WELCOME!

This booklet is not meant to be your traditional manual. It will be a beginning step on your journey to create your Youth Program, however it will not hold relevant answers for all of your youth programming needs. In the spirit of youth-directed education and truly experiential work it is essential to use this book as only a guide. It should help you ask questions and get you brainstorming about new ways to handle your own unique work with youth. This book will help facilitate your play and facilitate your programming. It is not to direct your play or to hand you answers. Instead we will paint a picture of what has worked for Please Touch Museum’s Youth Programs. This picture can hopefully get you thinking about where you want to go with your programs.

Your Youth Program must fit your needs and the needs of your youth. If you have an existing program this booklet will help you to clarify your needs; if you are beginning a program you will be surprised about how much you already know about the program you want to create.

Think of this as your workbook. Think of this as a space for inspiration. Think of this as a space for change, a space for growth and a space for creativity. Use this space to build wonderful Youth Programs within your museum world.
1: GETTING STARTED

“great results cannot be achieved at once and we must be satisfied to advance in life as we walk—step by step.”

Samuel Smiles

ACES Students Orienteering on an Outward Bound Urban Expedition in Valley Forge, PA. Front to back: Tydell
Getting Started

Congratulations! You've decided to create your own experiential, student-centered Youth Program. Here are some helpful hints to consider when starting your program.

Why are you reading this? There must be some reason you're considering building your own Youth Program. Take a few moments to write down what those reasons are. Keep them in the forefront of your mind as you peruse this publication. Remember that this is just a guideline to help you create your own unique Youth Program.

After you record why you are interested in youth programming, find out if there is anyone else around who also thinks this might make sense. Spend some time gathering ideas with colleagues and community members to decide on a direction for your youth programs.

Many people are puzzled when Please Touch Museum describes its Youth Program and we are often asked:

**Why does your museum have programs for high school students when your primary audience is young children? Doesn't it conflict with your mission?**

You will be asked the same question if you decide to create a Youth Program. The following is our answer to this question.
ACES is an investment in the future.

The experiences teenagers have at Please Touch will help them grow into self-sufficient adults and effective well-educated parents.

Nancy Kolb
Please Touch Museum's President and CEO

Please Touch Museum's Mission

Please Touch Museum's mission is to “Enrich the Lives of Children by Creating Learning Opportunities through Play.”

At Please Touch Museum we encourage children to play and grow through the myriad of experiences we offer here. It is clear that play is freely chosen and an imaginative engagement in activities that are fun and enjoyable. We know that play provides the foundation for basic life skills such as relationship building, cooperation, negotiation and compromise as well as providing opportunities for children to find out who they are and what they enjoy doing. Play offers an emotional outlet, develops the imagination and creativity, and cultivates problem-solving skills.

With young children playing daily at Please Touch Museum, we see that it is a process-driven way for them to create, explore and investigate the surrounding environment with adults, other children or by themselves. Play is a fun and imaginative way to become familiar with the world in which we live.

ACES (Achievement Through Community Service, Education, and Skill Building) focuses on experiential, student-directed learning which is supported by every program at Please Touch Museum. We have found that the high school students in our program have very little opportunity to engage in process-driven, child-directed play. They need the opportunity to get excited about learning again. Please Touch Museum’s ACES program gives teenagers the opportunity to direct their own learning, have fun while learning, and do things they never thought possible.

In addition, the program brings the students’ families into the museum community, providing museum access to siblings who may not have come to the museum otherwise.
For many ACES students being a part of this program is their first opportunity to feel comfortable within a cultural institution. Hopefully their participation will help them become lifelong learners who appreciate the value of museums as spaces for learning. This experience helps students access other cultural institutions throughout their lifetime.

What do the high school students do?

Here's our answer, but remember that your answer to this question may look very different. Create a program tailored to the opportunities and limitations of your museum.

Please Touch Museum's ACES program serves high school students from the School District of Philadelphia. Students are selected at the end of 9th grade and participate in the program until the end of their senior year. ACES students go on trips, participate in workshops, and work behind the scenes at Please Touch Museum. Working with staff mentors, they gain real world experiences in departments that include Community Service, Exhibits, External Affairs, Development, Finance, and Human Resources. While working at Please Touch Museum, students complete challenging projects and become stronger problem solvers who learn to approach conflict from many angles. Multi-disciplinary service projects at Please Touch Museum help to build academic and workforce skills, provide leadership opportunities, promote contact with the wider community and encourage a growing sense of civic responsibility. Students take their ACES experiences with them when they go on to college, parenthood and future careers.

Please Touch Museum's youth programs have changed dramatically over the past 10 years. Our programming began with students learning about child development at the museum and developing pre-school farm tours for a school district run farm in Philadelphia. Today it is a student-directed experiential program that is focused on merging the needs of our museum with the interests and passions of the young people who work here.

Our program is unique because it focuses on experiential education and is student directed. We ask students what they care about—we want to know what they are interested in working on. Then the students develop programming around their own passions. By turning the program over to the students they can own it, they can grow it, and they stay invested in our program.

ACES has laid the foundation for post-secondary success by providing work-based learning experiences that support academic achievement, work readiness and the development of life skills.

From its inception, ACES has helped students:

- Achieve high academic standards and school success.
- Increase self-esteem.
- Develop interpersonal and decision-making skills.
- Assume increasing levels of responsibility.
- Develop work habits and an orientation to work that promotes workplace success.
- Learn about and participate in a wide range of museum-related career opportunities.

Building your own Youth Program

There are hundreds of Youth Programs in most cities. Consider the benefits and drawbacks of having your own independent program versus collaborating with another organization.
ACES students at the batting cages during our Road Rules 2005 Alternative Triathlon. Students competed in Mini-Golf, the Driving Range, and the Batting Cages. Left to right: Francis Mans-Khanu, Jesus Lopez, Chantal Jenkins, Chantell Whitfield, Daniel Corti (Please Touch Museum staff), Ny-oshi Acevedo, JeNavia Graham, Kenneth Allen.

Benefits of having your own youth program:
- You and the youth can design and organize the program.
- You control the schedule and programming.
- The youth feel connected to your museum and are inspired to bring their families and friends.
- Museum staff buy into the program and support it in unexpected and important ways.
- Broad programming options are available.
- Students may graduate and come back to work for the museum.

Benefits of collaborating with another organization:
- This is usually a more cost effective way to be involved in youth programming because you share costs associated with the program.
- There may be more resources including space, staffing and access to continuous funding.
- You will have less control over the programming and may be relegated to discussion about early childhood (baby-sitting classes, teen parenting etc...)

Partnerships can lead to dynamic relationships and continuous resources. Each organization is an expert in some area.

Broaden your thinking when it comes to partnerships to include more than your local school district. Consider other museums, community centers and even local colleges. Be creative and keep in mind that your shared goal should be something general where both parties can bring something to the table.

Focus Groups

The first and most vital part of beginning a Youth Program involves talking to the community and your youth audience. Connect with the students that you want to reach in order to find out how to form your program. It is worth the extra work early on in the process to make sure that you are creating a program that the community wants and needs.

- Begin with some community mapping
- Hold a series of planning meetings with interested youth, parents and representatives from the schools. Just putting these three groups together in a room will be a challenge and good experience for you in the art of dealing with the expectations of each stakeholder involved in youth programming.
- Go in with a clear vision of the Youth Program and how it could be organized, while being open to feedback from the group.
- Use this opportunity to connect with the community both within your walls and out in the community.
- Consider holding focus groups with youth, parents and school groups.
- Find out if there is a community need for another Youth Program or would it be easier to work with an existing program to support their needs?
- Take a few minutes to jot down questions for your focus groups!
  - Parent questions:
  - Student questions:
  - Community leaders questions:
  - School district leaders questions: