Youth Social Entrepreneurship integrates practices of positive youth development with community engagement and social entrepreneurship to enable mutual transformation of economies, neighborhoods, and individuals.
AN INVITATION

This paper asserts a definition, common language, and framework for the emerging field of Youth Social Entrepreneurship (YSE). The purpose of this paper is to:

- Provide a basis for dialogue, collaboration, networking, and model sharing among stakeholders of YSE
- Be useful for practitioners to improve programming and systems
- Assist decision makers as they develop enabling legislative policy
- Support grantmakers as they review innovative youth programs

Most of all, this paper invites all stakeholders to take action to advance the field of Youth Social Entrepreneurship.
Youth Social Entrepreneurship is a multi-faceted approach to positive transformation for youth, economies, and communities. More equitable economic opportunities for individual youth and for communities have been long sought, but infrequently achieved (Carter & Welner, 2013). In response, a rising number of out-of-school time (OST) and innovative initiatives across sectors are disrupting current economic disparities and programmatic stagnation. At the helm of these innovations are the youth and their intergenerational supporters who are leading the movement to create a new ecosystem of opportunity and empowerment.

Youth Social Entrepreneurship (YSE) promotes the overall development of adolescents through initiatives that increase their creative and skillful vision to gain financial stability while caring for their communities. These youth-driven programs are found in countries around the globe. In the US, major cities as well as rural communities host forms of Youth Social Entrepreneurship. Common features of YSE programs include activities to promote social and emotional learning (SEL), develop business and financial skills, and intergenerational activities that engage entrepreneurial and design thinking, which connect economic projects with community improvement.

While the positive outcomes of YSE are desirable for all youth, youth from low-income settings may stand to gain the most (Delgado, 2004). YSE programs aim to channel skill, determination and creative thinking with a desire to economically advance youth and their communities (Wagner, 2012) and may help reduce the opportunity disparities that exist for marginalized youth in the US (Carter & Welner, 2013). For these reasons, the Sundance Family Foundation focuses its attention on the YSE potential for economically disadvantaged youth.

Decades of research have provided evidence that quality youth programs are associated with many positive outcomes, including improved academic achievement, higher rates of high school graduation, and reduced youth involvement in risky behaviors (Eccles, Barber, Stone & Hunt, 2003; Little, Wimer, & Weiss, 2008). We invite all stakeholders to help expand the field of YSE.

Social and Emotional Learning—the process of developing the skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions. Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL).

Intergenerational Participation—in this paper, means that relationships are built and valued among individuals from multiple age groups. Often it involves a partnership, mentorship or mutual experience between a teen youth and a volunteer, staff member, community member, or customer who is older by 5 or more years.

Entrepreneurial Thinking—in this paper, embraces a human-centered approach to innovation that combines empathy towards people, enthusiasm for technology, creativity, and the ability to turn new business ideas into reality. It also involves multicultural, interdisciplinary, and intergenerational teams working together to investigate ambiguous situations, acquire information, analyze knowledge, and posit innovative solutions for user- and neighborhood-centered challenges.

Design Thinking—refers to: 1. Empathy as the centerpiece of all human-centered design solutions 2. Defining for clarity and focus 3. Ideating possibilities using testing and feedback 4. Prototyping interactive possibilities 5. Testing to solicit feedback that leads to new design solutions. Institute of Design at Stanford (link).

“There is a need to do business as unusual.”
— Youth Business International
Global Youth Entrepreneurship Summit Report
Introduction

Youth Social Entrepreneurship (YSE) is a youth-designed, youth-led business or community social initiative that is supported within a framework of intergenerational participation. A YSE experience is a transformative asset-based model of youth development. It includes the development of entrepreneurial thought, business skills, and community engagement. YSE youth often earn money while sparking personal development. YSE programs plan activities that progressively help youth build social and emotional skills. Together, these learnings inspire youth to acquire the self-confidence needed to “put poverty out of business.”

“I’ve gained skills, self-confidence, and personal direction while creating good in my neighborhood.”
—YSE Participant

What is YSE?

YSE integrates practices of positive youth development with community engagement and social entrepreneurship to enable mutual transformation of economies, neighborhoods, and individuals.

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The Problem: Hazy Definition=Lack of Attention

Educators, funders, and researchers express concern that the approach lacks clear definition, common language, and empirical evidence around outcomes. This concern has been voiced in academic scholarship (Delgado, 2004; Hamilton & Hamilton, 2011) as well as among experts in the field (Sundance Family Foundation, 2015). In order to advance YSE as an innovative tool for change, it is imperative to have a usable framework for understanding YSE and categorizing the types of YSE programming seen in practice. Without a framework, stakeholders speak about YSE-like efforts with blurry distinctions, and are left wondering what qualifies as YSE and what does not. As depicted below, YSE exists at the integration of multiple disciplines drawing key principles from each to become an independent model.

YSE exists at the intersection of multiple disciplines, drawing key principles from each to become an independent model.

Positive Youth Development
Intentional efforts to engage youth in building developmental assets. Focus is on positive programmatic activities, social emotional skill development, and intergenerational relationships to promote well-being.

Social Entrepreneurship
An approach by individuals and groups creating new economic enterprise opportunities with an emphasis on social good as one of the most important value propositions.

Community Development
A process in which community members take collective action and generate solutions to common problems.
The (Brief) History of Youth Social Entrepreneurship

Youth and other marginalized people have long engaged in entrepreneurship as a means of survival. These efforts are typically not well capitalized and construe what has historically been called the informal economic sector (link). Informal street vendors, invisible household enterprises, and unregulated garment producers, for example, have often been individual’s responses to exclusionary and discriminatory systems (International Labour Organization, 2002 (link)). Youth Social Entrepreneurship as it applies to this paper differs from informal economic sector businesses because it weaves together formal elements of positive youth development, community development, and social entrepreneurship. The goal is not merely to survive, but to bring positive transformation to people and to their communities.

Yet, YSE continues to be considered a marginal part of different fields. YSE has been viewed as an offshoot of the larger adult social entrepreneurship movement. It has been a subset of the youth development activities that captures social and emotional learning, or activities benefiting local neighborhoods. This paper purports YSE as a new field, one that exists at the nexus of positive youth development, community, or neighborhood betterment, and economic development. Research and professional development exist for each of the elements. Research and professional development is now needed for YSE to discover how they each contribute to YSE both as a composite model and as an exciting new field.

In 2011 the Sundance Family Foundation (link) partnered with Emergence Pictures (link) and Twin Cities Public Television (link) to produce Changemakers: Teens who Learn & Earn (link) a milestone in crystallizing the concepts of Youth Social Entrepreneurship for a broad audience. That and other efforts have helped advance opportunities to now focus on YSE research, funding, and expanded implementation.

The Solution: A Conceptual Framework

The clear next step to advancing the field of YSE is to establish a definition and usable framework: YSE integrates practices of positive youth development with community development and social entrepreneurship to enable mutual transformation of economies, neighborhoods, and individuals.

Many YSE programs focus keenly on one of these YSE elements more than another. Yet all efforts combine in some measure youth development, community change, and social entrepreneurship as part of this growing field.

Globally, initiatives currently exist to engage youth in entrepreneurial activities and in social enterprise but do not always include integration of all features of YSE. The time has come for focused attention on YSE for research, funding, and expanded implementation.

Community Transformation-Emphasis
YSE—refers to initiatives which embody the defining elements of YSE and prioritize their focus on changing a “community,” typically a specific neighborhood or identified cultural group. The aim is for meaningful and lasting improvement to a targeted problem such as inequitable access to health, education, housing, or other similar goals.

Economic Transformation-Emphasis
YSE—refers to initiatives which include all components of YSE and place priority on causing significant change to the financial and/or economic opportunities of their participants. The aim is for deep and meaningful change to combat systemic inequity in employment rates, pay scales, access to occupation types, or other goals related to economic equity.
CASE ILLUSTRATIONS

Community Transformation-Emphasis programs prioritize positive change in a targeted community over sustainable business enterprise. An example would be a community garden and nutrition program where vegetables are harvested to sell at stands and surplus is donated to neighbors and food shelves. Youth become agents for change as they learn valuable business skills.

Economic Transformation-Emphasis programs primarily focus on youth job skills and business development. An example would be a tee-shirt shop where teens design, print, and market T-shirts. While learning about the community and developing a broad skill-set, the focus is to create a sustainable enterprise, earn money, and become part of their business community.
The Benefits to YSE Clarity

Adopting this proposed definition and framework of YSE assists in fostering dialogue by offering a common language that can be used to identify further examples in the field. Additionally, this framework provides critical context for practitioners, whether new to YSE or seeking improvements to long-standing programs. The opportunity to find commonalities across programs will allow for better collaboration, sharing of models and expanding the YSE field. For example, the framework is helping the Youth Social Entrepreneurship Collaboration (link) founded in Minneapolis in 2013 to connect funders, board members, policy makers, youth, program directors, and other stakeholders in the Twin Cities to make clearer and more robust decisions about expanding YSE programs in their own communities. For example, Youth Social Entrepreneurship Facebook site has 4,084 likes from people all across the US and around the globe, who will benefit by having more information about YSE impacts.

A Call to Action!

Asserting a heightened awareness in the field about Youth Social Entrepreneurship, the Sundance Family Foundation encourages increased dialogue among stakeholders to support the YSE approach. YSE is a potential powerhouse for positive youth and community outcomes.

YSE Call to Action

☐ Research to evidence the impact at individual, group, familial, and community levels
☐ Identification of specific and replicable factors for effective practice
☐ Clearer identification of overlapping commonalities among initiatives
☐ An understanding of how youth see their own YSE experiences and its impact
☐ Professional development and support for practitioners
☐ Collaboration among YSE supporters
☐ Support for YSE in all geographic regions of the US
☐ Increased access to YSE for youth from economically disadvantaged backgrounds
☐ More independent funders or a collaborative of funders to support YSE
In Conclusion

Youth Social Entrepreneurship is a transformative, asset-based model that leverages the power of innovation, personal development, and community engagement. YSE youth develop social and emotional skills, business capacity, and deep community connections. Given the economic and educational disparities in the US, YSE may hold particular promise for disadvantaged youth as a means to reduce the opportunity gap.

With such profound potential for positive impact, YSE needs to be viewed as an independent approach to youth development deserving of the empirical, practical, and financial support afforded other youth initiatives. The time has come for YSE stakeholders to come together to advance the field for the benefit of youth everywhere.

Contact info@sundancefamilyfoundation.org for an expanded paper about the next steps to advancing the field of Youth Social Entrepreneurship.

“Entrepreneurship holds a secret weapon against apathy and anger. It presents an ace in the hole for anyone who wants to build a community. Entrepreneurs are inveterate optimists! They usually don’t know what they can’t do. This optimism, this belief in the possible, is a remarkably potent resource for building community.”

(Smilor, 1997, p. 8).
Researchers recently reviewed program materials from 30 sites in four areas of the US (Kruse, et al, 2014). Program components were coded and rated by the research team to create a system for categorizing the types of YSE seen in practice. The results illustrate several key messages about YSE in practice:

1. Most programs with YSE components do not specifically identify themselves as YSE; instead, they tend to identify as Youth Entrepreneurship with a community component, or as a community social enterprise with a youth component, or some similar combination.

2. About 75% of the programs reviewed for the study fit into Economic Transformation categories, 25% were categorized as Community Transformation.

3. More than 90% of programs reviewed for the study specifically target low-income or otherwise marginalized youth in their programming. This suggests YSE may already be viewed as especially effective for programming with disadvantaged communities.

4. The pervasiveness of practice varies greatly by region of the US, with both coasts and the Upper Midwest contributing disproportionately high numbers of formalized YSE activities to the American youth experience. This suggests there may be significant disparities in both resources and support for formal YSE programming across the US.
Through the stories of five Minnesota Youth Social Entrepreneurship groups you’ll be inspired to say...

“Teens we know and care about can do this, too!”
About Sundance Family Foundation

The mission of the Sundance Family Foundation is to support youth development and strengthen family stability.

Sundance Family Foundation makes grants to projects in 501(c)(3) organizations to encourage Youth Social Entrepreneurship with the goal of putting poverty “out of business.”

The Sundance Family Foundation is committed to cultivating Youth Social Entrepreneurial ventures that are helping youth—particularly youth from under-resourced communities—find their potential and vision that lead them to discover pathways into careers and/or businesses that benefit their communities.