

TASKFORCE GAZETTE



In 1995, on the tenth anniversary of International Youth Year, the United Nations strengthened its commitment to young people by adopting an international strategy—the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond. Full and effective participation of youth in the life of society and in decision-making is one of the priority areas of the international strategy and the theme of the first edition of our newsletter, the Taskforce Gazette.

See the [WPAY booklet](#) for more information.

Project Highlight

Nathan Malbert works as the Program and Product Developer at the Family and Youth section of the Ministry for Social Development, Labor and Welfare (SOAW) in Curaçao. In this position, he is connected with the International Convention on the Rights of the Child (ICRC) Platform and is the driving force of the Youth Workgroup. This Workgroup was set up in October 2020 and consists of fifteen young people between the ages of 16 and 20. In the beginning they met physically, but due to the lockdown measures they have switched to weekly video meetings.

Mr. Malbert said that “recruiting Workgroup members was quite a challenge. We wanted to put together a group that is representative [of] the entire community of Curaçao. We now have young people in the group from sports clubs and scouts, young people who have come into contact with the law, undocumented young people, young people from a boarding school and so on.” At the moment, members of the Light Intellectual Disability (LIB) community are the only youth category that is underrepresented in the Workgroup. To fill this gap, the Workgroup has decided to meet regularly with three LID youngsters and to include their input in the projects they organize.



In 2020, the ICRC Platform organized a National Youth Debate on the rights of the child. JCI IOBA, the local Junior Chamber International organization, gave twenty young people a three-day training on debating. Nine of them participated in the 2020 national debate. This year, the youth debate will again take place around the worldwide Children's Day, the day of the rights of the child (November 20). The ICRC Platform plans to organize this youth debate every year for the next five years.

The themes that are discussed during the debates are chosen by the Workgroup itself. In this way, various ministries are able to gain insights into the thinking, inclinations and interests of local youth. During the lockdown, for example, it became clear that due to their home situation, many young people were unhappy and had lost interest in school. This issue was regularly discussed at meetings and led to the Workgroup's decision to come up with a project called Keep Your Head Up, which encouraged young people to persevere and raise awareness for mental health issues. The Workgroup members had complete control over the contents of the project. Mr. Malbert noted that "they discussed everything down to the last detail. It was even debated whether or not they should call their mood 'depression.'"



The Workgroup's efforts to reach other young people were thoughtful and creative. "They say that Facebook and traditional media no longer work to reach them. said "they suggested using local young people who are considered 'influencers' on other online platforms," Mr. Malbert says. These influencers, who in some cases have more than 10,000 followers, reach the general public through their comedy and prank videos. "The intention is to open up the conversation about difficult topics, such as how to deal with depressive feelings, through the videos that we want to make together with the ministries."

The Workgroup wanted to attract the attention of the public through a creative and at the same time exciting teaser. Consultations were held with the Ministry of Health, Environment and Nature to ensure that the information and approaches to raising awareness of mental health were correct and appropriate.



Mr. Malbert said that "after that, they immediately came up with something new. They don't sit still! Now they want to approach the Ministry of Economic Development to find out more about setting up your own small business as a youth and to encourage young people to take more initiative in the field of employment. They are on fire!"



They have a few other projects planned for 2021. In addition to the youth debate later this year, they will organize a challenge called Mi Ta Impaktá (I Make an Impact) in collaboration with 1 Focus Diferente. Through this project, they want to put positively minded young people in the spotlight. "Youngsters will be required to do something big for the community with 100 guilders. It can be their own neighborhood or their school, as long as it's their own environment. The winning idea will be presented at a special event," Mr. Malbert said.

Another project that the Workgroup is currently pursuing is for twenty-five young people to complete two courses: one on 'leadership in a changing society' and the other on the 'success mindset'.



The Workgroup certainly does not sit still. In addition to the above-mentioned projects, an awareness campaign is also being planned for this year, in which they will educate both children and adults about six children's rights. Unfortunately, due to COVID-19, all projects in the pipeline have been delayed at the various collaborating ministries. Nevertheless, the Workgroup hopes to be able to complete at least three of the projects this year.

The Workgroup has been meeting less often in recent weeks due to schoolwork and exams, but once those are over, they will plan a team-building day at the beach. "This will help to strengthen mutual ties and give the less verbally strong members the confidence to make themselves heard more," Mr. Malbert said. A number of young people from the workgroup are going to pursue further studies this year, so they will soon be looking for new members.




In Conversation With...

Since 2012, Aruban youth (14-25 years) have been trained in leadership at the Heart-Centered Leadership Foundation (HCLF). We spoke with Keyla Rojas, project coordinator at HCLF.

The programs that HCLF offers are mainly aimed at the internal development of the young person. The organization regularly organizes activities via which the youth commit themselves to the community. According to Ms. Rojas, HCLF is "committed to making the youth as active as possible in the community. Heart-centered leadership is leadership where you learn to lead based on a desire to help instead of looking for your own gain. The important thing is that they know who they are and what their standards and values are."

WHAT DOES THE HEART-CENTERED LEADERSHIP FOUNDATION DO?



The main program of HCLF is called 'Sustainable Me - We'. It aims to make the youth as powerful as possible and to let their power radiate in their environment. The program is based on four pillars, with the focus not only on the youth themselves, but also on the people who work directly or indirectly with the young people. The pillars are:

● **Heart Centered Activities:** This focuses on the personal and professional development of participants who work directly with young people.

● **Heart Centered Impact Coaches:** In these, 'older young people' (18-39 years old) are trained to be mentors for other youth. These mentors are trained to facilitate workshops, assist in seminars and to act as role models.

- **Impact Activities:** These youth-centered activities fall into three categories, which are also the foundation's three core goals: personal and professional development; involvement and participation; and giving back to the community.
- **Heart-Centered Youth Leaders:** The sounding board about what's going on in the community.

HOW DOES HCLF REACH ARUBAN YOUTH?

The youth of Aruba know how to find HCLF through the seminars the organization regularly organizes and the workshops it offers in schools. HCLF also participated in 'Kansen voor Jongeren Cariben' [Opportunities for Youth in the Caribbean], which mainly focused on the prevention of early school dropouts. Ms. Rojas noted that HCLF "always tries to make what we offer extra interesting and useful for young people. This makes them curious. It's also a lot of fun. We let them play games and immediately apply what they have learned in an interactive way." It has been noted that when the youth have had a good time at a seminar, they tell their friends about it and involve them the next time the Foundation organizes anything.

YOUNG PEOPLE STAY INVOLVED

Some of the youth who have benefited from the HCLF programs have expressed deep interest in the work of the Foundation and are then trained to become Impact Coaches. The Impact Coaches are involved in the efforts of the Foundation to guide young people and are more accessible as mentors/role models than older people. One of the youngsters who completed the program is now the host of the HCLF podcast: Vox luventus Impactus (The Young Voice with Impact). This includes conversations with young people about current themes. (Click here to watch [seizoen 1](#) and [seizoen 2](#) on Youtube.)

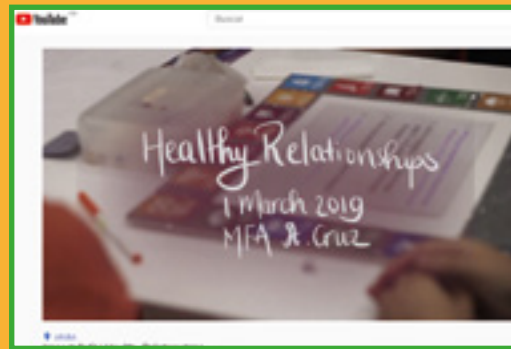
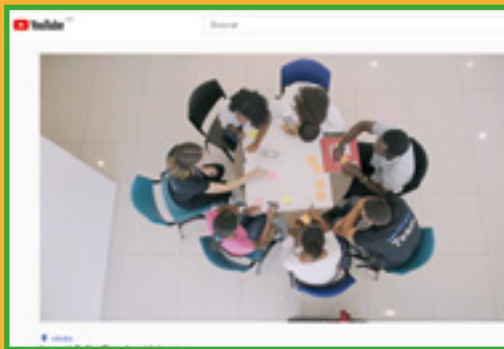


YOUTH WANT TO PARTICIPATE

In 2018, HCLF started Impact Café, where young people come together and discuss problems and challenges in groups of no more than six. Ms. Rojas said that “the Impact Cafés create a safe environment in which young people feel free to talk about difficult topics.” There is always an Impact Coach at the table, who guides the conversation and ensures that all participants are involved. The hosts are non-judgmental and do not interfere with the opinions of the youngsters, “but they motivate and encourage where necessary.” The Impact Cafés are organized in different areas on the island, so that the participants can also talk about the areas where they live, including what they see as solutions to challenges. Ms. Rojas noted that the response from the youth has been extremely positive: “They say that for the first time they feel heard. Not judged. And they see that they can make a difference. This is mainly due to the hosts, who create a safe situation in which the participants can express themselves freely.” HCLF then puts their plans into action through the Impact Factories, via which they apply the solutions that the youth have come up with.

“We simply want to the Aruban youth to know that they should not give up and they should continue to assert themselves to be heard and taken seriously,” Ms. Rojas said.


Two videos of Impact Cafés from 2018 and 2019.



Children and Youth Speak Up

One of the Youth Services programs on St. Eustatius (Statia) has the flashy name: Girl Talk Triple-B (Bold, Bright and Beautiful). It targets girls between the ages of 10 and 17, with the aim of giving them opportunities to express themselves freely and to work with their peers on issues related to sexuality, relationships, education and preventive self-care in a safe environment. Additionally, it aims to make the young ladies strong and assertive and to better enable them to make good choices in life.

Each Girl Talk group has a maximum of 15 participants. The groups are kept small because it was discovered that some girls do not feel confident enough to talk openly about certain topics in larger groups. The groups are classified by the girls' age, levels of education and general life experience.



Each group meets weekly to discuss themes that play a role in their lives and works together for ten weeks. The themes include topics such as personal hygiene, sexuality, relationships, setting boundaries, norms and values, child abuse and self-confidence. They also discuss possibilities to study abroad and the ways in which teenagers communicate with their parents. During the sessions, previous participants of Girl Talk come back and talk about their post-Girl Talk experiences.

At the end of the ten-week period, family members, other teenagers and representatives from various organizations in Statia are invited to the graduation ceremony, where the successful participants have opportunities to share their experience and knowledge.

Erika Simmons, age 18, took part in the Girl Talk program in 2018. She is now a youth ambassador for the program and has started guiding sessions with younger girls.

Hi, who are you and what do you do?

I'm Erika Simmons. I will graduate from high school this year and will go on to study social work in Amsterdam.

Tell us what you do best at with Girl Talk.

What I am best at are the sessions about self-confidence and learning to set boundaries. What really matters is that you love yourself. If you do that, everything will be much easier. And this also helps with setting boundaries, because when you are more confident it becomes easier to say 'no'.

How do you know if you are confident enough to set your boundary?

You only know that when you find yourself in the situation. Only when you are in the middle of it and you indicate your limit, you truly find out if you are strong enough. For example, we do role-play with the children based on imaginary situations or it can be a situation that someone actually experienced. Then they practice holding onto a 'yes' or a 'no'.

Before you participated in Girl Talk, how was your self-confidence?

My confidence was weak and my boundaries were... unstable. When I first started Girl Talk, I had a social worker who also guided me outside the sessions. As a result, my confidence had grown quite a bit by the time we passed Girl Talk. I was very interested in the topic at the time. My friends always came to me for advice.

And how did you get better at setting boundaries?

It gradually got better. Because every day there are situations in your life where you have to set your boundaries. You just have to be strong. And sometimes you

also have to indicate that otherwise you will use the support from higher up if they continue to insist.

How do you do that with peer pressure?

I explain why I don't want to do something. And I remind myself that real friends will respect that.

Would you recommend Girl Talk to others?

Yes, definitely. I even wanted to start my own group when Girl Talk was about to stop. I had a plan to continue it with a friend, but we are both going to graduate this year, so we couldn't do it on the side. But I still give smaller sessions to young girls between 8 to 10 years old, because I work at MYF [MegaD Youth Foundation]. They often ask: 'teacher, what do I do when...' and then I give them advice. I always give advice to anyone who comes to me with questions.

What do you want to do when you graduate and come back to Statia?

I want to come and work here at Youth Services. But I also have a backup plan. Because there is something Statia doesn't have yet, a motivational speaker. I'd like to do that, visit the schools and talk to children there. Because, for example, during exam time there are people who are still nervous about going abroad to study. So, I would tell them about my experience.



Diving Deeper

To become an expert, one often needs years of engagement and devotedness to a subject. According to writer Malcolm Gladwell, it takes 10,000 hours of consistent practice to become a master at anything.

Henry Wallace Charles is precisely that, a Caribbean authority on child and youth participation, with over thirty years of practice in youth and development, youth civic and political participation, youth economic empowerment, adolescent and children rights, and youth governance. An internationally recognized policy development expert, Mr. Charles has served as the lead consultant for the Caribbean Development Bank's first Youth Policy and Operational Strategy.

He has also developed youth policies and development action plans for the governments of Turks and Caicos Islands, Belize, Trinidad and Tobago, Dominica, and Grenada. He is a founding member of the Saint Lucia National Youth Council and the former Regional Director of the Commonwealth Youth Programme-Caribbean Centre, as well as former Interim Director of the Youth Affairs Division of the Commonwealth Secretariat in London.

In a stirring conversation with the Taskforce Gazette, Mr. Charles pointed out that "participation is more than just listening." He added that "in a society where youth participation is taken seriously, you should see the involvement of children and youth in the consultation, execution, monitoring and evaluation of policies and development projects." When asked why it is important to involve children and youth in every aspect of development, he noted



that “children and youth are citizens too. Taken from a pure rights-based position; they have the right to contribute—in their own way—to development processes”. These processes have implications for the lives of every citizen.

According to Charles, you can break down children's rights into three categories: protection rights, development rights, and participation rights. He sees participation rights as a gateway “because without participation rights, the right to protection and the right development will be undermined—especially now, in a world that is changing so much, where debt is growing and we are mistreating the environment, we need to realize that it will be the children who will inherit this from us.”

“Remember, we want to accomplish the SDGs [Sustainable Development Goals] by 2030. Our young people are better positioned, both from the innovative standpoint as well as having the propensity to take risks, to offer new and cutting-edge ideas to point us in a new direction.”

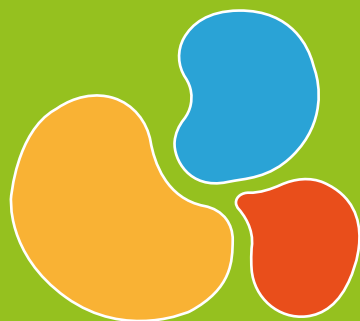
Mr. Charles noted that “in most Caribbean countries, young people under 30 make up between 40-60% of the population. You cannot ignore that group of citizens and propose new developments without allowing them to participate. Most transformational moments in history, moments that have in fact changed the course of history—in the Caribbean as well—have been driven or lead by young people.”

He said it is true that not every young person is equipped to consider all that is involved in transformation and development “but I am certain, if one allows them to participate and share with us their priorities, their critical issues, there is a greater likelihood that what emerges will assist in broadening our horizons. They need to be provided the opportunity to develop their own agency to be better equipped at handling certain situations.”

“I think we have a responsibility to support and invest in young people, but in the Caribbean, we are doing poorly. There are certain projects and organizations that are doing very good work, but it is not part of our culture. It is not established yet,” he said. “We need all hands on deck. We need significant investment in young people to build their competences. We need to see them as assets and most importantly, we need to recognize that the approach to young people should be rights-based.”



Henry W. Charles has authored and presented several academic and technical papers on youth empowerment, youth participation, youth governance, youth economic empowerment and the professionalization of youth development work. Mr. Charles is a part-time lecturer in the M.Sc. program in Child and Youth Studies at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine. He can be reached by email at luciancharlo58@gmail.com. [Click here](#) to access his presentation on Youth Participation in Latin-America and the Caribbean.



The Taskforce Gazette is a publication by the Kingdom Taskforce for Children's Rights. Visit our website for additional information

www.tfchildrights.info

TASKFORCE GAZETTE