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# A Critical Analysis of the "Young Life" Program: Implications for the Creation of A "Leader" Manual

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A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE "YOUNG LIFE" PROGRAM: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE CREATION OF  
A "LEADER" MANUAL

By

Christina Romano

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## **Introduction**

The goal of this project was to create a useful and informative manual for current Young Life leaders in Columbia, South Carolina based on research from developmental literature about adolescent needs. Young Life is a nondenominational Christian youth group made up of volunteer leaders and staff people who go into local high schools to build relationships and develop an opportunity for ministry and sharing the Gospel. This project intends to critique what Young Life could be doing better in terms of catering to the needs of adolescents in this critical stage of development while coming from the perspective that the methods of Young Life in its ministry are effective. That being said, the manual should act as a supplement to the current forms of training for leaders and policies that Young Life runs by. It is my hope that Young Life leaders will be able to utilize this consolidation of information specifically created for Young Life leaders in order to better their ministry and assist their high school friends in their developmental progression into successful and capable adults.

## **Overview of Young Life**

Young Life is a nondenominational Christian youth group founded in 1941 by Jim Rayburn (Young Life, 2016). Today, Young Life is in every state in America and in 99 countries worldwide. Though there are multiple facets of Young Life outreach such as teen moms (*YoungLives*) and kids with disabilities (Capernaum), the main focus is on high school and middle school students. Volunteer leaders and staff people go where the kids are to build relationships in order to share the Gospel of Jesus, while the Committee is made up of adults in the community who support Young Life's finances, administration, mission, and provide support and prayers.

The Young Life program is made up of Club, Campaigners, Camp, and Contact Work. Club can be described as a party with a purpose. It is generally a weekly event where high school and middle school students can come have fun and learn about Jesus. Each Club looks different depending on the location, school, and leaders who run it, but generally, students sing songs, play silly games, watch funny skits, and hear a “talk” about Jesus. All the fun and crazy things that happen at Young Life provide not only a refuge from the stresses of being an adolescent today but also the chance to break down barriers and make students more comfortable in order to more receptively hear about Jesus and build relationships. The talks at the end of each Club paint the story of the Gospel throughout the semester, starting with What is Young Life, followed by Person of Christ, Need, Sin, Cross, and Resurrection. These talks are all created and given by one leader per week and share the Gospel in an easy to understand and non-threatening way. The picture of Jesus that Young Life presents is that of a loving and grace-filled God who encourages goofiness and laughter and wants to have a relationship with each person, despite their utter brokenness from sin—all of which is demonstrated at Club each week.

Campaigners allows leaders and students to go deeper into the Gospel and relationships through a more intimate look at the Bible and what it means to follow Jesus as a believer. Essentially, one or more leaders gather with a group of students to share life stories and struggles, study the Bible, and generate ideas to further the ministry at their school. Students pray together and for each other and learn what it means to follow Christ together. Again, each one looks different depending on location, but the kids that participate in campaigners become the backbone of Young Life at their school and walk alongside leaders in their ministry. In other words, the “campaigner kids” become a part of the campaign for Young Life and the Gospel of Jesus.

Contact Work is simply the word used for spending time with high school and middle school friends outside of club and campaigners. Many leaders are able to go to school lunches and sporting events, become a coach for the school, and attend other events where the kids go. Young Life stands firm in the concept that the leaders have to “earn the right to be heard.” In other words, before being able to affectively speak the truth of the Gospel into the student’s heart, they need to earn the right to know their heart in the first place. The leader to student relationship is not that of an instructor or authority figure but that of a true friend. Theoretically, the leader will go to the school as much as possible to meet kids and then keep going back to those kids to build relationships and eventually invite them to club and/or campaigners. “Doing life” with high school and middle school friends is a central idea in Young Life and comes from 1 Thessalonians 2:8, “Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well,” (New International Version). Therefore, many people call contact work, or relationships, the heart of Young Life.

Camp is an awesome ministry tool that brings together all the parts of Young Life into a weekend or weeklong trip. There are 33 Young Life camps in the United States, Canada, Puerto Rico, Costa Rica, and more, with different activities from horseback riding and mountain biking to parasailing and water tubing. Camp time includes planned activities such as volleyball tournaments and Clubs as well as free time to enjoy all the activities and beautiful scenery at the camp. Cabin time happens after each Club talk where each group in a cabin discusses the talk, their own lives, and the Gospel of Jesus. This time mimics Campaigners while allowing students to explore their faith and ideas about Jesus in a safe environment. Camp provides students with the chance to get away from the struggles they face at home (and their phones) to have fun and learn about Jesus in a beautiful place designed to show God’s glory in every aspect.

Further information regarding Young Life and its practices can be found on [younglife.org](http://younglife.org) or by contacting any local staff person via the contact information provided on the aforementioned web page.

### **Critique of Young Life**

Young Life is clearly an effective tool for ministry, as evident from its endurance over time and ability to impact millions of students worldwide (Young Life, 2016). However, upon reading the goals and methods described in Young Life's Mission Statement, it becomes clear that much of Young Life's focus is on what leaders, staff, and committee can do for the students and the ministry and not on what the students need. Of course, the ultimate need as held by Young Life is of a savior in Jesus Christ. Still, developmental needs that can be affected through Young Life exist. The mission as stated on the Young Life website is as follows:

#### **Our Mission**

Introducing adolescents to Jesus Christ and helping them grow in their faith. We accomplish our mission by ...

- Praying for young people.
- Going where kids are.
- Building personal relationships with them.
- Winning the right to be heard.
- Providing experiences that are fun, adventurous and life-changing.
- Sharing our lives and the Good News of Jesus Christ with adolescents.
- Inviting them to personally respond to this Good News.
- Loving them regardless of their response.
- Nurturing kids so they might grow in their love for Christ and the knowledge of God's Word and become people who can share their faith with others.
- Helping young people develop the skills, assets and attitudes to reach their full God-given potential.
- Encouraging kids to live connected to the Body of Christ by being an active member of a local congregation.
- Working with a team of like-minded individuals — volunteer leaders, committee members, donors and staff.

Each of the actions listed above reflect what the leaders, staff, and committee do. Thus, a lack of what the adolescents themselves need is evident. Again, the mission of Young Life is to share and spread the Gospel, but acknowledgement of adolescent's developmental needs in order to grow in their faith and as a person is absent. That is to say, simply focusing on what the volunteers do as advocates for Young Life holds no backing in what research says adolescents need for positive development. Therefore, this project aimed to fill the gap in Young Life's ministry through the construction of a document or manual for the use of leaders for the enhancement of the currently available informative materials.

### **Current Young Life Resources**

The current resources available to Young Life leaders and staff vary depending on location but mostly come from the Young Life website and its headquarters. Specifically, in Columbia, leaders go through training before being placed on a team that attends to a specific high school. This training includes weekly meetings with talks about Young Life and what it means to be a leader, short assignments such as writing a Club talk, Bible study small groups, and shadowing at local high school and middle schools Clubs, Campaigners, and Contact Work. Leaders in training are provided with a packet of general information about Young Life and information specific to their area. This packet includes the basics of Young Life, content about Club, Campaigners, Camp, and Committee, the mission and values of Young Life, expectations for leaders, and contact information for the area. Leaders are also required to read *Back to the Basics of Young Life* by John Miller and *The Master Plan of Evangelism* by Robert Emerson Coleman. After placement on a Young Life team, leaders continue to acquire resources from their Area Directors and staff people such as worksheets and articles from Young Life and other ministry sources. Continually updated resources can be found on both the Young Life website,

another website called The Young Life Leader Blog, and other web, hard copy, audio, or video sources developed by and for Young Life staff people, volunteers, students, and committee members.

However, none of these resources explicitly define or explain the importance of the developmental needs of adolescents from a research-based perspective. Similar to the Mission Statement of Young Life, all of these resources explain what the leaders should do or look at the adolescent's needs purely from a ministry perspective and not a psychological or developmental perspective. Thus, the guide produced from this project will fill that gap of valuable information regarding the developmental needs of adolescents for Young Life leaders to utilize in their ministry.

### **A Developmental Perspective: Pros and Cons**

An emphasis on a developmental perspective for positive youth outcomes has increased in popularity and been the focus of many academic studies (Conway, Heary, & Hogan, 2015; Lerner, Fisher, & Weinberg, 2000). The literature points to positive outcomes when holding a developmental perspective in trying to positively impact youth development, because developmental psychology focuses on the person as an ever-changing organism and takes the entire life-span into consideration (Lerner, Fisher, Weinberg, 2000). This research not only looks at human life across all its years, but also emphasizes the importance of creating experiments and research in a contextually sound manner in order to best capture the outcomes in real life situations (Lerner, Fisher, & Weinberg, 2000). Of course all scientific study should aim to mimic real life situations as much as possible, but research in the developmental field has evolved and recognized the importance of utilizing studies in order to apply them to real life scenarios for the betterment of human development overall (Lerner, Fisher, & Weinberg, 2000). Thus, theory and



research concerning positive youth development takes into consideration both scientific research and the implementation or results of such research with the ultimate goal of public use and benefit from the research.

Specifically, many studies of positive youth development have relied upon the model of the Five Cs of positive outcomes (Conway, Heary, & Hogan, 2015; Gentry & Campbell, 2000; James & Fine, 2015; Lerner, Fisher, & Weinberg, 2000; Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2000). This method of defining adolescent development creates categories in which to define the different aspects of successful development as well as areas to focus on when implementing youth policy or generating programs to enhance the development of adolescents. The categories of competence, confidence, connection, character, and caring/compassion exemplify the ideal outcomes for adolescents as they grow through those years and progress into emerging adulthood (Conway, Heary, & Hogan, 2015). These outcomes have been studied and reported in numerous articles and literature, providing not only increasing and evolving information on the subject, but also supporting the claim that this kind of perspective and theory is valid and useful in looking at development (Conway, Heary, & Hogan, 2015; Gentry & Campbell, 2000; James & Fine, 2015; James, Fine, Turner, 2012; Lerner, Fisher, & Weinberg, 2000; Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2000).

Although research holds a strong argument for the benefits of a developmental perspective and its implementation into programs connected to adolescents, its possible downfalls must also be discussed. As with all research, applications to real life may not always result in its intended way. Humanity is ever-changing and complex, so any outcome may be different depending on the person. This possibility in terms of cultural differences is discussed later, but the lack of pertinence to all people proves a constant likelihood. Furthermore, research on this developmental theory as related to spirituality and Christianity specifically is lacking.

Though studies explore the impact of spirituality on adolescents in light of this model of development (Dowling, et al., 2004; James & Fine, 2015) the validity of this perspective as viewed from a ministerial perspective is minimal if not nonexistent. Most studies that involve spirituality define it in abstract and general terms due to the difficult nature of actually defining spiritual beliefs for generalized populations (Dowling, et al., 2004; James & Fine, 2015).

Nevertheless, the immense amount of information and scientific backing of a developmental perspective on adolescent needs resulted in the decision to adhere to this theory in addressing the gap in information within Young Life as a ministry and a program for the betterment of youth in the form of a manual for leaders.

### **Process of Creating the Manual**

The compilation of this manual was very simple in nature and began with a literature search for the developmental needs of adolescents. Most of the articles found reference, utilize, and confirm the validity the “five Cs” that define the developmental outcomes of a successful adolescent which are competence, confidence, connection, character, and caring/compassion (Conway, Heary, & Hogan, 2015; Gentry & Campbell, 2000; James & Fine, 2015; Lerner, Fisher, & Weinberg, 2000; Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2000). Thus, this model for developmental outcomes was used in the manual itself as a way to organize the information found throughout literature. The decision to follow this organization came from both its prevalence and use in research as well as its simplicity in conveying the varying aspects of positive youth development. Each of these categories are defined and discussed in terms of adolescent development and how the Young Life leader can apply that information to their relationships with adolescents. Three main sources were used to develop the content of the manual, through a distilment of the information into a simpler more succinct format, and are listed in the manual under the heading

“Sources” in order to supplement the information provided in the manual (Gentry & Campbell, 2000; Lerner, Fisher, & Weinberg, 2000; Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2000). This decision to list the sources of information for the manual in such a way without in-text citations resulted from the goal to keep the manual as simple and user friendly as possible while still providing proof that it is credible and allowing readers for further investigation if desired.

The APA guide “Developing Adolescent: A Reference for Professionals” is organized by physical, cognitive, emotional, social, and behavioral development (Gentry & Campbell, 2000). Though the organization of this resource is different from that of the produced manual, much of the information comes from the APA source. The different aspects of the categories utilized in the APA guide were analyzed and divided in order to adhere the content to the five C organization. Since this document is intended for the use of those working with adolescents and was produced by the American Psychological Association for such a purpose, its overview of the developmental needs of adolescents provided much of the content for the leader manual. This tool, though beneficial on its own for clinical psychology professionals, is too dense and general to be applied directly to use by Young Life leaders. Hence, a condensation of the material and application directly to Young Life practices with supplementary information from other notable sources seemed the most beneficial for the purposes of this project.

The second article by Jodie Roth and Jeanne Brooks-Gunn divided the content of the needs of youth development into the different areas through which development is established (2000). The components of an adolescent’s life of family, friends, school, work, and neighborhood are discussed in relation to generating social policy for positive youth development. This article differed from the resource generated by APA in that its objective is to provide information for those working with adolescents directly, within those components

previously mentioned, in order to facilitate the progress of youth via the people who spend the most time with them instead of clinical professionals. In other words, this source focused on the application of the research and knowledge about adolescent development for implementation by mentors, youth program organizers, and anyone who may be working with an adolescent, such as a Young Life leader. Essentially, Roth and Brooks-Gunn claim a successful youth program should encompass or address aspects of each of the areas within an adolescent's life. It should provide time, closeness, love and understanding of a family, advocate for appropriate behavior like a school, and provide connections like from friends, while creating opportunities for skills and knowledge growth like in the workplace. These goals may be accomplished, as demonstrated in this article, through spending quality time, listening, providing opportunities for growth, and modeling behavior for the adolescents in the youth program. These specific applications are discussed in the end of the manual and summarized into the repeated suggestions of leading by example and listening. These two methods specifically can be implemented or further emphasized in the Young Life leader's tool belt for relating to and guiding the student they spend time with.

### Competence

The goal of competence includes intellectual, academic, social, behavioral, and emotional aptitude in the adolescent's life; they should have an increasing knowledge in each of these categories. Much of the development in an adolescent's newfound exploration of competence comes from the transition to abstract thinking about the world that adolescents were previously incapable of (Gentry & Campbell, 2000). This new cognitive ability leads to discovery of new view points and topics, examination of previously held truths, considering meaning, and exploration of self-identity, as discussed in the next section. Therefore, the Young Life leader is

called to provide an example of utilizing this new found cognitive ability by modeling effective decision making skills, asking probing questions to enrich this new way of thinking, providing moments to explore emotional competence in a safe environment, challenging the adolescent to further their realms of competence in both the areas where they exceed and those where skills are lacking, and generally demonstrating the advancement of knowledge in all its forms from academic to social. Social competency in particular can be modeled more so in a Young Life setting as much of it is relational in nature; therefore, a leader can help a friend lacking in social competence by modeling appropriate social behavior and challenging them to step out of their comfort zone in order to enhance this ability.

#### Confidence

The developmental outcome of confidence proves extremely important in development as the increased cognitive ability to think abstractly allows the adolescent to form an identity for the first time in their life (Gentry & Campbell, 2000). This identity is made up of self-concept and self-esteem which can be developed through peer and family relations, experiences, and expressions of identity whether from the adolescent themselves or another person's acknowledgement of a certain trait in an adolescent (Gentry & Campbell, 2000). Comparisons to others and identifications or lack of belonging within a group can have a huge impact on an adolescent's perceived identity and self-worth (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2000). Experimentation with new identities, tastes in music, movies, clothing, and more can easily be seen in youth development and is the result and process of this self-identification dilemma in adolescence (Gentry & Campbell, 2000). The Young Life leader can aid in this confusing time through exploration along side the student, acceptance of changing tastes and characteristics, and

reinforcing positive self-concepts by highlighting strengths and acknowledging the normality of experimentation and confusion in adolescence.

### Connection

Since Young Life focuses on relationships and its role in ministry, the concept of connection and its importance is easily understood for a leader. Connection is made up of not only relational and social connection, but also connection to a larger group or community (Conway, Heary, & Hogan, 2015). Noticeably, connection links strongly to the ideas of social competence and self-identity as the importance of belonging to a group and the definition of one's self identity tend to come from connections or relationships. Being able to form positive bonds with friends and family is essential to positive growth and success in the future (Gentry & Campbell, 2000; Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2000). Young Life can aid in this outcome by fostering these kinds of bonds both between the student and leader and within the relationships of those that attend or are associated with Young Life. Creating a family-like environment of safety and care is a main goal outlined by Roth and Brooks-Gunn for a successful youth program (2000).

### Character

The goal of establishing character in adolescence is that of forming positive and sound values, morals, and beliefs to view the world and act from (Conway, Heary, & Hogan, 2015). Good character is defined as holding positive values such as honesty, integrity, and moral commitment (Gentry & Campbell, 2000) Since adolescents are now able to think abstractly, they can wrestle with the ideas of good and bad and decide what they believe and how those beliefs may differ from their family, friends, and those around them. The outcome or behaviors that result from those new beliefs are where the concern lies for those working with youth. Often the exploration of identity and character derive from group time and peer influence, so the

possibility of associating with deviant or dangerous youth must be addressed and appropriately assessed based on the level of severity (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2000). Leaders can juxtapose this flawed value base by objectively providing a range of options and potential outcomes if the adolescent decides to associate with this kind of group or participate in dangerous or unhealthy behaviors (Gentry & Campbell, 2000). Moreover, a Young Life leader can aid in this area of development by generating conversation about moral dilemmas or right and wrong; they should also demonstrate good moral character in the way they handle themselves and face issues. Since Young Life has a moral base and values built in as its Christian foundation, the path down which to guide youth in terms of values can be easily defined. However, it should be noted that in discussion with students about these values, an adolescent ought not experience belittlement if their ideas do not match up with Biblical or Young Life values in order to sustain positive self-regard; instead, the leader should be compassionate in their acceptance of differing opinions without wavering from their own personally held Biblical truth.

#### Caring/Compassion

Compassion relies on the same kind of development of internal beliefs and values as character but applies to relational scenarios and concepts about humanity (Lerner, Fisher, & Weinberg, 2000). In other words, how the youth deals with feelings toward other people and then acts on that behavior. Ideally, this internal belief would come from a place of love and compassion for others and thus affect the outward behaviors. This compassion can be manifested in the way the adolescent interacts with another person or in a broader context of volunteering and participating in community service or outreach (Gentry & Campbell, 2000). This can also be seen in advocating for social justice issues and interest in changing the brokenness of the world. In a Young Life context, this will likely manifest in becoming more involved in Young Life by

inviting their friends and evolving into more of a leader in order to further the Kingdom of Heaven and spread God's love. The leader can encourage this through modeling this behavior and compassionate attitude, while referring the source of this compassion back to Jesus, not the leader him or herself, and by instigating discussion and thought about people in different situations, cultures, beliefs, and other diverse perspectives in order to fully develop compassion for all kinds of people.

Generally, the research does not advocate for a problem-free adolescence, but rather one with the resources available to prepare for challenges, face them, and cope with the consequences in order to become healthy and successful adults (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2000; Gentry & Campbell, 2000). The fostering of these five elements through awareness, education, and focus on them by the people who work with adolescents, such as Young Life leaders, will hopefully attain that goal of encouraging positive development for success even after adolescence.

Following these elements, a call to be culturally aware is included in the manual. Though the emphasis on these five outcomes in adolescent development is strongly supported in research (Conway, Heary, & Hogan, 2015; Lerner, Fisher, Weinberg, 2000; Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2000) it is important to note that differing cultures, genders, groups, and geographic locations may provide variation in both the way adolescents develop and what is considered successful development. For example, different ethnic groups tend to hold different values—Asian Americans value community and group wellbeing over the individuals, African American families value spirituality and family bonds, and Latinos value respect for elders and authority figures (Gentry & Campbell, 2000). Again, these are purely examples and may not apply to every Asian American, African American, or Latino person. As with all relationships, the individual's



values, background, and self-identification must be considered and explored in order to fully bond. Understanding an individual's personal cultural differences and that the ideas and applications outlined in the manual may not apply or look exactly the same for each person is essential to ensuring the success of using the manual. Moreover, helping an adolescent come to terms with and take pride in their cultural identity will have a lot to do with confidence and the ability to form a strong self-identity (Gentry & Campbell, 2000). All of these reflections are addressed in the manual and should be reflected in the use of the manual when applying the concepts to each individual leader and the students they work with.

Finally, the manual closes with an explanation of the importance of the manual in the work of a Young Life leader and the importance of the Young Life leader's work itself. Those subjects will be addressed in further detail in the following sections, but they were included in the manual in order to promote the important task of including a developmental framework into working with adolescents. Not only does the use of a research-based developmental theories enrich a Young Life leaders tool belt in working with students and building their ministry, it also lends itself to creating a community full of well-adjusted and capable youth who continue those practices into adulthood and pass them onto their own children (Lerner, Fisher, & Weinberg, 2000). In other words, the reaches of the ministry of Young Life when supplemented with this material goes far beyond adding believers to the population of heaven for eternity; it also manifests itself in the wellbeing of the people within a community and thereby the wellbeing of the community as a whole. The idea is that if more adolescents have people in their lives advocating for positive development, they will continue that legacy and more and more capable adults will be realize their full potential and impact the society they inhabit. It is the hope that the highlighting of this possibility will drive the leader who reads this manual to see the importance

of what they are doing in their ministry in general and the importance of what they can be doing specifically for their high school and middle school friends.

### **Importance of a Developmentally Focused Manual: For Young Life**

The lack of a developmentally focused perspective in Young Life has already been discussed, but the implementation of this information will surely be beneficial for Young Life as an organization and a ministry. First of all, the knowledge of both how an adolescent develops and how to encourage positive developmental traits will aid in the understanding of adolescents in general. That increased knowledge and understanding should provide a better platform on which to build relationships—again, a key component of the Young Life ministry—especially in the ever-changing and complex life of a modern day adolescent. Furthermore, this information will fill a gap in the possible knowledge of the Young Life organization yet unexplored in its effect on this ministry specifically. The consequences of this information cannot be seen in the current timeframe of this project, as will be discussed later, but ideally any new information relevant to the program and deemed beneficial by other sources should result in some kind of positive outcome. Overall, this manual aims to help Young Life in the understanding of adolescents by individual leaders, the ability to connect to adolescents because of that knowledge, and the betterment of the Young Life organization as a whole resulting from the improvement of its students through developmental growth.

### **Importance of a Developmentally Focused Manual: For Adolescents**

For the young people that come in contact with Young Life leaders who have a solid knowledge of developmental needs as a result of this manual, numerous benefits may result. Having any person in their life who understands the cognitive, social, behavioral, and emotional changes that occur as an adolescent as well as the developmental needs that come from those

changes will likely be advantageous. Not only that, but a mentor who aims to build and foster the positive outcomes outlined in this manual would truly be the best kind of advocate to associate with. Since most young people do not have this kind of knowledge of what their developmental needs are nor have the ability to see their needs and progress objectively, the need for a mentor is evident. Having these developmental outcomes strived for, whether the adolescent is cognizant of it or not, will allow for resiliency that will last into adulthood (Gentry & Campbell, 2000).

Students who adhere to these guidelines out positive youth development will likely do better in school, be less likely to engage in deviant behavior, maintain relationships, overcome obstacles, and be more assured in their identity throughout life (Gentry & Campbell, 2000). Not only that, but the more adolescents who attain these goals, the more advantageous peer groups will form thus supporting and challenging each other to improve. Moreover, the successful and resilient adults that come from this guidance and growth will affect those around them in both their contributions to society and in the inheritance of these positive traits in their children, creating a cyclical effect of positive outcomes for the individual and society as a whole.

The ultimate advantage of having a Young Life leader with this knowledge in order to most effectively share the Gospel will result in the best kind of outcome: salvation and a relationship with Jesus Christ for the adolescent. Ultimately, the benefits that result for the adolescent would be benefits for Young Life as well, since Young Life aims to reach high school and middle school students with the intent of bettering their life through the Gospel.

### **Shortcomings of This Project**

The hope for the completion and implementation of the document created through this project is that of an effective, helpful, and widely applicable resource for Young Life leaders in Columbia, South Carolina. Following the completion of the manual, it will be given to the local

staff people for use, if they wish, in future leader training and continued education for current Young Life leaders. The amount of information and its tailoring to Young Life should be helpful and informative for those who read it. Ideally, the leaders would take the information provided into consideration while working with their high school and middle school friends, and that information would transform their ministry, relationships, and effectiveness as a Young Life leader. Nevertheless, the obvious shortcoming of this project is that the actual effectiveness and implementation of this manual will not be seen. As the producer of this document, I plan on keeping in touch following its application and use in this area to see how it has affected Young Life's ministry. Still, the manual's usefulness, clarity, and relevance in its intended purpose will not be able to be observed in the completion of this project. It is my hope that the manual will be useful and endure over time, but the resolution of that hope cannot be seen in its entirety.

Furthermore, the lack of current research on the effects of social media on youth development and its ever changing nature led to the decision to omit a section on media in the manual itself. Since technology is evolving at an unprecedented pace, the research cannot keep up with current trends and their impacts of adolescent growth. Often the research that has been completed is contradicting and variable depending on the time, place, population, and type of social media or technology observed (Barth, 2015). However, this is still an important aspect of youth development that is becoming more and more prevalent in relating to the youth who have lived with this technology all their lives. Some studies have shown social media sites such as Facebook impact emotional intelligence, ability to connect, and self-identification in both positive and negative ways (Barth, 2015). As Gentry and Campbell put it in the APA outlined guide for professionals regarding adolescents, "the ultimate effects [of the media] will depend upon the extent to which positive possibilities can be harnessed and negative influences

minimized,” (p. 27, 2002). While the ability to express themselves on the internet, explore new cultures, and connect to people worldwide heightens certain areas of development, this access also limits the adolescent in their ability to connect in person, recognize boundaries in the sharing of personal information, and often results in feelings of loneliness (Barth, 2015). Still, the use of Facebook by today’s youth has shifted, and continually shifts between the newest and most popular social media sites such as Instagram and Twitter, making the research difficult to apply to adolescents in their consistently changing methods of social media use. Thus, the constructed manual omits this subject for the sake of clarity and accuracy but may as a result be lacking in prevalent and significant discussion on the affects of social media on adolescent development.

Additionally, the scope of this project is limited in nature due to the minimal amount of time dedicated to it as compared to a doctoral thesis or research conducted by a professional in the field of development. My own knowledge and research of this topic is in no way exhaustive, and the ability to read and analyze every paper related to this topic proves simply unattainable in the allotted time frame. Although the research provided is accurate and recent, it cannot reflect the full extent of knowledge on the developmental needs of adolescents. Still, despite this shortcoming and those previously mentioned, the final document is projected to be useful, relevant, and applicable for its intended use, despite these limitations.

## **Conclusion**

Young Life on its own provides a solid and effective ministry for high school and middle school students around the globe. Yet, its mission statement reflects the lack of emphasis on and knowledge about the developmental needs of those adolescents that Young Life intends to reach. This project sought to fill that gap in knowledge through the creation of a usable and constructive

manual describing these developmental needs and how Young Life leaders may work towards advocating for those needs in their high school and middle school friends. That result has been accomplished through the analysis of information available on the topic of positive youth development, the five C's of developmental outcomes, and subsequent application of that information to Young Life leaders in their ministry and relationship building. Furthermore, the importance of what this manual could do for Young Life and adolescents alike have been discussed and deemed suitable as a valuable contribution to the community in its possible positive outcomes.

Despite the lack of explicit provision regarding developmental needs of adolescents as applied to Young Life, the organization itself actually meets many of the developmental needs found to be advantageous for adolescent development. Research has shown correlations between spirituality in adolescents and positive development (Dowling, et al., 2004; James, Fine, & Turner, 2012). Furthermore, Anthony James and Mark Fine established that the specific way a youth conceptualizes spirituality impacts its benefit on development (2015). The three categories of conceptualization they used were established meaning in life, being a good young person, and ambiguous spirituality. Adolescents who conceptualized spirituality as a way to establish meaning in life, scored highest on each of the 5 Cs of positive youth development. Of the three categories, "established meaning in life" is the one that aligns with Christianity and the message of a life lived for Christ that Young Life encourages. Thus, it may be said that the kind of spirituality Young Life aims to cultivate among adolescents is not only beneficial for development, but also one of the more beneficial forms of spirituality for positive youth development.

An aspect of developmental needs in particular that Young Life addresses well is emphasizing the importance of spending quality time with adolescents in order to build relationships for increased impact. This can be seen through the highlighting of Contact Work as the backbone of Young Life's ministry and the commonly used phrase of "earn the right to be heard" (Young Life, 2016). This theory is backed by research that focuses on positive youth development, as can be seen in the article by Jodie Roth and Jeanne Brooks-Gunn, discussed previously, that examines the necessary components of a youth program in nourishing the developmental needs of adolescents (2000). This article, among others, emphasize the importance of spending time with adolescents and approaching them to create a bond rather than advertise an agenda in order to truly impact their development. Studies show that both the way a possible mentor first approaches an adolescent and how long the relationship lasts has an impact on how beneficial the mentor is to the adolescent's life and development (Karcher, et al., 2006). In order for the methods of listening and leading by example to work effectively, there must be a previously established relationship between the adolescent and the mentor. As related to Young Life practices, these outlines of positive relationship building prove beneficial in terms of being able to truly impact the student in their growth toward a successful and healthy life.

Upon examination of the Young Life program and its assets, it can easily be seen that many of its current practices align with the following description from the APA outlined "Developing Adolescents: A Reference for Professionals" of an ideal faith institution in positively affecting adolescent development:

"Adolescents from many ethnic groups, including European Americans, are positively influenced by spiritual and cultural values. Adolescents, hungry for meaning, benefit from positive role models, explicit discussions of moral values, and a community in which there are activities

structured around prosocial values, including religious values.” (Gentry & Campbell, p. 27, 2000).

This demonstrates not only what Young Life does well, but also that it addressed these pressing issues for youth development without explicit knowledge that these needs existed in a developmental and psychological sense. The original and continued hope of this project is to enhance the already affective ministry of Young Life through pointing out the appropriate practices already in place and providing information to enrich the skills of Young Life leaders in order to ultimately better adolescents and the community and expand the Kingdom of God.



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