lots more pages with community building games to try out with your youth!

This guide hits on the four rows of Item L (pictured above). In simple, everyday language, these rows can be summarized as follows:

### Related Youth PQA<sup>1</sup> Item

#### III-L. Youth have opportunities to develop a sense of belonging.

1. Youth have structured opportunities to get to know each other (e.g., there are teambuilding activities, introductions, personal updates, welcomes of new group members, icebreakers, and a variety of groupings for activities).
2. Youth exhibit predominately inclusive relationships with all in the program offering, including newcomers.
3. Youth strongly identify with the program offering (e.g., hold one another to established guidelines, use ownership language, such as "our program," engage in shared traditions such as shared jokes, songs, gestures).
4. The activities include structured opportunities (e.g., group presentations, sharing times, recognition celebrations, exhibitions, performances) to publicly acknowledge the achievements, work, or contributions of at least some youth.

Young people...

1. Get to know each other.
2. Don't leave other youth out.
3. Think of the program as theirs.
4. Get recognized for their accomplishments.

<sup>1</sup> The Youth Program Quality Assessment (PQA) is a validated instrument designed to evaluate the quality of youth programs and identify staff training needs. It focuses on the point-of-service—the place where the kids are. For more information please visit [cypq.org](http://cypq.org)

## Why Build Community?

Building Community in a youth program is important for many reasons. A strong, welcoming community can help young people feel safe, feel a sense of belonging, and build their sense of selves within the group. Even beyond these personal growth issues, a strong program community can create an environment in which learning can better occur.

This Building Community Guide workshop the following four areas:

1. **Youth have opportunities to get to know each other.** Most of this guide consists of descriptions of Group Games, short activities which promote youth getting to know each other. It's important to lead structured games because without structure typically only some youth will get to know each other. Structured games not only make for a fun experience, they also level the playing field so that even shy or less socially adept young people can have a place in the group.
2. **Youth don't leave other youth out.** It is not completely in your control to make young people be inclusive, but there are things a youth worker can do to move toward this as a community norm. Like the above area, leading structured Group Games can help quite a bit in this area.
3. **Youth think of the program as theirs.** Again, the way youth think about the program is not completely in your control but there are things you can do to build a sense of "ownership". One way is by providing ample choices about how they spend their time (see Voice and Choice guidebook in this series). Another is by concentrating on sense of belonging by—you guessed it—leading Group Games.
4. **Youth get recognized for their accomplishments.** Making sure young people get recognized for their accomplishments is a small thing a youth worker can do to make a big impact on the group norms. It's important that recognition does not take the form of praise or rewards (See Ask-Listen-Encourage guidebook in this series); however, events (simple or formal) in which youth accomplishments are acknowledged can be powerful experiences for youth.

