

## YouthBank: Developing Social Entrepreneurs

YouthBank understands the value of enterprise and initiative, supports experimentation and enables young people to translate their ideas into social action. They are encouraged to analyze the factors and forces shaping the issues and problems that their local research highlights, to examine the range of existing responses by others and identify gaps. They then initiate new answers and monitor and evaluate what happens.

*In Bosnia Herzegovina for example, in a remote village, 40 km from the nearest town and school, young people applied to their local YouthBank for a grant to help them build a children's playground. In a village where shared community spaces did not exist the playground provided a focus for children and parents to meet, play and relax. In the same village, initial funding was granted to another group to organize basketball and volleyball tournaments. As well as providing a focus for social activity, this initiative acted as a catalyst for the local community to mobilize and work together. In another village, funding made it possible for the local Roma population to celebrate their musical culture and heritage and share this with their neighbors. The opportunity to break down gender, generational, and ethnic barriers was inherent in all of these projects.*

Our experience demonstrates that YouthBank releases young people's entrepreneurial spirit, focuses it on social issues and nurtures the skills and capabilities that will serve them well in adult life.

Investing in the international expansion of YouthBank is investing in the development of young social entrepreneurs who are equipped to use their successes as springboards for future constructive social action.

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***A concept paper  
from YouthBank  
International.***

# YouthBank: Developing Social Entrepreneurs

Social entrepreneurship is the process of pursuing innovative solutions to social problems, typically seeking out responses that bring benefits to all those involved. According to Ashoka, the world's largest association of leading social entrepreneurs, *"...social entrepreneurs act as the change agents for society, seizing opportunities others miss to improve systems, invent new approaches, and create solutions to change society for the better."*

YouthBank does exactly that: supporting, challenging, strengthening and celebrating the role of young people in bringing about positive change in their communities. YouthBank is about innovation, encouraging young people to bring their perspective to bear on local issues and to galvanize other young people to action by providing resources to tackle those issues.

*Since its introduction to Slovakia in 2004 YouthBank has had a direct impact on the lives of over 20,000 young people. YouthBanks were set up in seven locations and there are now nine groups meeting across the country. Each year these groups meet up nationally to share experiences, develop a social network and exchange ideas. Every year over 60 youth-led projects are funded by the YouthBank teams, engaging approximately 3,500 young people in local communities. Their work has included the transformation of a farm into a youth activity center, a sports-and-working summer camp and an arts event which has grown into an annual two day festival.*

YouthBank has a unique methodology that starts with the needs and issues of local young people and supports them to seek out and fund small-scale projects that can alleviate these problems and bring about change in local communities. Alongside this is a commitment to the personal and social development of the young people involved. Being part of a YouthBank is fun and it is also an educational experience.

YouthBank seeks to empower young people to be entrepreneurial, whether as grant-makers or grant recipients. It enables young people to learn early on in life that they can lead social change. The YouthBank process provides a platform on which young people can experiment and try things out at their own pace. Putting in the effort on a small scale to begin with kick starts the development of entrepreneurial spirit, innovation and a commitment to social action. The approach is systematic though flexible, challenging young people to research and explore issues influencing the lives, circumstances and well-being of their peers and the communities in which they live. By identifying the root causes of social problems and designing grant programs they enable other young people to tackle them in constructive ways. In addition, the young people who make up the groups that receive funding are challenged to develop fresh and innovative ways to address local issues.

With YouthBank, young people launch and lead their own initiatives; taking social action during this most impressionable stage in their development can be a truly transformative experience. Young people on our programs learn a range of critical skills for life and work and regularly report significant increases in their self-confidence and self-esteem. This is not something that you 'unlearn'. It is true that confidence can 'take a knock' but these early experiences also build resilience and determination, powerful tools to take forward into an adult future.

The jobs of tomorrow do not exist today, and part of the YouthBank ethos is to support young people to succeed as they progress into that new world of work. Young people need to master a range of skills and capabilities to cope with an ever-changing social, economic and political landscape. As Heraclitus<sup>1</sup> said *"The only constant in life is change"*. Recent research<sup>2</sup> has identified 7 'clusters of capability' that support and enable young people's growth into well-rounded, productive community members:

- Communication
- Creativity
- Confidence and agency
- Resilience and determination
- Planning and problem solving
- Managing feelings
- Relationships and leadership

YouthBank supports young people to develop those 'building-block' capabilities; the things that will enable them to deal with whatever life throws and that research has identified are key to positive future life chances.

<sup>1</sup> A Greek professor who lived from 535BC to 475BC

<sup>2</sup> *A Framework of Outcomes for Young People*. Young Foundation, 2012