



**Youth Leadership  
Affinity Group Charter  
December 4, 2018**

**Introduction**

The out-of-school time (OST) sector in Kalamazoo envisions a community where all youth are college, career, and community ready by 21. Youth in the county believe that a community is, feels, and does certain things. According to youth, a community...

- Is interconnected people sharing a place, physically and emotionally, whether you like them or not;
- Feels safe, unified, connected, and;
- Collaborates, influences, and supports (has your back, trusts you, holds you accountable).

Kalamazoo County youth believe that to be community ready by 21, they need to gain social emotional learning (SEL) skills (agency, voice, independence, and confidence), invest in the community by voting and broader civic engagement, be aware of issues, and feel comfortable being their true selves. They also believe that the community must be ready to invest in them by having supportive adults and co-creating a roadmap for skill development, connections, and resources.

The Kalamazoo Youth Development Network serves as the intermediary organization for the out-of-school time (OST) sector in Kalamazoo County. Our vision is a community where all youth are career, college, and community ready by 21. We achieve this vision through our mission of ensuring that all Kalamazoo County youth have access to high quality, youth-driven, diverse, inclusive, and equitable out-of-school time programs that are part of a well-coordinated system that uses data and best practice strategies.

To achieve our mission, KYD Network formed the Youth Leadership Affinity Group whose charge is to guide the OST sector's journey to create more opportunities for youth voice and leadership in Kalamazoo County and ensure that all youth are community ready by 21. This charter sets forth the OST sector's vision, our guiding definitions, why youth leadership matters in the OST, and our proclamation. This Affinity Group is open to anyone interested in furthering our goals.

**Vision**

Youth in Kalamazoo County will develop leadership practices through participation with the OST sector to create change and address challenges in their life, organization, and community.



## **Role of the OST Sector**

Youth, parents, out-of-school time professionals, and educators across the country acknowledge that youth are missing a critical piece of their education. We know that in addition to reading and writing, we need to teach self management and social awareness and provide youth with opportunities to practice goal directed behavior and sound decision making. We acknowledge the need for youth to exercise their sense of optimism and develop optimistic thinking skills because we know that without this SEL skill, youth cannot develop a sense of agency and will be less likely to engage in opportunities to become effective leaders and better their communities.

During the out-of-school time hours, youth-serving organizations strive to create physically and psychologically safe environments where ALL youth can develop their youth leadership skills. WE recognize that these are teachable skills and that we are uniquely equipped to provide youth with the space they need to develop in their own way, in their own time.

### **Proclamation**

During the out-of-school time hours, youth serving organizations strive to create an environment for youth leadership where each and every young person can create a positive sense of self, rooted in their unique cultural context. Operating from a youth voice framework, there are skills that the youth development work force can learn in order to provide youth with environments that encourage them to fully embrace their individual identities.

We, the “second shift” will:

Create opportunities for youth to explore and establish their voice in a safe environment. We therefore adopt and embrace a youth leadership lens as a foundation for our youth development work, which includes:

1. Providing support and being an advocate for youth voice;
2. Serving as a community liaison and providing youth with resources and connections;
3. Creating opportunities for youth to improve and establish leadership roles in their organizations, the out-of-school time sector, and communities;
4. Creating opportunities to practice decision making skills as they implement projects to address community challenges; and



We will hold ourselves accountable to the principles in this charter:

We strive to partner with other sectors in order to tackle youth leadership issues that we are not equipped to address independently. We vow to keep youth leadership central to our organizations and programs, use our influence in ways to address youth leadership whenever possible, and continue to build our capacity to engage in difficult conversations and strategy related to youth leadership.