



THE RITES OF PASSAGE PROGRAM

The Brotherhood Sister Sol (BroSis)

The Rites of Passage Program supports adolescents' successful journey into adulthood by helping them define their values and by providing them with an intentional community, wraparound support, liberation education, and leadership development.

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OVERVIEW

The Brotherhood Sister Sol (BroSis) is a New York City-based nonprofit organization that has been at the forefront of social justice, educating, organizing, and training youth and educators since 1995. Through unconditional love, around-the-clock support, and wraparound programming, it makes space for young people to examine their roots, define their stories, and awaken their agency as they develop into empowered critical thinkers and community leaders.

Core to the organization is the Rites of Passage Program (ROP). ROP is a long-term, transformative youth development model that provides multilayered support, guidance, and education to adolescents as they grow into adulthood. In this model, youth form self-identified, gender-based groups (called "Chapters"), each led by two adult Chapter Leaders who facilitate weekly sessions and serve as trusted mentors and confidantes for participants as they explore their identity and beliefs as well as life's various challenges.

Together, Chapters of 12–18 youths form an intentional community, learning to embrace the ideals of brotherhood and sisterhood and to utilize restorative justice methods to resolve conflicts. All the while, they are strengthening their connection to their histories, their values, their world, and their voices.

While ROP was designed to support Black and Latinx youth, the program has been successful in many diverse communities. BroSis offers training and coaching for schools and community organizations to help them establish ROP programs that meet the unique needs of their youth. [▶ BroSis Voices](#) [📄 The Rites of Passage Program Overview and Rationale](#)



What Makes This Model Innovative?



Affirmation of Self & Others

ROP provides the structure and space for young people to explore who they are, where they come from, and what they value while also teaching them what it means to be part of a broader community and world.



Whole-Child Focus

ROP supports all aspects of young people's lives, including but not limited to: academics, health and wellness, exploration of personal values, and leadership development.



Social Consciousness & Action

ROP provides youth with the support, guidance, resources, education, and love necessary to understand the negative pressures in their lives and the skills to combat them.

DESIGN

Goals

The ultimate goal of ROP is to provide young people with the holistic support and guidance they need to ensure their safe, educated, and empowered entry into adulthood.

Critical Thinking	Young people become independent and resourceful critical thinkers who possess the knowledge, skills, and confidence needed to analyze and question the world around them.
Knowledge of Self	Young people gain a greater understanding of and appreciation for their cultural and historical legacy, and develop a personal testimony of their values, beliefs, and goals.
Moral Code	Young people dedicate themselves to living by their personal values and standing up for what they believe is right for themselves and others, utilizing restorative justice to address community challenges.
Agency	Young people find their voice, develop a powerful sense of their own self-worth, and establish a belief in their ability to achieve.
Life Skills	Young people master life skills that are essential for survival and success and range in complexity from simple (e.g., personal hygiene) to complex (e.g., self-advocacy and accountability).

Community Leadership

Young people embrace the ideals of brotherhood, sisterhood, and community by practicing self-defined values through self-exemplification, advocacy, service, or other forms of leadership.

Experience

In ROP, youths form gender-specific Chapters of 12–18 youths of the same age that are led by two adult Chapter Leaders. Young people join ROP of their selected gender identity. In some cases, ROP Chapters can also be gender neutral to create safe spaces for youths who are nonbinary or gender expansive. Chapters meet for 2 hours each week to:

- establish an intentional community guided by personal values;
- have access to wraparound support;
- receive a culturally responsive education through weekly workshops;
- develop leadership skills; and
- receive support related to college, career, and wellness.

These experiences occur across four distinct phases, each lasting approximately one year.

- **Phase 1 – Bonding & Community Building:** Developing a functioning Chapter is the most crucial of all ROP activities and serves as a foundation for all other aspects of the program. During this phase, Chapter Leaders work to create a confidential safe space where students meet to discuss current issues that affect their lives, to exchange information, and to acquire knowledge.
- **Phase 2 – Critical Thinking, Global Awareness, Knowledge of Self:** The ultimate goal of ROP is to help youths develop into critical thinkers who are confident, who are able to analyze their environment, who derive sensitive conclusions, and who make informed decisions. During this phase, culturally relevant workshops that include interactive activities, diverse reading materials, and various forms of media help drive toward this goal.
- **Phase 3 – Oath of Dedication:** Within the 3rd phase of ROP, youths engage in an intensive process of self-reflection and analysis. This results in the creation of an individual “Oath of Dedication”—a personal testimony of their beliefs, goals, and lifetime commitments anchored in the core values that each young person will strive to live by. The Oath of Dedication Ceremony is a symbol of entering young adulthood. Members who complete the process take on a leadership role within the Chapter.
- **Phase 4 – Lifetime Commitment:** In the final phase of the program, students begin to give back to their community by organizing their own service activities. As they are preparing to graduate and move on to college or the workforce, they are also “lifting as they climb,” serving as examples and role models for younger youths.

[4 Rites of Passage Phases](#) [The Rites of Passage Program Website](#) [▶ Conversations: A Short Film About the Work of BroSis](#)

Intentional Community

For the duration of ROP, Chapters meet weekly, a cadence that provides the stability and consistency necessary for members to forge deep bonds. During these meetings, Chapter Leaders facilitate purposeful learning experiences and activities that foster connection and enable members to discover the power of brotherhood and sisterhood.

A foundational element of ROP is the establishment of an “intentional community,” a group of youths who come together by choice and collectively define their beliefs and objectives. This provides young people with a safe space to grapple with new knowledge, to define their beliefs, to tackle issues affecting them in their lives, and to develop a deeper understanding of self and the world around them.

Examples of activities that foster intentional community in Phase 1 are:

- **Choosing a Name** – Group names create a sense of shared identity and belonging, indicating that members are more than a collection of individuals.
- **Creating a Mission Statement** – A Chapter’s Mission Statement defines the group’s core values and objectives, including who they do and do not intend to be and what they do and do not intend to do. The collective design of a Mission Statement promotes group unity and self-determination.
- **Creating Definitions** – Members arrive at a collective definition of *brother* or *sister*, *woman* or *man*, and *leader*. This experience provides members with an opportunity to think critically about their personal and collective goals and results in a living document representing the commitments to which the group will hold one another accountable.

While building an intentional community is the primary focus in Phase 1, Chapter Leaders continue to focus on community for the duration of ROP. Examples of how they do this include:

- **Check-Ins** – At the start of every weekly meeting, Chapter Leaders facilitate a check-in where they connect with members and support them to connect with one another. Check-ins often begin with members sharing how they are feeling and move into a reflection on a prompt geared toward drawing out members’ perspectives.
- **Team-Building Activities** – To minimize cliques and ensure that all members interact with, respect, and forge connections with each other, Chapter Leaders utilize games and activities that require teamwork and emphasize the power of working collectively.



Wraparound Support

Chapter Leaders commit to being available to members as much as possible for the duration of the program (some programs offer 24/7 support). They work in pairs to serve as mentors, confidants, role models, and educators. The Chapters become an extended family for their members, offering stability and positive, mutually supportive relationships with peers and elders.

In addition to providing young people with connection and community, Chapter Leaders offer members access to wraparound services as necessary to ensure their health, safety, and ability to thrive. To that end, Chapter Leaders serve as case workers, connecting members to resources (academic tutoring, legal aid, government assistance, etc.) to support their personal development and academic achievement.

Within ROP, all young people are treated as family. This means that there are no taboo topics, and there are no issues that students face that go beyond the support of the program.

Liberation Education

During weekly sessions, members engage in a culturally responsive curriculum that teaches young people about their history and culture, increases their sense of agency, and supports them to develop into critical thinkers who are able to analyze and respond to personal and social issues. This curriculum focuses on 12 issues that are critical to young people's healthy development and understanding of the world. ROP is based on a "living curriculum," which means that Chapter Leaders have access to a constantly growing curriculum database they utilize to create a flexible calendar of sessions for the year that they adapt in response to issues brought up in check-ins, current events, teachable moments, and more. Sessions (also called *workshops*) use literature, multimedia, and hands-on activities to make learning exciting and accessible. [BroSis ROP Workshop Template](#)

In addition, Chapter Leaders use the world around them as their classroom, frequently engaging members in immersive experiences such as service projects, rallies, conferences, and theater and museum visits to make learning engaging, relevant, and powerful.

Examples of curriculum Focus Issues include:

- **Dismantling Sexism & Misogyny** – Youths learn how historical and present sexism and misogyny operate in the United States and globally, and they explore key moments, members, and leaders of the ongoing women's rights movement.
- **Political Education** – Youths learn about the history and the present function of the United States government, explore the struggles for equal rights by marginalized groups, analyze the history and the



current agendas of existing political parties, and develop an understanding of state and federal policies and their impact.

- **Conflict Resolution & Violence Reduction** – Youth examine personal and societal experiences that can lead to violence, and develop skills in anger management, conflict resolution, de-escalation, avoidance, and restorative justice. They also learn about interpersonal, institutional, and systemic oppression and their intersections, and they explore how violent tactics have been used both to oppress and to liberate people throughout the world.

Taken as a whole, the Focus Issues help youths develop their critical thinking, global awareness, and knowledge of self, which are the primary objectives of Phase 2. [📄The Brotherhood/Sister Sol Focus Issues](#)

Youth Leadership

Over the course of ROP, youths engage in a culturally responsive curriculum and practice habits of mind that increase their capacity to think critically about the world and their place within it. They learn to move from awareness, to analysis, to action, a process that helps them unlock a sense of agency, self-determination, and confidence. Examples of leadership development activities include:

Service Projects – In each phase, members participate in service projects that allow them to support their community, develop empathy, and work collaboratively. As examples, they might contribute to a community garden, clean up their community, or participate in protests that relate to the 12 Focus Issues or other areas of interest.



Oath of Dedication – During Phase 3 of ROP, members take on the challenge of creating an “Oath of Dedication”—a personal statement of who they are, who they want to be, and what they believe. After the young people have spent years grappling with the 12 Focus Issues and engaging in analysis and self-reflection, this project invites them to take public ownership of their ideas, share their life paths and obstacles with others, and declare their personal dreams and aspirations. This challenge represents members’ passage into adulthood, after which point they take on more leadership responsibility within the community.

Community Leadership – Upon completing their Oath of Dedication, members enter Phase 4 of the program where they take on leadership roles within their Chapter to strengthen their community. They begin facilitating sessions, providing support and guidance to younger members, and even recruiting new members.

College, Career, & Wellness

Much of ROP is designed to equip young people with the knowledge and skills they will need to navigate life after graduating from high school. Therefore the curriculum includes activities that focus attention on college, career, and wellness to support members in determining their post graduation plan.

College Support – Chapter Leaders expose youths to the importance of higher education through interactive workshops that emphasize the opportunities that college provides. Furthermore, annual college tours expose members to campus life, enabling them to experience college campuses and interact with college students.



Career Support – Chapter Leaders support members in discovering their desired vocation. From career-planning workshops to hosting guest speakers from a variety of industries, members are exposed to a range of career paths, ensuring that they understand the necessary education and training to pursue them.

Financial Literacy – The BroSis curriculum includes workshops that enable members to explore the expenses involved in independent living. Members practice personal financial management and budgeting so they develop a healthy relationship with money. They also explore salaries and benefits across industries to understand the economic realities of the US workforce.

Wellness – In supporting young people to become critical thinkers and empowered leaders, it is essential to help them identify their natural and unique strengths and to also recognize their human need for self-care. Therefore an emphasis on healthy activities and lifestyles that support the mind, body, and spirit underlies all of our curriculum. Ultimately, we seek to help our members identify practices that develop their inner strengths and belief system, and support their growth into healthy and whole individuals.



Supporting Structures

The BroSis ROP can be implemented by schools or community-based organizations with minimal changes to their existing models. However, implementation is most successful with shifts to adult roles and schedules.

Schools and community-based organizations use a “living curriculum” to design workshops and unique assessment tools to determine member growth and support self-reflection.

Chapter Leaders have access to an online curriculum database that includes hundreds of resources, including fully developed workshops, readings and



CURRICULUM, INSTRUCTION, & ASSESSMENT

videos, facilitation strategies, and suggested activities. The curriculum is organized around 12 Focus Issues that increase youths' knowledge of history and social issues while expanding their capacity for analysis, ultimately teaching them to be engaged, informed, and active citizens. Chapters hold ~35 weekly sessions/workshops each year. [The Brotherhood/Sister Sol Focus Issues](#)

Feedback is core to ROP. Youths have ongoing opportunities to give and receive feedback that will help them revisit their Chapter's norms, their personal goals, their Oath of Dedication, and more as they grow as individuals and community members. In addition, there are two formal assessments that occur yearly—one by members and one by their Chapter Leaders—that together drive one-on-one reflection conversations that serve as the basis of ongoing coaching and support.

- **Member Self-Assessments** – Youth members complete an annual self-assessment based on the values they set for themselves in the first phase of the program. After completing the assessment and discussing their experience as a group, individual members meet one-on-one with a Chapter Leader to reflect on their unique progress. [Sample Member Self-Assessment Form](#)
- **Assessments by Chapter Leaders** – Chapter Leaders monitor their members' growth utilizing detailed rubrics related to two key outcome areas—critical thinking and acting ethically. These categories illuminate the degree to which youths are leveraging what they learn during workshops to guide their actions in life.

Leaders must demonstrate investment in ROP to ensure successful implementation.

In order for ROP to run well in a school or community-based organization, it must be overseen by leadership that understands, believes in, and fully supports the program. Leaders can demonstrate their investment by:

- providing an established weekly 2-hour period for Chapter Leaders to hold Chapter meetings;
- providing a minimum of 1 hour per week for Chapter Leader pairs to reflect, discuss, and co-plan sessions;
- ensuring that Chapter Leaders have the resources they need to successfully facilitate their Chapter, including but not limited to an adequate meeting room, a budget for trips and snacks, and required technological resources.



SCHOOL COMMUNITY & CULTURE

Schools and community-based organizations must identify two adult Chapter Leaders to run programming and to provide their members with long-term mentorship, guidance, and support.

In ROP, each Chapter is led by two adult Chapter Leaders who wear many hats, including (but not limited to):

- youth mentor
- workshop facilitator
- community builder
- case manager
- liaison between youth, parents, and school community.



**ADULT ROLES, HIRING,
& LEARNING**

The success of ROP requires deep dedication from Chapter Leaders, who commit to providing long-term support to their members and to upholding the ideals of brotherhood and sisterhood alongside their youth participants. Chapters operate like tight-knit families. As such, Chapter Leaders make themselves available to young people outside of typical work hours. Model adopters use different methods to select Chapter Leaders, but one of their primary considerations should be the adult's willingness to commit to long-term youth support and development.

At the start of their tenure, Chapter Leaders complete a 4-day Torchbearer Training to learn the core elements of the model, to understand their role and associated responsibilities, to develop strong partnerships with other Chapter Leaders, and to practice activities and techniques they can apply in their work. [📄Torchbearer Institute Overview](#)

In addition to Chapter Leaders, each school or community-based organization must have a designated program supervisor who is responsible for overseeing Chapters' progress. This should be someone in leadership who can ensure that Chapters have access to the resources they need to support their youth members and can serve as the primary point of contact with BroSis if they are providing ongoing coaching.



**SCHEDULE & USE OF
TIME**

Schools and community-based organizations must designate time for weekly Chapter Meetings and planning sessions.

Chapter Meetings – Each Chapter usually meets for 2 hours each week, either during the school day or after school. On occasion, Chapters meet outside of regular meeting times to engage in cultural events, participate in college tours, attend wilderness retreats, or to participate in an ROP ceremony or celebration.

Access to Chapter Leaders – Ideally, Chapter Leaders make themselves available to members outside of the regular school day by sharing their

preferred contact information. Doing so deepens relationships as Chapter Leaders demonstrate their willingness to serve as extended family.

Planning Time – It is crucial that partners allocate at least an hour per week for Chapter Leader pairs to plan and debrief in order to effectively prepare for weekly sessions. While Chapter Leaders have access to the BroSis Curriculum Database of workshops, content, and planning resources, weekly sessions have the greatest impact when Chapter Leaders have an opportunity to adapt them to the specific youths they are serving.

Chapter Leaders must prioritize building connections between young people, their parents, and the broader community.



Upon launching a Chapter of ROP, Chapter Leaders connect with parents to let them know they are available to offer support to them and their children however possible for the full duration of the program. Getting to know families broadens young people’s circle of support and ensures that their full network (family, school, and community) is working collectively to support their development.

FAMILY & COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Model adopters must have a list of youth support organizations to draw on as needed, including mental and physical health providers, free legal services, food banks, and more. Many schools and community-based organizations have employees dedicated to this kind of community work; Chapter Leaders must work closely with these individuals to ensure that youths and families have access to the critical resources they need, when they need them.

Each Chapter must have its own private meeting space in the school or community-based organization.



SPACE & FACILITIES

Each Chapter must have a dedicated private space in which to hold its weekly meetings within the partner school or community-based organization. It’s crucial that these spaces are kept private for the duration of the 2-hour meeting to ensure that young people feel safe to raise and discuss challenging issues. Maintaining the same space for the duration of a school year also fosters a sense of security and stability.

As many workshops involve multimedia, meeting spaces should include a SMART Board or its equivalent.

Each Chapter’s meeting space must have a SMART Board or its equivalent to enable multimedia presentations.



To engage youth members, many workshops involve the use of multimedia including music, video, slideshows, and more. Each Chapter’s meeting space

TECHNOLOGY & INFRASTRUCTURE

must include a SMART Board or its equivalent to make these presentations feasible on an ongoing basis.



BUDGET & OPERATIONS

It is recommended that organizations allocate a small activity budget for each Chapter.

While most ROP activities are free, it is helpful to have a budget to draw on for field trips, celebrations, and ceremonies. Furthermore, allocating funds for snacks will help ensure that members' hunger is satiated so they will be more likely to attend meetings on time and arrive ready to engage.

IMPLEMENTATION

Supports Offered

[BroSis](#) offers the following supports to help you implement ROP.

Torchbearer Training

Cost Associated



BroSis facilitates a 4-day Torchbearer Training to prepare staff to facilitate Chapters with ROP. During the training, participants will develop an understanding of the model and the responsibilities of Chapter Leaders, learn the BroSis approach to youth development, including strategies and activities that can be turnkeyed, and develop bonds between participants to enhance their ongoing collaboration.

Torchbearer Training can be customized to support specific organizational needs.

[Get in Touch](#)

Leadership Coaching

Cost Associated



BroSis offers individualized coaching to meet the unique needs of schools and organizations. Support can range from thought-partnering with organizational leadership to regular scheduled coaching meetings with Chapter Leaders and/or their supervisors.

[Get in Touch](#)

Reach

2,000+

Youths
Served
Annually

29

Years of
Impact

21

School &
Organizational
Partnerships

3,000+

Adults
Trained

Impact

The following statistics represent the program's impact in Harlem, NYC as of 2021. [Bro/Sis Outcomes \(2021\)](#)

ROP alumni develop the critical thinking, leadership, and agency needed to navigate college and career.

- 90% of ROP alumni have graduated from high school as compared to 68% in New York City.
- 94% of ROP alumni have either graduated or completed their GED.
- 95% of alumni aged 18–25 are working full-time or enrolled in college as compared to 30% of young adults in Harlem overall.
- Members attend leading universities and colleges such as Yale, Brown, Columbia, Barnard, Howard, Wesleyan, Wheaton, Brandeis, Syracuse, American, George Washington, NYU, the New School, Parsons, Temple, and many others. They are mentoring, organizing, and serving in leadership positions on their school campuses.

ROP alumni master essential life skills.

- Fewer than 2% of ROP members experience teenage pregnancy as compared to 17% in Harlem overall.
- No members or alumni are incarcerated, and fewer than 1% have a felony conviction, while 1 out of 3 Black men who did not participate in ROP aged 20–29 are under supervision of the prison system.

Contact

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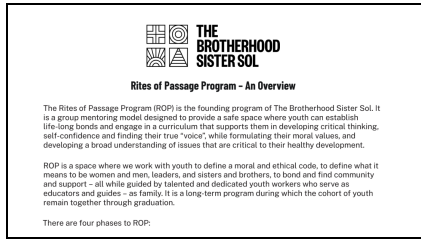
jcw@brotherhood-sistersol.org

RESOURCES



BroSis Voices

A short film introducing the voices of youth members of BroSis programs.



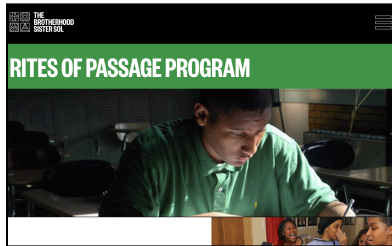
ROP Overview and Rationale

An overview of ROP's four phases and what the program aims to achieve.

Phase	Theme	Specific Activities	Challenges & Gift
Phase 1	Bonding & Community Building	Recruitment & Orientation 30 weekly sessions Change Tour 2 Wellness Retreats	Challenge: Create a Name Gift: Fire Drill Challenge: Water Wheelbarrow
Phase 2	Critical Thinking Global Awareness Knowledge of Self	30 weekly sessions Change Tour 2 Wellness Retreats Member Self-Assessment	Gift: Wheelbarrow Challenge: Cash of Education
Phase 3	Oath of Dedication	30 weekly sessions Change Tour 2 Wellness Retreats Member Self-Assessment Member Peer Evaluation	Challenge: Secret Spot
Phase 4	Lifetime Commitment	30 weekly sessions Change Tour 2 Wellness Retreats Member Self-Assessment Member Peer Evaluation Member Designated Service Project	Challenge: 7 Year Plan Gift: House Transformation

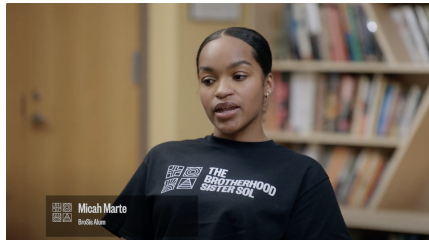
ROP 4 Phases

A table outlining the themes, activities, challenges, and gifts aligned to each phase of ROP.



ROP Program Website

The official website of ROP at BroSis, outlining its goals, phases, and impact.



Conversations

A short film detailed the three intersecting areas of the work of BroSis—educating, organizing, and training.

Workshop Planning Template (2023-2024)

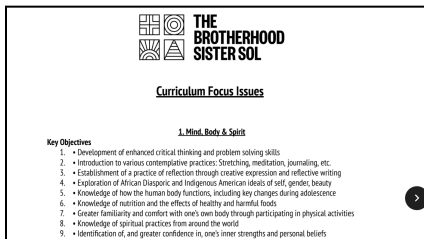
Program/Chapter: _____
 Workshop Title: _____
 Date: _____
 Author: _____

Objectives
 What you are trying to achieve in the course of the workshop – what are the specific goal(s)?
 What will participants know, understand or be able to do at the end of the workshop?

Focus Issues
 Which Focus Issue(s) does the Workshop Address? Copy and paste the primary Focus Issue Objective(s). Include the Focus Issue abbreviation, number and the Objective number (i.e. MBS 1.12)

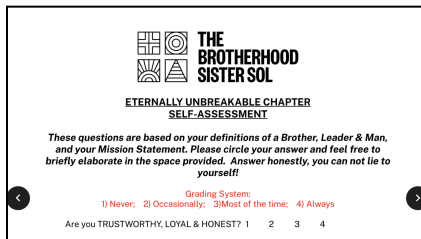
BroSis ROP Workshop Template

A sample template to support Chapter Leaders in designing workshops aligned to ROP Focus Issues.



BroSis Focus Issues

An outline of the key objectives that fall under each of the 12 Focus Issues.



Sample Member Self-Assessment Form

A sample self-assessment for youth Chapter members that has them rate the degree to which they live up to their own definitions of brother/sister, man/woman, and leader.



Torchbearer Institute Overview

An overview of the Torchbearer Institute and what it offers, including trainings, coaching, and resources.



BHSS Outcomes

The Brotherhood/Sister Sol - Outcomes

BHSS's evaluation objectives are to capture the complexity and nuance of our work; to uncover planned and unforeseen experiences and impacts, and to engage our staff and members in data collection and analysis. Our evaluation model joins participatory research and more traditional approaches. Staff complete individual assessment forms for each member to track his/her social, emotional and academic growth, as well as her/his challenges and needs. This information assists us with connecting individual members to necessary resources and with identifying common issues that can be addressed programmatically. By collecting our members' report cards, we learn in which subjects they need additional academic support and guidance. Surveys are used for collecting demographic data and information about participation patterns (frequency, activities, etc.) appeal and impacts.

[BroSis Outcomes](#)

An overview of what BroSis has achieved in its work with young people.