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# Who Benefits From Community-Based Participatory Research?

## A Case Study of the Positive Youth Project

Sarah Flicker, PhD

Community-based participatory research (CBPR) has evolved as a popular new paradigm in health research. This shift is exciting, yet there is still much to discover about how various stakeholders are affected. This article uses a critical social science perspective to explore who benefits from these changes through an analysis of a CBPR case study (The Positive Youth Project). Two major categories of beneficiaries emerged: the research itself and the partner-stakeholders. The benefits, however, were not gained without substantial human resource investment, nor were they necessarily equitably spread. Participation costs included heavy demands of time, an added burden of work, frustration with the process, missing other opportunities, risking loss of anonymity, and loss of control. Care needs to be taken to ensure that concrete benefits accrue for all project partners and costs are minimized. Another way of framing benefits is to look at the community capacities built to address future health and social issues.

**Keywords:** *community-based participatory research; partnerships; youth; HIV; community-based organizations; academics*

Community based participatory research (CBPR) is a collaborative approach to research that equitably involves all partners in the research process and recognizes the unique strengths that each brings. CBPR begins with a research topic of importance to the community with the aim of combining knowledge and action for social change.

—Minkler and Wallerstein (2003)

Community-based participatory research (CBPR) has evolved as a popular new paradigm in health research (Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995; Israel, Schulz, Parker, & Becker, 1998; Viswanathan et al., 2004). Unlike traditional academic research, CBPR is rooted in communities, builds on local knowledge and strengths, directly serves community interests, and encourages participation at all levels (Green et al., 1997; Sclove, 1997). CBPR practitioners challenge notions of objectivity and the idea that science is apolitical (Hall, 1993) by adopting a set of underlying beliefs and principles that embrace subjectivity.

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CBPR presupposes that working with community members as co-researchers renders results more accessible, accountable, and relevant to people's lives (Israel et al., 1998), with the added promise of a greater effect on public policy (O'Fallen & Dearry, 2002). Advocates of CBPR suggest that the very process of meaningful participation can be transformative. Through active engagement, individuals and communities may become more empowered and better equipped to make sustainable personal and social change (Wallerstein & Duran, 2003).

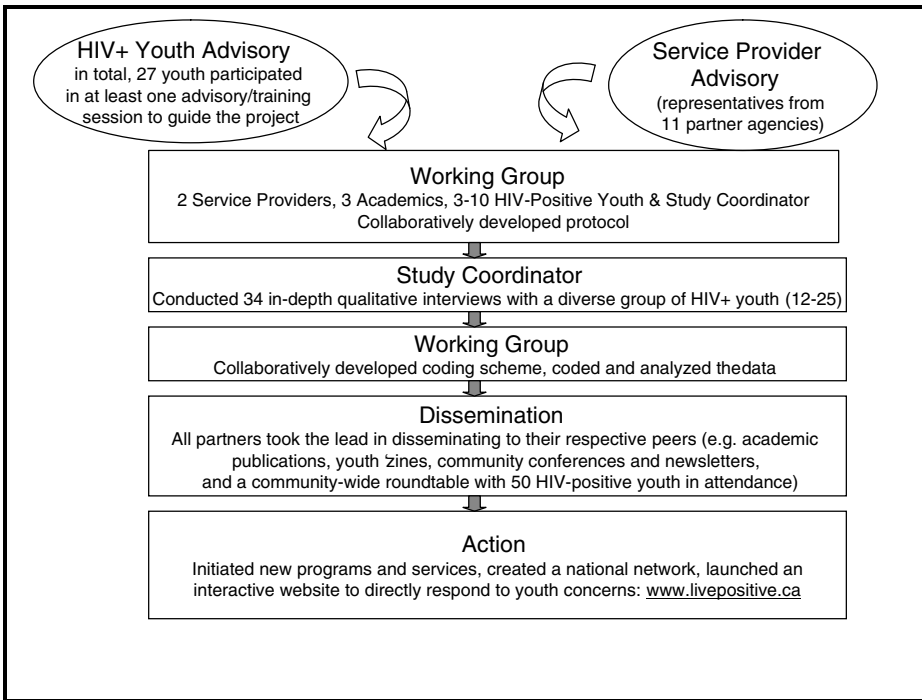
There has been a recent proliferation of literature about the goals, challenges, and theoretical underpinnings of CBPR. Several prominent journals have dedicated issues or sections to thinking about CBPR approaches (Vlahov & Friedman, 2001; Zeldin, Larson, & Camino, 2005). Most recently, CBPR "classics" (Fals-Borda & Anishur-Rahman, 1991; Friere, 1970; Maguire, 1987; Park, Brydon-Miller, Hall, & Jackson, 1993; Whyte et al., 1991) have been supplemented with several comprehensive new textbooks outlining major theoretical and practical concerns (Blumenthal & DiClemente, 2003; Israel, Eng, Schulz, & Parker, 2005; Minkler & Wallerstein, 2003; Stoecker, 2005).

Despite the strong interest in this paradigm shift, more needs to be done to critically and explicitly consider who benefits (and how) from these changes. Wang, Yi, Tao, and Carovano's (1998) exploration of the costs and benefits associated with Photovoice (a participatory photographic methodology) is an example of such work. They note that although substantial potential benefits are associated with participation, those benefits accrue differentially across power structures and are not without substantial costs. Other studies that have begun to examine the meanings of community-university partnerships have generally found that despite honorable intentions, tensions remain around negotiating university-community relations (Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995; Eisinger & Senturia, 2001; Freudenberg, 2001; Gomez & Goldstein, 1996; Green & Mercer, 2001; Israel, Schulz, Parker, & Becker, 2001; Kone et al., 2000; Maguire, 1987; Mason & Boutilier, 1996; Stoecker, 1999; Wang et al., 1998).

Robertson and Minkler (1994) discuss many of the recent shifts in health promotion that laid the groundwork for the rise in popularity of CBPR. These include a broadening of the definition of health and its determinants, greater emphasis on the social and political determinants of health, embracing the concept of empowerment, and advocating for increased community participation. They argue that in order for these new public health approaches to not become imperialistic ideologies (or practices that serve to eventually undermine real community interests), we must continue to question the multiple meanings of community participation and empowerment. Using a critical social science perspective (Eakin, Robertson, Poland, Coburn, & Edwards, 1996), this article will explore the costs and benefits involved in CBPR participation from the perspectives of multiple stakeholder-partners through an analysis of a CBPR case study: The Positive Youth Project.

## THE CASE

The Positive Youth Project is a CBPR initiative that seeks to improve the conditions of Canadian young people living with HIV. Its pilot venture was a provincewide needs assessment that took place between March 2002 and March 2004. The project was spearheaded by a working group of three academic researcher-clinicians and two community-based organizations (CBOs): one with a mandate to serve HIV-positive youth, and the other with a mission to provide treatment information to the HIV/AIDS community.



**Figure 1.** The Positive Youth Project flow chart.

Early on, each organization designated a service provider to sit on the working group, and the team recruited a graduate student study coordinator (myself) and several HIV-positive youth to join. In total, 11 community partners, 4 researcher-clinicians, and 79 HIV-positive youth were involved to some degree in the pilot (see Figure 1).

Given the complexities around defining community representation (Jewkes & Murcott, 1998), both service providers and HIV-positive youth advised the project. Working group members facilitated workshops with youth to train them in research methods and collaboratively design the protocol. In all, 27 youth participated in an iterative planning process. In consultation with both advisory groups, the working group chose a qualitative approach to data collection and a participatory analysis strategy. The protocol was approved by the University of Toronto HIV Research Ethics Board (#8637).

Thirty-four key informant interviews were conducted with a diverse group of HIV-positive youth across the province by the project coordinator. The interviews were audiotaped and transcribed. Anyone who had participated in the protocol development was invited back for data analysis. Working group members returned (including six HIV-positive youth). Transcripts stripped of unique identifiers were given to the group, and a coding scheme was collaboratively developed. Group members were trained on using Nud\*ist (qualitative data management software). HIV-positive youth members coded transcripts; spot checks were done to ensure accuracy and consistency. Ongoing revisions were made to the coding scheme as necessary.

Over 4 months, the group met weekly for analysis. Each week, group members were provided with a package of several codes and a worksheet for each code. Meetings were

used to review worksheets and discuss main themes. Collectively, the group's notes were captured in summary tables. (For more detail around methods and a description of results, see Flicker, 2004; Flicker et al., 2004; Flicker et al., 2005; Veinot et al., 2006.)

Once results were agreed on, a multipronged dissemination strategy was adopted. Three scholarly papers were prepared for peer-review audiences. Four youth-friendly 'zines were created for community distribution. ('Zines—pronounced "zeens"—are a popular youth culture medium. They are self-published noncommercial magazines that are often made using collage techniques with original and appropriated texts and images.) Team members also collaborated on the development of three community newsletter articles and 21 conference presentations.

The project culminated in a communitywide forum. HIV-positive youth and service providers from across Canada were invited to participate in a feedback roundtable. More than 50 youth and service providers gathered to hear results and chart next steps. The forum was the largest known Canadian gathering of HIV-positive youth.

The research results have already been used to galvanize transformation and work more collaboratively across sectors. Concrete changes have been made at both program and policy levels. Service providers have credited the project with helping them to advocate more effectively for youth issues internally (within their respective agencies) as well as externally. National and provincial bodies have approached the team for presentations on findings and training in relevant areas. Most recently, the partnership has launched a Web site ([www.livepositive.ca](http://www.livepositive.ca)) to respond to youth treatment information needs.

Over the course of 16 months, 33 HIV-positive youth advisory meetings, 5 service provider advisory meetings, and 25 working-group meetings were held. Although there was some fluctuation in youth over the course of the 2-year period, there was a core group of three that attended nearly every single meeting. Youth were provided with \$20 honorariums for meeting participation, snacks (generally pizza), and transit tokens. Academics and service providers collaborated on several proposals for additional funding to continue the work of the collaborative. One proposal was successful. The work is ongoing.

## METHOD

Case study methodologies were used to examine benefits and costs associated with project participation from the perspectives of key stakeholders. In keeping with case study research methodologies, several approaches to data collection were used to triangulate findings (Stake, 1995, 2000; Yin, 2003). The protocol was approved by the University of Toronto's HIV Research Ethics Board (#9432). Two primary modes of data collection were used:

*Facilitator Participant-Observation and Field Notes.* Detailed field notes were taken by the project coordinator (myself) of all group activities, attendance logs, and accomplishments. Throughout the course of the project, several informal group process check-ins were conducted with different partners.

*In-Depth Semistructured Interviews.* Working group members were invited to participate in reflective one-on-one interviews on two occasions (midway and near completion). In total, 2 academics, 2 service providers, and 10 youth volunteered. Each interview lasted approximately 1 hour. All interviews were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim.

Youth	Service Providers	Academics
Time, hard work, commitment		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• knowledge of community</li> <li>• 'lived experience'</li> <li>• devotion</li> <li>• recruitment assistance</li> <li>• hands-on work</li> <li>• analysis &amp; dissemination</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• knowledge of community</li> <li>• writing funding proposals</li> <li>• recruitment assistance</li> <li>• analysis &amp; dissemination</li> <li>• program development</li> <li>• community concerns</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• research experience</li> <li>• writing funding proposals</li> <li>• project administration and guidance</li> <li>• day-to-day operation</li> <li>• ethics review</li> <li>• analysis &amp; dissemination</li> </ul>

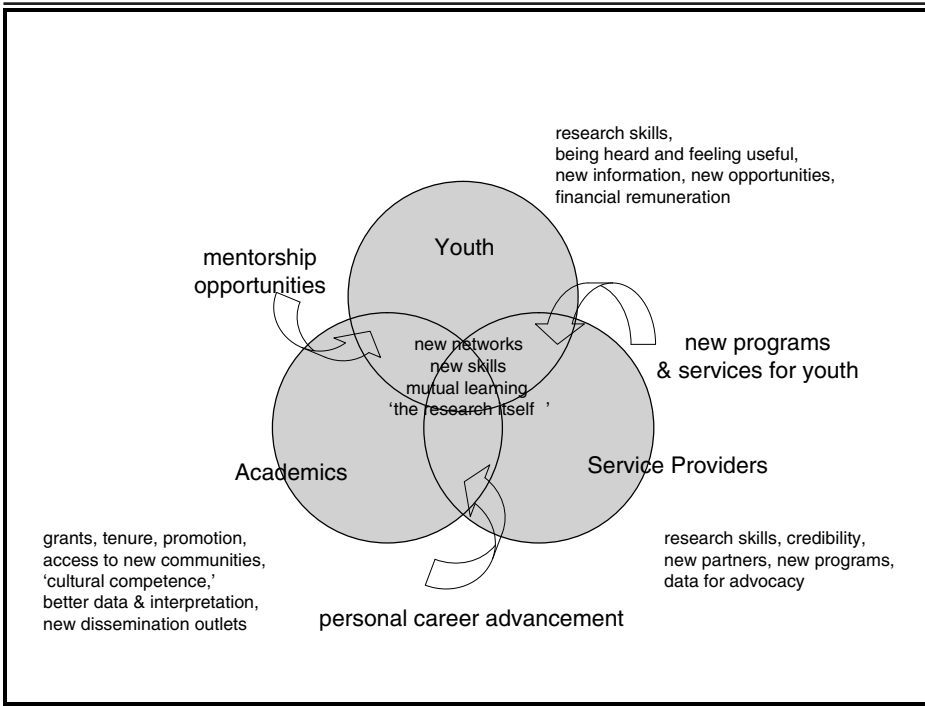
**Figure 2.** Contributions of project partners.

A preliminary coding framework of relevant themes garnered from the literature was developed. It informed the creation of the initial interview guide and provided a framework for field notes (Miles & Huberman, 1984). Following the interviews, the framework was revised to incorporate themes generated from the data through an adaptation of the constant comparisons methods used in grounded theory (Charmaz, 2000; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Taylor & Bogden, 1998). This involved the development of codes that described participants' own accounts of participation. Codes were applied and compared to newly collected data and were modified as necessary using Nud\*ist qualitative software. Descriptive codes were combined to develop theoretical and analytical themes.

A number of different strategies were adopted to optimize trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). These include triangulation of multiple data (e.g., interviews and field notes), member checks (providing participants with earlier drafts of this article for reflection), thick description (to follow), and keeping a clear "audit trail" (Cresswell, 1998; Devers, 1999; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1984).

### WHO BENEFITS?

In trying to tease apart the relevant contributions (see Figure 2) and benefits (see Figure 3) to working group members, it became clear that there were two major categories of beneficiaries: the research itself and the stakeholders (e.g., HIV-positive youth, community-based service providers, and academic researcher-clinicians).



**Figure 3.** Who benefits from community-based participatory research (and how)?

### THE RESEARCH ITSELF

All those involved felt that “the research itself” benefited from its participatory approach. The following areas were highlighted:

*Better Questions.* Youth assisted in developing research questions that met their needs: Rather than simply focusing on barriers and facilitators to treatment information, youth widened the discussion to more general issues of access to a plethora of youth, health, and social services.

*Better Recruitment.* Youth designed the recruitment materials in youth-friendly formats (e.g., collages) and hung them in places where they themselves looked for information. As a result, several participants who had never before entered an AIDS-service organization or participated in research came forward.

*Better Data Collection.* Protocols were amended based on youth feedback to ensure that maximum attention was paid to ensuring confidentiality and anonymity. For instance, youth who were uncomfortable with being tape-recorded were offered alternative forms of participation (e.g., writing out answers, or having a note taker). Ultimately, 2 out of the 35 (6%) sought these accommodations.

*Better Analysis.* Throughout analysis, youth researchers offered new perspectives and ways of understanding and reading the data. They often questioned researcher assump-

tions and spurred closer readings of the text. Through active engagement (and sometimes disagreement), youth involvement generated discussion, prompted assumption checking, and injected rigor. Analyses were considered “results” only when the entire team came to consensus.

*Better Dissemination.* While being supported by the rest of the team, researchers, community-providers, and youth each took the lead in disseminating to their respective peer audiences.

*Better Action.* Community-based organizations were able to immediately integrate research recommendations into their work.

### THE STAKEHOLDERS: HIV-POSITIVE YOUTH

Nearly all of the youth involved identified as being present or past members of at least one socially excluded community (e.g., gay, injection-drug-using, or homeless communities). For many, the pathways that led to HIV infection were part of a larger story of social and structural barriers to their full participation in society. Many described feeling silenced, disempowered, and often unheard in their quotidian interactions with professionals and others in positions of power.

Active participation in a project where those in positions of authority not only listened but acted on their recommendations meant a tremendous amount: “It felt good kinda to be able to contribute some ideas . . . ’cause I hadn’t really ever been kind of asked my opinion on ideas like that, you know” (youth, g). Nearly every youth interviewed talked about the power of simply “being heard” and having others “finally listen.”

Feeling like they were part of a productive or socially respected team was important to participants. Youth regularly mentioned their allegiance to each other and the project and articulated how feeling like a necessary part of “something” helped their self-esteem:

Just coming to be a part of something was . . . good for me. . . . I think helping out on a research project, well for me anyway, like makes me feel like I’ve done something, you know, and that’s good for me. You know, maybe I didn’t do a lot of stuff, you know, but I did something, you know. Do the best I could and I try. (youth, b)

Many of the youth were neither in school nor employed. The ones who devoted the most time to the project lived on the Ontario Disability Support Program as a result of their HIV and related conditions. Project participation gave them an opportunity to contribute in a “meaningful” way to civic society.

I wanted to make a difference; I wanted to do something significant like this. . . . I knew, I just anticipated it would have a big impact. . . . I knew it would be intellectually fascinating. And at that time I was looking for some sort of an intellectual endeavour that I could do because I couldn’t afford to go to school and then all these sorts of things, so I thought I wanted something like that in my life. (youth, a)

The same youth was later able to articulate her participation as akin to part-time employment:

The way I put my vigour into it, it took up a lot of my energy. . . . But it took up my energy in a very good way. It gave me something to do and I felt like it was like a part-time job. So it wasn't overwhelming. It wasn't too much. (youth, a)

Similarly, another young man talked about the importance of having something meaningful to do:

Ah, like it gave me renewed sense of purpose that I'm doing something good; that I'm not only helping myself but I'm helping others and I guess you can say it gives you that warm, fuzzy feeling. . . . It made me feel useful. That was something since being diagnosed that I couldn't feel. . . . I looked forward to the meetings that we had every Tuesday, not so much for the pizza or the money; it was, uh, it felt like I was contributing to a team again. (youth, f)

For youth who lacked the structure of school or work, the project represented an opportunity to actively engage and participate in society in a way that respected and valued their skills and abilities, yet took into account the limitations and barriers they faced while living with a chronic, episodic illness. For these youth who often felt alienated from larger institutions (schools, hospitals, large social service agencies), project participation gave them a point of entry for imagining links with sponsoring institutions and possibilities for the future.

Youth who participated in the planning and execution of the research were in many ways the recipients (somewhat unintentionally) of an intensive community development intervention with a strong dose-response effect. As a "core" participant said, "You get what you give." He elaborated,

Well . . . see I was on the street for a while, right? . . . A lot of those people who are HIV or AIDS don't have this opportunity. They feel hopeless: They don't have no directions. But when you give them like the research, it could . . . makes you feel somebody, more somebody. . . . When you say a project, it sounds like be a part of a team. . . . It makes you be more involved with something. Especially a guy like me. . . . How did it make me feel? I am somebody. That's how it makes me feel. (youth, l)

He credited the project with helping him to "stay clean" and find housing. He talked about how "feeling useful again" and "part of a team" helped him to have the "courage" to take these steps. Service providers and academics associated with the project helped this young man and others secure information about public housing support and other social welfare benefits and negotiate the bureaucratic systems of access. As such, project affiliation also provided a link to other economic supports and social services outside the scope of the project.

Finally, youth talked about how project participation expanded their horizons and helped some to reevaluate their plans for the future:

I got to network with people across this country . . . that I otherwise normally would have never popped into. . . . And like I've taken my focus where I want to go with my life and from like making lots and lots of money . . . to helping people and doing social work and this project is giving me—was help laying some foundation for that. (youth, f)

Another youth talked about how this project made her want to go back to school. She credited participation with giving her a renewed sense of confidence in her "analytical"

and “questioning” skills. In turn, this made her want to investigate the possibilities of going back to school while living on social assistance. Several of the other youth also credited involvement with helping them to rethink their roles as research participants in other studies that they were involved with (e.g., drug trials). It made them want to ask more questions about how research that may involve them might take place. They also felt they had learned a number of important social and practical skills that were transferable to other settings (e.g., computer and literacy skills).

Finally, youth described the \$20 weekly honorariums as a major financial benefit. As most lived on fixed government incomes, the honorariums represented a substantial boost. Nevertheless, they avowed that money (alone) was not enough: Had they not enjoyed their experiences, they would not have continued coming, even if “the cash was good.” To illustrate this point, one youth described having opted out of another study on mental health where they paid her more (\$50/session) because she did not feel like they respected her.

### THE STAKEHOLDERS: ACADEMICS

The academic researcher-clinicians reported that although the project was important, it was only one of several ways in which they have demonstrated their passion for and commitment to working with, and for, youth. Academics talked about the rewards of dedicating substantial portions of their careers to youth health research.

It can be difficult to work with youth; on the other hand, it may be just so rewarding . . . it can be such a marvelous experience, because nobody is listening to these kids. . . . And they’re the future generation of leaders and to make a commitment . . . this is where we need to invest and reinvest. (academic, a)

Academics were passionate about the intrinsic value of simply listening to youth. They felt that the benefits of listening not only were important for the youth recipients but were equally beneficial for the adults doing the listening. They were inspired by the imagination and talents of the youth with whom they worked and felt enriched through their participation in youth work and advocacy.

Academics lamented not having the time to take more active roles in the day-to-day operations of project administration and youth participation. “Because of this area I’m having to kind of fly by at fifty thousand feet so . . . but I can see the outputs . . . I just observe from my fifty thousand feet perch all the great work that you guys are doing” (academic, a). Given the hectic lives that academics and clinicians lead, the head researchers rarely had time to work directly with the youth. Rather, they left this work to graduate students and service providers. The academics understood their roles as being the guides or providing the vision that others would implement. Given that they took less active roles in the day-to-day youth encounters, the project was somewhat less meaningful to them.

Nevertheless, academics talked about enjoying their roles as both mentors and co-learners in the collaborative process. Both academics talked about the pride they felt when they saw members of the team who had less experience with research present at conferences, provide valuable input into proposal development, or succeed in getting manuscripts published. They found satisfaction in their roles as mentors for community members as well as graduate students.

They also reflected on how much they learned through the process:

That process of working together and hearing what all the different partners envisioned was a very important exercise to go through, that without that, if I as an academic . . . worked the usual way we do, and imposed what we felt was the way to go, I don't think we would have been successful. I don't think we would have appealed to the community the way we did. I don't think it would have resulted in the successes that have occurred as a result of that collaboration. (academic, b)

Academics recognized that the HIV field is a much politicized environment and partnering with CBOs allowed them entry into new territory in a sensitive and respectful manner. Finally, academics felt that an important benefit to participation in any research endeavor was new knowledge created and disseminated in the form of academic publications, new sources of research funding, and ultimately, tenure and/or career advancement. When queried about whether the project was successful in their eyes, one suggested,

Well I think the fact that we got four manuscripts out from one project is pretty remarkable. Wish I could say that for all the other ones we're doing. (researcher, a)

What made this project so successful in this researcher's eyes was being able to balance community activism with scientific rigor.

### **THE STAKEHOLDERS: SERVICE PROVIDERS**

Service providers reported feeling that they as individuals (specifically) and their agencies (generally) had benefited from the project. They felt that the knowledge gathered through the research provided them with the "ammunition" to advocate more effectively on behalf of youth (e.g., "It's actual real evidence that I can use to back things up now" (provider, a).

They reported that they were able to immediately integrate knowledge into service provision and more effectively train staff on youth issues. As one service provider described,

Certainly in terms of organizational knowledge about youth is like a lot greater. Like I presented our study findings to our staff, I'm working on a plan to try to train everybody here who does workshops . . . [we] also got a literature review out of the project which is on our website and . . . we get a lot more questions now from our 1-800 phone service about youth issues because of having stuff on our website. (provider, b)

Providers felt that their agencies were also able to leverage the partnerships developed to apply for additional research and service funding. They credited the project with helping them to find organizational partners who were then able to offer support for other initiatives:

I'd say the partnerships we've developed have been really amazing. . . . [We] developed links with organizations that we didn't have before, and that hopefully will be solid and ongoing. . . . And you know, it was extremely easy, for example, . . . when we had to do our funding

submission . . . to draw upon our relations that we have now [for support] . . . that was very easy because we are working so closely together. (provider, b)

Providers also credited the project with helping them to advocate for youth issues in their agencies where competing interests and agendas often made it difficult to focus attention on youth needs. They reported that the project also helped to galvanize community development: The roundtable and strong representation at national conferences helped to put youth issues on the national agenda. Furthermore, the project's commitment to developing the skills of youth fostered the development of young leaders who might champion the cause in the future.

Finally, service providers also commented on the benefits of learning new research skills. They felt that these skills were transferable to other settings and projects. As a result of participation, one provider actually decided to leave her agency to pursue a doctorate.

### AT WHAT COSTS?

I think research seems to be more complicated, takes longer, is more in-depth and needs more money than anything else that I've been involved with. I don't know why. (service provider, a)

Although working group members all felt that they had benefited from participation, they also agreed that the project took much longer and was more involved than they had originally anticipated. Over the course of the project, several articulated that it would be "so much faster" or "more efficient" if they could sit in their offices or apartments and do things on their own without so much "back and forth." Although many felt that the emphasis on process contributed to project success, the slow pace was a persistent frustration.

In addition, some felt that the project was a huge added responsibility on top of their already heavy workloads: "I was just—I was like excited to do it, but I was also like kind of frustrated because there was a lot of things to do and I was like—and I have to do my job as well, so it was just like crazy. It was like a lot of stuff to do" (service provider, a). Service providers felt that they already knew much of what was "discovered" through the research process. The legitimacy, however, afforded to project findings because of the academic affiliations made participation somewhat of an imperative under increasingly competitive funding environments. As a result, some resented the heightened workload:

[We have] had the same level of funding for the last ten years with—or maybe a bit less time, but basically our funding has not changed, yet the demands have increased in terms of the complexity of what we're doing . . . there's a real issue with having enough time to sort of fulfill our basic mandate and be involved in community-based research, and I think that that's where the challenge will come from. (service provider, b)

Several partners mentioned informally during conference calls and other meetings that to stay on top of their regular work demands, they cut into their personal time to complete partnership activities.

Another persistent frustration was the difficulty of finding sustainability funding. "The endless cycle of writing funding proposals" (service provider, b) was an onerous

and taxing job. Given the nature of the project, program funders found team proposals “too researchy,” whereas research funders claimed that there was not enough of a scientific focus. Negotiating the appropriate balance proved extremely challenging. There were also questions around whether appropriate funding dollars were being sought and who should take the lead on resource development.

Another common theme was a lack of clarity about roles and decision making. Given the multiple decision-making groups—a working group, a youth advisory, and a service provider advisory with overlapping membership—some felt chronically “out of the loop.” In particular, the gap between youth and academics was highlighted, because as one youth said, “There’s still a power dynamic because they never come and talk to us” (youth, a). Despite the team’s best efforts, academics were rarely able to attend youth meetings and, as a result, some youth articulated feelings of frustration at what they saw as a double standard of participation when reading final reports and seeing “people’s names on there who I never even met before” (youth, f). This led some to feel frustrated and challenge the rhetoric of partnership.

Participating in collaborative ventures was also understood to be risky. Whereas the academics on this project were quite senior, they talked about how CBPR might be a dicier endeavor for younger academics in the current “publish or perish” academic environment because CBPR “time lines can be longer and you have to build the relationship first” (researcher, a). For service providers, hazards were associated with not having enough time to do all jobs well (and service provision suffering as a result). Finally, for youth, there were risks around disclosure and stigma of actively participating in an HIV activity, jeopardizing the respect of their peer groups if they found out they were engaged in research and the possibility of being tokenized.

A final cost of engagement was loss of control. Several participants articulated feeling challenged by (a) the number of people involved; (b) discomfort with transgressing disciplines/zones of comfort/traditional spaces; and (c) having their names and reputations associated with a partnership with multiple spokespeople. Issues came to a head when a youth associated with the project decided to create a Web site offering youth-friendly treatment information. Before checking in with the group, he sent out a media release using team members’ names and organizational affiliations as project advisors. In the release, he styled himself a not-for-profit and asked for donations. Needless to say, this was an embarrassing gaffe. Project partners were very unhappy and many were worried about their names or organizations being affiliated with a Web site that purported to give treatment information to youth without any form of medical review (not to mention the legal issues involved in asking for donations as a not-for-profit when this was not the case). This incident threatened to break apart the partnership. Although on one hand, some members were very proud of the youth for taking on a huge project and being able to create an impressive product, others were furious that he would use project resources (funding proposals, media contacts, etc.) to undermine partnership activities. Ultimately, it was decided that it would be best for the partnership if this particular youth parted ways with the collaborative.

## LIMITATIONS

This case study examined one CBPR project from the perspectives of working group members. It had some limitations. First, the sample was small and therefore results are

not intended to be generalizable. Nevertheless, issues raised may be important to consider in other CBPR contexts. Further research may wish to compare multiple projects.

Second, those stakeholders interviewed were all members of the project working group and therefore represented a deeply invested group. Members of the working group who were not interviewed included one academic (largely due to repeated scheduling conflicts) and one youth (who “didn’t feel like it”). Further research may wish to interview other stakeholders, perhaps more peripheral advisory group members with less investment in the project, for comparisons.

A third limitation is that the study coordinator was also the same person who conducted all the reflective interviews. This may have led to people being guarded about negativity. On the other hand, it may have led to richer findings because a familiar and trusting rapport was already established. A final limitation is that although this article was examining a CBPR project, the results presented here were largely not collected or analyzed using a participatory framework. Participants were all, however, given an opportunity to view earlier drafts of this article.

## DISCUSSION

CBPR can (and often does) benefit all those involved in the research process. The benefits, however, are not without substantial investment, nor are they necessarily equitably spread. Several youth in this case study found the project transformative and many of them did indeed secure tangible benefits throughout the life of the project (finding housing, securing employment and/or income security, social support, assistance with getting “clean,” etc.). Nevertheless, questions remain as to the sustainability of these and other effects. By contrast, the benefits secured by CBOs (new partnerships, new grant sources, new service delivery models) and academic researchers (new grants, new research partners, publications, career advancement) might be seen as more sustainable.

One approach to considering benefits is shifting the lens from individual to community. Hawe (1994) argues that evaluations of public health interventions ought to think about empowerment as both a process and outcome indicator. Building on her work, Boutilier, Rajkumar, Poland, and Badgley (2001) posit that evaluations of action projects should take into account “important shifts in community processes, relationships and competencies that indicate progress in community initiatives . . . [whereby] small individual level changes are sometimes precursors to larger-scale changes” (p. 91). They recommend using alternative indicators of success, such as long-term participation of members despite obstacles, reaching consensus on goals where none had been possible before, skills development, creating employment opportunities for community members, and so on (Boutilier et al., 2001). By these counts, the project was certainly successful. The Positive Youth Project built the capacities of HIV-positive youth, service providers, and academics that might allow for more successful tackling of future health and social issues faced by this community. This may in fact be a higher order indicator of benefit and success (Hawe, 1994; Hawe, Noort, King, & Jordens, 1997).

Furthermore, examining success on an individual level makes it very difficult to see community-level benefits. For example, the advocacy efforts of the larger collaborative resulted in new resource streams and new communitywide networks and initiatives to serve youth. These meso-level changes are difficult to measure but certainly show the synergistic effects of the capacities of individuals and organizations working strategically in a collective manner.

Discourses around empowerment also need to be continually questioned. Empowered individuals are not merely acquiring new practical skills: They are reconstructing and reorienting deeply ingrained personal systems of social relations (Keiffer, 1984). Williams and Labonte (2003) argue that “as members of communities experience, reflect and engage in constructive or critical dialogue about their experiences, this may evoke new understandings, internal feelings of dissonance and provoke new and more effective actions that challenge status quo power relations” (p. 65). Despite romantic notions of empowerment, few explore what happens when empowerment “goes wrong” or sets up unrealistic expectations. For instance, “participants who are motivated to become actors for change may feel a sense of cynicism, despair or powerlessness when the results of their efforts fail to match their expectations” (Wang et al., 1998, p. 85). In our study, one young man’s empowered attempt to develop community resources without adequate consultation or support put the collaboration in jeopardy and led to partner dissatisfaction and his being ostracized from project activities. As such, empowerment in this context needs to be understood as a double-edged sword.

Managing the complex relationships among project partners was a delicate and difficult balance. In this study, youth both valued being heard by some project partners and, at the same time, complained about the perceived lack of attention they got from others. Project partners in CBPR collaborations need to remember that complex institutional hierarchies are often grafted onto interpersonal relations (Mason & Boutilier, 1996). As such, those wishing to partner with youth should pay special attention to finding ways to engage and partner with socially excluded youth that do not re-inscribe relations of power and inequity.

Finally, the recent popularity of CBPR ought to be understood in a larger social, political, and economic context. Seifer (2004) partially attributes the newfound esteem of this approach to the rise in corporate citizenship and privatization. This trend has led to new public expectations of accountability and dollar value, virtually forcing not-for-profits to engage in research to make a case for their work. In increasingly tight fiscal environments, not-for-profits (especially AIDS-service organizations) are being asked to do evermore with dwindling resources (Cain & Todd, 2002). Care needs to be taken to ensure that we are not placing “the burden of organizing for change on the poor and/or minority groups in our society” (Minkler, 1978). Finding the appropriate level of participation for community members and service providers that allows for collaborative decision making while respecting their overburdened schedules remains an ongoing challenge (Kone et al., 2000; Maguire, 1993; Stoecker, 1999; Wang et al., 1998).

## IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

This article has shown that CBPR can bring about both tangible and intangible benefits for those directly involved as well as for the greater community. Nevertheless, these benefits are not without substantial investment.

One key learning from our project is that inadequate upfront resources were dedicated to partnership development. This manifested in a lack of clarity around roles and responsibilities and multiple advisory committees without clear terms of reference. Partnership teams may want to develop memorandums of understanding or partnership agreements that productively acknowledge power inequities, develop principles of engagement, and help to preclude unnecessary confusion. In addition, ongoing resources are necessary for partnership maintenance (e.g., conference calls, scheduling meetings, check-ins).

Those interested in engaging in CBPR should plan appropriately and budget for the substantial human and resource costs associated with partnership approaches to research. Those engaged in CBPR (especially funders) need to be attentive to the increasingly stressful work environments experienced by service providers in not-for-profit agencies. One way of alleviating some of the burden of the double responsibility of research and service provision might be to provide smaller agencies with staff buy-outs (Caldwell, Zimmerman, & Isichei, 2001). Community members and service providers should be encouraged to find appropriate and desirable levels of involvement that give them a meaningful voice without overburdening them or diverting them from other important duties.

Interested parties may also want to repeatedly reflect on whether benefits to participation are equitably distributed to redress systemic inequalities. At the end of the day, generating “good feelings” all around is an important start, but it is not enough. Care needs to be taken to ensure that concrete benefits are accrued for all project partners and that the benefits of CBPR fundamentally address the pervasive inequities that maintain marginalization for our society’s most disadvantaged.

Finally, CBPR funders and practitioners alike ought to continue critically thinking about the ways in which these partnerships affect all stakeholders and advocate for policies and approaches that most equitably serve community interests.

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