

FROM THE INTRODUCTION



Welcome to Our Kitchen

Perhaps when you were young you joined your grandmother in the kitchen while she created delicious meals. As an experienced cook, she only occasionally referred to the cookbook on the counter. Through observing her bustling about you might have learned quite a bit about food, perhaps incorporating her ideas about inventing entire meals. Using this image of learning in a supportive, informal way, we developed this handbook for adults who work with youth in clubs, after school programs, museums, recreation centers, and other community outreach forums.

This handbook is for those role models and teachers who are looking for additional strategies to engage teens in developing their skills of communication, leadership, teamwork, and respect.

Teen Theatre: Recipes for Success brings together a unique combination of theatrical, environmental, and science education techniques, and describes those methods that have borne success during five years of trial testing with youth groups in the San Francisco Bay Area.

It is not necessary to have a theatre background to serve up these activities and

workshops. We hope you try the activities and workshops, and give us feedback on your results.

This handbook's activities and workshop "menus" are designed to increase communication skills in teens, while they explore issues related to self-esteem, risk-taking, and body image. These activities foster the self-confidence and trust that enable teens to boldly declare their individuality and take healthy risks within a safe group setting. Communication is a foundation for a variety of interpersonal skills. These skills foster respect of the self and for the perspectives of others. Presentation and theatre skills are important for teens who present in classrooms or to the public. Communication skills can also help build both team and leadership strengths.

How can we empower our youth leaders to communicate effectively and encourage diverse youth in our communities to consider themselves capable of leadership? One recipe for success is to make it fun to learn about communication and to provide interesting content and forums in which teens' opinions are heard. Contemporary issues related to health and science provide a context for youth to share their talents and ideas with others.

The arts provide powerful opportunities for youth to learn and communicate their ideas. The educational research report, *Champions of Change: The Impact of the Arts on Learning* (1999), provides evidence that learning through the arts enhances the learning and achievement of students when they are involved in a variety of arts. The report compiled findings from seven major studies.

One of the report's contributors was James Catterall of the Imagination Project from the University of California at Los Angeles. He conducted an extensive analysis of the Department of Education's National Education Longitudinal Survey data base of 25,000 students. This study demonstrated that students with high levels of arts participation outperform "arts poor" students in virtually every measure. The study indicated that a more significant difference was realized for students from low-income backgrounds.

Richard Riley, the former United States Secretary of Education, noted in his review of *Champions of Change*, "Through engagement with the arts, young people can better begin lifelong journeys of developing their capabilities and contributing to the world around them. The arts teach young people how to learn by giving them the first step: the desire to learn."