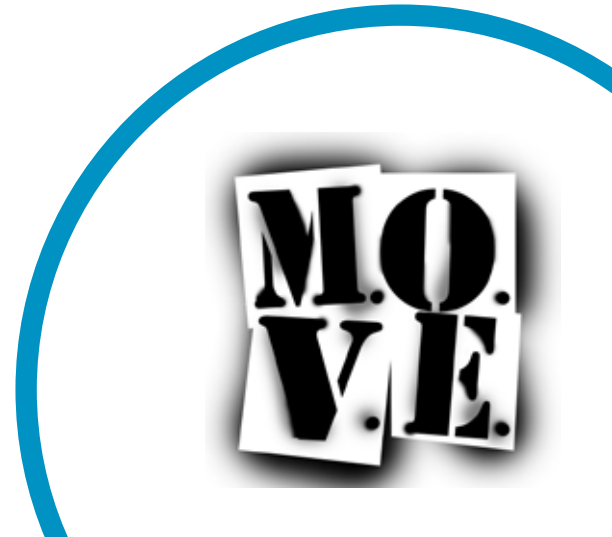
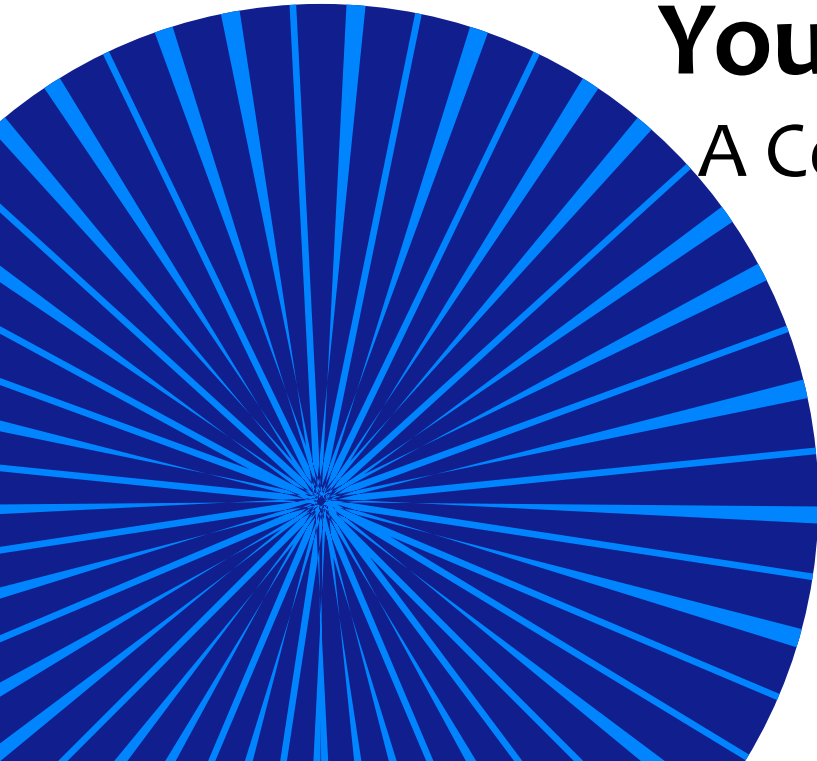


Language in the Youth MOVEment

A Compilation of Terms



Authors

Johanna Bergan

Jeremy Long

With input from Young Adults across the Youth M.O.V.E. Network

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Table of Contents

Introduction

Themes

Terms

Youth

Transition Aged Youth

Young Adult

Emerging Adult

Youth Advocate

Advocate for Youth

Youth Guided

Youth Directed

Youth Driven

Authentic Youth Engagement

A Youth Voice Message to Potential Partners & Supporters

Here at Youth M.O.V.E. National, we use a set of words that are specific and vital to Youth M.O.V.E.ment work. In an effort to ensure that usage of these terms is relevant to young adults across the country we created a compilation of terms and their general understandings, from the perspective of young people. This compilation was created, with the help of young adults who are members of Youth M.O.V.E. chapters across the country, in a series of discussions held June through September 2013.

Representation included young adults from Arkansas, California, Connecticut, Florida, Idaho, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Mississippi, Montana, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oregon, Washington DC and Wisconsin.

These terms are now part of our guiding documents and the sharing of this document allows us to ensure that our partner organizations understand our intent when using these terms.

The following are the terms presented to participants to share how they are used (if at all) in their local communities and the understood meaning: Youth, Transition Aged Youth, Young Adult, Emerging Adult, Youth Advocate, Advocate for Youth, Youth Guided, Youth Directed, and Youth Driven, and Youth Engagement.

The young adults who participated in these conversations encouraged us, at Youth M.O.V.E. National, to continue pushing this conversation forward, in hopes of creating a common youth language. One young person said, “Sometimes adults don’t get it. We need to keep pressing the issue.” These ideas came from many smart and educated young people across the country, who were willing to share their unique voices in this process.

Please remember, depending on the community or system, these terms may have the same or different meanings so be sure to consider each group separately.

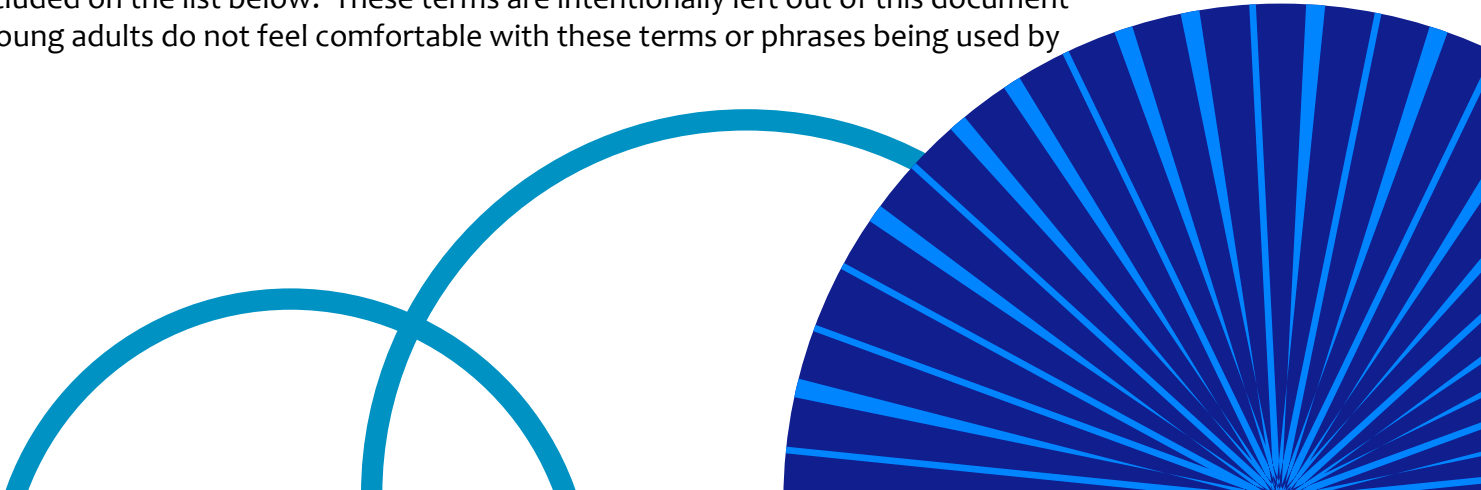
The conversation of word meaning will continue with other youth groups nationwide and the plan is to continually build on this document and strengthen its purpose. The facilitated guide used in this project is available for use in any community or system. Please request a facilitator’s guide from Youth M.O.V.E. National by emailing info@youthmovenational.org.

Respect

It is of primary importance to understand that the way in which the following terms are used is as important, if not more important, than the word itself. Each word included in this document can be misused if spoken without respect to the recipient or reference.

Peer Usage

Young adults are quick to share that there will be terms used within their peer group which are not included on the list below. These terms are intentionally left out of this document because young adults do not feel comfortable with these terms or phrases being used by adults.



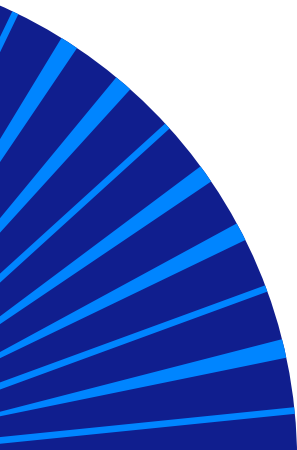
Youth

The most general term commonly used within the youth movement and well accepted by both young adults and adults. While other terms are preferred, youth is the most acceptable blanket term. Common understanding includes the primary meaning to encompass ages 13 - 25, with variance found between systems and communities. There is also a shared understanding that youth implies a physical and mental position in life, one that will grow into adulthood. There is such a spectrum involved in this transition that no specifics are desired in the common understanding of the word youth.

YMN strives to use this word without specific connection to age in order to meet the needs of basic communication throughout the youth movement.

Often times, the term youth prompts the additional question 'Are youth defined by a specific age range?'

Remember that because youth is such a vague and broad term it is important to take into consideration each unique individual when trying to develop of common definition. In the end we are all people, together.



Transition Aged Youth

Transition aged youth applies to an individual who is in process of moving from a young person to an adult. Common understanding includes the meaning of this phrase to encompass ages 16 – 25 however; it is not unheard of for the term to expand to ages 13 - 29.

This term gets to the heart of the process that young adults go through to reach maturation. Transition Aged Youth allows for an understanding that this age of youth are considered young adults but are still undergoing a process, a transition, growing and developing further.

While we acknowledge that the term is cumbersome and prone to over usage by adults, the term is useful in bridging systems or community differences in the definition of youth. The transition period offers a bridge over the hard lines of age 18 and 21 in reference to entering adult systems and services.

Connecting with peers and adult supporters is of great importance in youth serving communities and the youth movement and this term allows for an easier understanding of which groups are connecting. The term, in its broadness, leaves room for a young adult to self-select into this definition. Transition will take a different amount of time for each individual and this term allows for that difference.

A regional adaptation to this lengthy term is the shortened version of this phrase to TAY (rhymes with Yay!). The term was particularly well accepted by young adults in this region, perhaps because of the use of this abbreviation.

Even though the term transition aged youth relates to a very defined age group as defined by communities, it is important to remember that youth and adults will continually be in a state of transition. Young people are consistently transitioning to different communities, careers, and networks as well as transitioning mentally and emotionally.

Young Adult

Young adult is a consensus term used in communities to bridge the communication and labeling gap between adults and youth. The term is a respectful gesture away from the overused terms, kids and youth, on the part of adults. The term is a step up in role for youth who are beginning to take on additional responsibilities in self-care, youth voice and transition to adulthood. Youth are quick to admit while this term is not the first choice in a 'label,' but if a 'label,' is used, this is the best option! In the world of kids vs. adults no term existed to define youth who no longer fit the criteria of a kid but don't quite fit the characteristics of an adult. Young adult gets at this very important need, especially when creating strength based youth/adult partnerships.

Young adults identify this as a term that a person must earn. For a young person to be identified as a young adult they must show responsibility, increased maturity, and good character. Youth find motivation and are better able to exercise the tools of youth voice when accepted as a young adult on the road to adulthood than as a youth.

Young adults ask for acknowledgement that this stage in development exists and for the term to be used to show respect to this time of transition. Moving away from the usage of incredibly vague terms, such as kid, is important to youth advocates.

Emerging Adult

Emerging adult is a term not well understood or accepted by young adults. Young adults found this term unnecessary and asked for it not to be used given its close relation to the more commonly used term transition aged youth. The majority of the young people had never heard of Emerging Adult nor found it used in their communities.

If this term is to be used in a document or dialogue with young adults it is imperative that a definition and intent of usage is shared with young adults. Many young adults were troubled by this term and could not connect ‘emerging’ with ‘transition’ unless prompted.

The following is a prompted definition provided by one of the few young adults who had familiarity with the term, “When a young person is in a state of emerging, they are acquiring a new set of responsibilities, creating a new view of the world, developing a new set of goals, and emerging (or transitioning) into adulthood.”

Youth Advocate

A young person, typically between the ages of 15-25, who utilizes lived experience to educate, inform, motivate, and inspire others in an effort to create positive systems change. A term specifically used for young adults who are participating in self-advocacy or systems advocacy by utilizing youth voice to make change. A young adult can choose to become a youth advocate, and may hold this role for a specific amount of time or choose to fulfill this role throughout the transition age period.

The term youth advocate is used in partner with the following term advocate for youth. For further information on each term please reference the guide created by Youth M.O.V.E. National and RTC Pathways to Positive Futures, “Youth Advocate to Advocate for Youth: The Next Transition.”

Advocate for Youth

A young adult, typically between the ages of 25-35, who has transitioned from being a youth advocate into a role of advocating for youth involvement across individual, program and system levels. This person may still share personal experience, but focus is on supporting youth advocates to utilize their voice as agents of change and creating opportunities for youth voice within systems.

The transition between youth advocate and advocate for youth is different for each young adult. Note that the terms reflect the transition young adults are going through. Each are used to reflect a different spot on that transition but are not tied to a specific age. This allows for use across communities and systems.

Youth Guided

This phrase is seen to be when the young adults are allowed to take a lead, make decisions, and are able to provide direction to their peers but are continually receiving support from their organization and communities.

This phrase is familiar and comfortable with the young adults and understanding seems to be self-explanatory within communities engaging youth and young adults. The phrase is frequently used interchangeably with the following phrase youth directed.

Youth Directed

This phrase is understood to mean that young adults are able to develop rules, group structure, make executive decisions on travel and projects, and create and project the image they want to portray to their communities is what it means to be youth directed. There is a role for supportive adults and/or an organization to support young adults in this process.

This term is seen to correlate well with youth guided and is used interchangeably due to the found similar meaning. This phrase is also well understood and comfortable for use in the youth movement. The term is used by young adults as well as supportive adults.

In discussions with the young adult participants there was a strong connection between policy and structure and youth directed. A similar connection between decision-making and planning process occurred with youth guided. This subtle difference went almost unnoticed in the conversation but was apparent when reviewing summary notes. The subconscious connection was made between organization structure, bylaws, committees, agendas, facilitation, etc., and youth directed. Similarly the connection between ideas, planning, social engagement, sharing voice and deciding on program content was connected to youth guided. These connections offer insight on how to select the best phrase choice based on the situation.

Youth Driven

This phrase is used when young adults are seen as primary leaders in a situation or even organization; developing the agendas, participating in public speaking events, strategically sharing lived experience to promote positive systems change, and educating friends, families, and communities on mental health with little adult guidance but with the full support of adults.

A term used to let communities realize that each event and project is solely initiated, developed and executed by youth and their voice with outcomes directed towards peers.

The previous three terms were described by one young person as “Guided implies that youth have a voice but are being supported by an adult or organization, directed means they have even more of a voice with less adult guidance, and driven is a process that is entirely led by youth for youth.” The continuum is recognized across the youth movement in this order, and as such was intentionally presented in this order here.

Authentic Youth Involvement

Being authentic is being real; real in intention to involve and partner, on the part of both the young adults and adult supporters. Authentic youth involvement is present when young adults are consistent in participation, taking ownership, initiating conversations and plans, allowing for adult support and relationships possess true collaboration and partnership.

When young adults, who are ready and willing to share youth voice, are present, authentic youth involvement will occur when adults ensure them the opportunity to be heard, listened to, and their ideas taken into consideration and acted upon.

Youth involvement works when youth and adults have created a supportive partnership. This partnership will be successful when it is about ‘US’ (youth and adult) rather than ‘me and you.’ This partnership is essential in this growth from youth to young adult and is a key to authentic youth involvement. There is added value in having the support of other youth advocates and especially advocates for youth who are assisting in creating space for youth voice from young adults and in mentoring youth in the process of sharing.

A Youth Voice Message to Potential Partners and Supporters

Dear Supporter,

We, as Young Adults, ask that you begin utilizing this resource to develop a stronger partnership between you and us. There are terms that are used in our communities that are not always how we feel we should be defined. Being defined and labeled by others is hard. Transitioning to adulthood is no easy task. However, if we can continue to work together and ensure the practice of Youth Guided, Directed, and Driven work and provide us opportunities to grow and flourish, we would be happy to show you what we are capable of. Thank you for all the work you do as adult supporters in this system. Believing in us is the best thing you can do to ensure a thriving life.

Young Adults

It is recommended that training be made available for supportive adults who work in youth serving systems to become educated on usage of terms based on the perspective of young people to ensure development of mutual respect and partnership.

