THE EXAMINATION OF AN EMPOWERMENT EVALUATION APPROACH IN A HEALTHY LIVING INITIATIVE OF A NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION

by

TAMARA LAWRENCE

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ABSTRACT

Youth often have little say in the development of programs designed to improve their health (Fiscus, 2003; Mitra, 2004; Brown, 1991). This is because adults often believe they know what youth need and therefore program without input from them. This problem is being addressed by a non-profit organization in the Greater Vancouver region that is using the empowerment evaluation approach to incorporate the input of girls and young women into the planning and evaluation of a healthy living initiative. Empowerment evaluation is a strategy that seeks to “help program participants evaluate themselves and their program to improve practice and foster self-determination” (Fetterman, 2001).

The purpose of this study was to examine the implementation of an empowerment evaluation approach from the perspectives of staff, volunteers, and female youth in the case study non-profit organization. The specific research questions were: i) What factors were considered when deciding to implement an empowerment evaluation approach into a healthy living initiative? ii) How was it integrated into program planning, implementation, and evaluation? iii) What benefits and challenges were identified during the start-up phase? iv) What factors affected the sustainability of the empowerment evaluation approach over the course of the research?

Qualitative research methods were employed including: observations, focus groups, interviews, and a document analysis. These data collection tools are consistent with a case study research strategy where the purpose of the study is to examine how organizational members interpret processes around them (Marshall & Rossmen, 1995). Four focus groups were held; two with clients (n= 7), one with volunteer mentors (n=6) and one with members of the Healthy Living Committee (n=3). Three one-to-one interviews were held, one with a client and two with former Healthy Living Committee members. A document analysis was performed on some of the organization’s existing materials.

The results revealed that the volunteer and staff of the organization unanimously agreed that seeking input and feedback from clients would be valuable. Six of the eight clients interviewed also expressed a desire to be more involved in program planning and evaluation. But to date, the clients had not been engaged in the planning or evaluation of programs, except for being asked to fill in a survey after each activity. The findings were consistent with an adult-oriented top down approach to program planning where youth can be viewed as problems to be fixed or dependents to be taken care of (O’Donohue et al., 2002).

Based on the results of this study, recommendations have been made to the organization to engage the clients more and to develop guidelines to ensure that youth are involved in utilizing data gathered from internal surveys and in subsequent decision-making. Further research can examine the levels of empowerment felt by the clients before and at different stages during the empowerment evaluation approach and factors that can make empowerment evaluation sustainable in not for profit youth serving organizations.
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Prelude: Assumptions and Experiences that Shaped my Research Interests

There are many assumptions and experiences that have compelled me to take on this research project and it was not until I was far enough into my proposal that I stepped back and examined the factors that were shaping my interest. This prelude is a way for me to explain the reasons why I chose this research, the assumptions that I carry along with me, and the experiences that have brought me to this point.

I am a strong believer in physical activity and, except for the last few years when I became a new mother, have been very active for my entire life. When I began studying for an undergraduate degree in physical education, I could not understand why everyone, and especially the women I knew, was not an active participant in sport and physical activity. Through my courses and readings, I began to realize that there were more factors at play than simply a lack of interest or motivation.

Volumes of research confirm the fact that participation in physical activity provides numerous mental, physical, and emotional benefits. Canadian research now emphasizes the preventative benefits of physical activity and the necessity for all Canadians to participate regularly in order to lead a healthy life and prevent disease. Despite the prevalence of literature declaring the benefits of physical activity, still only 15% of Canadian women participate in physical activity enough to derive health benefits. Knowing that opinions are shaped early in life, I became interested in how I could work with youth, specifically girls, to increase their participation in physical activity.

After working for 8 years at a non-profit women and sport advocacy group, I began to volunteer with a committee formed to provide physical activity opportunities for girls in a non-profit community organization. This committee allowed me to interact with girls and see them enjoying activities first hand. Soon after I took on a fundraising
position with this organization and I was able to witness the role modeling, the mentorship, and the relationships that appeared to be making a difference in the lives of the girls in this program.

It was at this organization where I saw a population of girls who I thought could really benefit from physical activity. I assumed that, if the majority of the Canadian female population was not participating enough, these girls must be participating even less. It was here that I really wanted to step up my efforts to do what I could to bring more physical activity into their lives. The mission statement of this organization is to “increase the self-esteem, confidence, and well-being of children through supportive friendships with caring women” and I knew that physical activity was also a way to accomplish this. Yet, I also understood that girls and women have low participation rates in physical activity for a variety of reasons. My role would have to be one where I share the knowledge of the benefits of physical activity and provide them an opportunity to participate and have fun, but also recognizing that these girls will make their own decisions about participating or not.

I realized that simply offering more activities would not necessarily equate to increased participation and that I could not change the situations and challenges in these girl’s lives. When the empowerment evaluation approach was brought to my attention, I was excited that this approach might provide a venue for increasing the participation of these girls in the planning and evaluation process thus hopefully increasing their interest in the newly created Healthy Living Initiative (HLI). This initiative is a program offered by this organization to encourage the clients to understand and incorporate healthy living into their lives. Through educational materials, workshops, newsletter articles, and group activities focusing on being physically active, the Healthy Living Initiative works on
achieving the mission “to promote self-esteem by educating, encouraging, and empowering girls to make healthy lifestyle choices.” The initiative provides activities focusing on holistic health – physical, emotional and mental, which include, but are not limited to, cooking and nutrition workshops, sports and recreational activities, and personal health workshops. This also became my research interest - to examine and evaluate the empowerment evaluation approach to see if it would encourage participation of the girls in the planning and evaluation of programs and, hopefully, participation in the activities. After initially reading the empowerment evaluation literature, it seemed logical that the girls would have an increased interest in the program based on their increased involvement in it. This, of course, assumes that the girls are interested in becoming more involved and that the empowerment evaluation approach will be able to achieve measurable results.

Collectively, these experiences and assumptions led me to pose the following research to see if I could provide a method for increasing the involvement of a population of girls in the decision-making processes of the Healthy Living Initiative and discover their thoughts and ideas on the subject. Ultimately, my personal goal is to engage the girls in more physical activity, but of course this cannot be the goal of this research. I am hopeful that this project will provide an opportunity for the girls to get more involved, learn more about physical activity, gain new interests in physical activity, or simply engage in discussions so that I can learn more about why they do or do not participate. If this approach is unsuccessful, the process will provide information on what these girls are interested in pursuing and how the organization can most effectively meet their identified needs.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the assistance of many people and organizations that made this endeavour possible.

This project took time, effort, and energy that could not have been possible without the support and understanding of my family, friends and colleagues. This support network sustained me throughout this process and allowed me to focus my energy and see it to completion.

I extend thanks to my committee members, particularly Wendy, who provided endless encouragement and countless edits over a time period that extended well beyond my original expectations. Collectively, their advice and comments increased my learning throughout this research project and made this project more meaningful and enjoyable.

I wholeheartedly thank the clients, the volunteers and the staff of the case study organization for their openness and willingness to share their thoughts, their ideas, and information that assisted me to understand the unique circumstances that exist and the diverse factors that affected this project. I am hopeful that this organization and other youth serving organizations will find usefulness in the outcomes and will continue to count youth as equal partners in the future.
Chapter 1

Introduction

Rationale

One of the effects of the personal and structural marginalization of many young people in our society is the significant loss of their power of decision-making - a loss which is not alleviated by the strategies of many human service organizations, which simply maintain their clients in their marginalized position (Brown, 1991, p. 41).

As Brown (1991) states, marginalized groups often stay on the margins because they have little say in decision-making. Programs and services provided for disenfranchised or marginalized groups are often based on what “experts” think would be good for these groups. When discussing disenfranchised clients, youth are often an example of those who have little say, little power, and few opportunities to voice their opinions (Fiscus, 2003; Mitra, 2004; Brown, 1991). For example, adults often believe that they know what youth need and therefore program for them without their input.

Research on involving students in decision-making in schools suggests that participation can benefit the young people in many ways including having more ownership in their schools and a stronger sense of their own abilities (Mitra, 2004). It may therefore be useful for organizations that provide physical activity programs and services to youth, to include them in program planning, evaluation, and implementation. In a study by Cargo et al. (2003), practitioners wanted to create an environment in which to “empower” youth. For this study, empowering youth is described as creating an environment conducive to adolescents’ taking responsibility for their quality-of-life issues. This was achieved by welcoming the youth into the process and structures,
making them feel comfortable at meetings, and encouraging participation in the decision-making process. The aims of Cargo et al.'s (2003) study are summarized below.

The learning experiences associated with taking responsibility and directing community action contributed to the realization of youth’s potential through developing esteem, gaining confidence, building competencies...and raising consciousness (p. 75).

Similarly, Mitra (2004) noted that by assuming responsibilities and enacting decisions that have consequences for themselves and others, students developed a broad set of competencies that helped them prepare for adulthood.

However, compounding the marginalization of youth is the further stigmatization that comes from the labeling of “youth at risk”. This label that has been placed on segments of the youth population, including those from single parent families, has historically received much attention from recreation planners who began to target specific programs for crime prevention purposes (Health Canada, 1994; Parks and Recreation Ontario, 1999; Witt & Crompton, 1996). There is a growing body of literature, some dating back as far as 1918 (McKay, 1994), on the positive impacts of recreation for “youth at risk.” Various levels of governments have commissioned reports geared to providing recreation programs as a “cure” for this group (Canadian Parks and Recreation Association, 2001). By focusing on “at risk”, adolescent health has become synonymous with their involvement in “risk behaviour” (Cargo et al., 2003). This orientation is based on the needs or deficit model of health and bears the unfortunate consequence of stigmatizing adolescence as a life stage fraught with social problems. In contrast, Cargo et al. (2003) took a positive approach to youth health by focusing on the development of youth through active community participation, thus focusing on an assets approach. By shifting community practice toward a more egalitarian programming approach, they
allowed youth to control the process by attempting to create a welcoming social climate with enabling adult support. Adults in the study were observed as giving up responsibility for voicing, decision-making, and action, thus making it available for youth to take on more responsibility. The learning experiences associated with taking responsibility and directing community action contributed to the realization of youth's potential through developing esteem, gaining confidence, building competencies and raising consciousness as youth confronted challenges during the active community participation (Cargo et al., 2003). For some at-risk youth in the project, the support and personal and social benefits of participating positively influenced their life course, allowing them to get back on track, as evidenced in this quote:

I grew up a lot faster and became more mature with all my youth work and working on serious matters, and doing a lot of things that usually only adults do like conferences. I stopped things like partying, drinking because I thought, 'Oh no, it's not worth it. It's boring. It's not nearly as fun' (Cargo et al., 2003, p. 76).

The assets approach focuses on what individuals have to offer instead of what they cannot offer and challenges the negative connotations brought on by, and supported by, the literature on “youth at risk”. The literature has further itemized levels of deviant behaviour on an “at risk” continuum thus stigmatizing youth based on the frequency of engaging in and levels of this deviant behaviour, such as chronic truancy, vandalism, or shoplifting (Ministry of Small Business, Tourism and Culture, 1996; Parks and Recreation Ontario, 1999; Health Canada, 1994). As indicated in the following quote, the simplistic assumption is that involvement in physical activity will “save” youth and it ignores the fact that complex social, economic, political and cultural conditions affect youth health and well being.
Research shows that strategies involving physical activity and recreation appear particularly promising in minimizing or removing risk factors at all stages of the [at-risk] continuum. Participation in physical activity and recreation can provide positive benefits related to psychological health, physical health, familial interactions, peer influence, academic performance, community development and other lifestyle behaviours (McKay, 1994, p.1).

Donnelly and Coakley (2002) have defined social inclusion as the social process through which the skills, talents, and capacities of children are developed and enhanced so that all are given the opportunity to realize their full potential. When examining the delivery of recreation programs, they concluded that programs have often been delivered in a paternalistic manner, more often for the purposes of social control. This is very similar to the notion of programming for “youth at risk,” to provide a controlled environment that would keep the youth, and the surrounding community, safe by keeping them off the streets. Programs targeted specifically to poor or high-risk children may actually have an ‘exclusionary’ effect and that an overall policy of recreation accessibility based on need (rather than ability to pay) is more likely to have the effect of social inclusion (Donnelly & Coakley, 2002, p. 2). In order to achieve social inclusion, it is necessary to avoid the traditional traps of program provision (i.e. top down, ‘expert’-driven systems) and give up some of the ‘power’ to the youth intended to benefit by allowing them to be involved in the program planning, design and ongoing implementation.

As previously stated, labeling can further contribute to the marginalization of youth and can be used as a reason to keep them at the margins while “experts” plan and implement various programs and services for them. In contrast, Fiscus (2003) advocates treating young people as equal partners in decision-making. She found there are many benefits for youth when this partnership is genuine, including increased confidence, the
development of new skills, and increased leadership experience. The central argument is that by getting youth involved in the process and giving them a venue to voice their opinions, youth will receive some of the benefits sought through the actual programs and services being provided.

When examining research on programming for youth, it is also important to recognize that girls and boys can have different experiences and needs. Current research indicates that girls are significantly less active than boys, with 64% of girls and 52% of boys being considered physically inactive (Canadian Fitness and Lifestyles Research Institute, 2001). Numerous studies have found that boys are more active than girls overall and that girls are less likely to visit activity areas in their free time (McKenzie et al., 2000; Kulinna et al., 2003). As girls age and leave a structured school environment, most continue with a pattern of inactivity. Furthermore, it has been found that as income level increases, the proportion who are physically active increases (62% versus 44%) and that youth living in lower income families are the least likely to be physically active (Canadian Fitness and Lifestyles Research Institute, 2001).

Children and youth living in poverty often cannot benefit from the outcomes offered through participation in recreation and physical activity. They face many barriers that restrict access to quality recreation and physical activity opportunities. Some of these barriers include lack of transportation, family support, awareness, safe places to play, childcare and inadequate or no facilities in the community (CFLRI, 2001).

There is a gap in the “youth at risk” literature in that there seems to be very little research on girls (Wilson et al., 2001), because much of the youth at risk research has focused on crime prevention and boys. Midnight basketball programs for boys began sprouting up across the United States based on research that showed a drop in crime rates while these programs were held (Collingwood, 1997; Witt, 1996). Given the fact that
girls do not participate in physical activity as often as boys, creating recreation programs for all “youth” will be difficult without further research. Henderson and King (1998) noted that recreation professionals need to understand the context of girls’ lives in order to play a role in their positive development and that it cannot be assumed that the risk issues that boys face are the same for all girls. Wilson and Fisher (2001) emphasized the need to address practical and strategic approaches to programming for ‘at-risk’ female youth due to the scarce studies and a lack of understanding of female youth in a mixed gendered environment.

The focus of my research is on gaining input from girls and young women regarding a Healthy Living Initiative in a non-profit organization, specific to a program of activities that is being provided for them. First as a volunteer with this organization, then later as a staff member, and currently as a volunteer, I have noticed a lack of input from the clients into the programs and activities that are planned for them. In my previous work experience, I became a member of a group of “experts” in the field who were advocating for physical activity programs for girls, but we also seldom sought input from this target group. With this research project, I am hoping to increase the knowledge as a direct result of input of girls who are clients of this non-profit organization, through an empowerment evaluation approach, that involves them in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of a Healthy Living Initiative.

Introduction to Theoretical Framework

Empowerment evaluation is the “use of evaluation concepts, techniques, and findings to foster improvement and self-determination” (Fetterman, 2001, p. 3). It is not designed to replace other forms of evaluation - it meets a specific evaluation need that can involve both qualitative and quantitative evaluation techniques, depending on the
situation. Empowerment evaluation involves a diverse group of stakeholders in taking stock of their program, setting goals for it, developing strategies to reach the goals, and documenting progress on these goals (Fetterman, 2001). Stakeholders may include staff members, participants, clients, volunteers and others involved in either the delivery or outcomes of the programs. The goal is to gain ownership of the evaluation and its results, achieving liberating self-efficacy over their program. While it shares many of the same stakeholder-centered processes and goals as participatory evaluation, empowerment evaluation recommends giving the stakeholders the primary role in the evaluative activities, with the professional evaluator acting more as a “coach” or facilitator assisting the participants to evaluate their own program (Cousins & Whitmore, 1998; Patton, 1997).

Empowerment evaluation has been adopted in a wide array of settings and programs including tribal reservations, inner city schools, higher education, and the Environmental Protection Agency. It has also been used in battered women’s shelters, adolescent pregnancy prevention programs, substance abuse prevention programs, and a national educational reform movement (Fetterman, 2002). Empowerment evaluation efforts have been focused on traditionally disenfranchised, oppressed, and economically impoverished populations with the goal of creating empowering environments that will allow them to solve social problems affecting their lives. The W.K. Kellogg Foundation’s emphasis on empowerment in community settings has had a pragmatic influence on empowerment evaluation. Their belief on empowerment as a funding strategy is as follows:

We’ve long been convinced that problems can best be solved at the local level by people who live with them on a daily basis. In other words, individuals and groups of people must be empowered to become change
makers and solve their own problems, through the organizations and institutions they devise (W.K. Kellogg Foundation, 1992, p. 6). However, Fetterman (1997) also contends that disenfranchised and oppressed people exist in traditional academic, government, and business organizations as well as in ghettos and undeveloped areas. Focusing on self-determination, empowerment evaluation is applicable to human beings on every level of the social and economic scale as the assumption is that everyone can psychologically benefit from being more self-determined.

This proposed research will focus on a population who are often disenfranchised due to their age and low level of income. Through the use of the empowerment evaluation approach, I am hoping to provide an opportunity for the girls in the case study organization to participate by having a say in a program being provided for them; for getting involved in the evaluation of a program and in the planning and implementation processes to increase the likelihood that such a program will meet their needs.

**Introduction to the Case Study Site**

The case study site is a non-profit charitable organization that has been operating in the Lower Mainland since the late 1950s and was incorporated in 1960 to provide services to girls in the community with a focus on, what they termed at the time as, “underprivileged girls”. Based on demographic information, the majority of the clients come from families with a single parent who is receiving income assistance or working for low wages, live in social housing and are experiencing family or social distress related to family conflict, loss or trauma, past or present abuse, poverty, developmental challenges, or physical disability (Board of Directors’ Manual, 2005).

To ensure confidentiality for the study participants, the name of the organization will not be identified. The mission statement of the organization is to “enhance the
confidence, self-esteem and well being of children through supportive friendships with caring women" (organizational brochure, 2005). Girls and young women aged 7 to 17 are matched in one-to-one relationships with trained adult women who become a friend, companion and a positive adult in their lives. The organization does not label their clients as being “at risk”, nor do they use this term in any of their literature. More often, it is a term that is imposed on them by funders or outside agents who are seeking to categorize the clients to aid in justifying funding. There are no prerequisites for the girls and young women to enter into the program except for a desire to engage in a friendship with an adult woman.

This organization has recently launched a Healthy Living Initiative (see Figure 1). The mission statement of this program is “to promote self-esteem by educating, encouraging, and empowering girls to make healthy lifestyle choices” (organizational brochure, 2005). The program provides activities focusing on holistic health – physical, emotional, spiritual, and mental. To date, the activities include, but are not limited to, cooking and nutrition workshops, sports and recreational activities, and personal health workshops. The Healthy Living Initiative is a re-launch of the previous Health Promotion Project and Sport Club, both of which received minimal support in terms of resources, despite an organizational belief in the value of both projects.

Empowerment evaluation has the potential to provide a way to incorporate a participatory technique to evaluate the Healthy Living Initiative because it will involve the girls in evaluation and subsequent planning of the programs. It can become a tool used by the Healthy Living Committee, a group of volunteers and staff responsible for the direction of the Initiative, to allow the clients and volunteers to take part in planning
FIGURE 1

Healthy Living Initiative
June 2003

Board Committees
(community volunteers, volunteer mentors)

Event Committees
(staff, volunteers)

Program Committees
(volunteer mentors, staff community volunteers)

Non Profit Organization
(clients, volunteers, mentors, staff)

Healthy Living Committee
(staff, volunteers & mentors)

Staff
Mng. Program & Services

Activities Committee
(volunteers & mentors)

First Nations Committee
(volunteer & mentors)

Healthy Living Initiative (Program)
Healthy Minds
(mental)
Healthy Bodies
(physical)
Healthy Spirit
(spiritual)
Healthy Feelings
(emotional)

Clients

Volunteer Mentors
the program and activities. If this evaluation approach is successfully utilized, it has the potential to become part of the structure of the committee, thus providing a vehicle for seeking client input and opinion as the committee grows and develops its programs. If this evaluation approach is not successful, it could provide insight into the needs and interests of the clients in the program and will provide a forum for discussion on how the clients want to be involved in different ways.

**Researcher Role**

I began volunteering with this organization as a member of the volunteer Sports Club in 1999 and became a staff member in 2001. I left my employment with this organization in late 2005, but continue as a volunteer on the Healthy Living Committee and various event committees. These roles have proven to be beneficial as I have been able to build a good working relationship with volunteers and staff and have a good understanding of the organization, as well as its volunteer and decision-making structures. As a current volunteer, I feel as though I will be in a position to relay the findings of this research project to the clients, volunteers, and staff of the organization and may assist them with follow up.

However, I found it difficult to criticize the organization when I analyzed the results, although I realized that critique could reveal areas where improvements are needed. In interviews with staff prior to receiving agency consent, they unanimously expressed a willingness to participate because they believed that any research that may assist them to do their jobs more effectively, or to work with the clients to provide programs or services in a more collaborative way, was worth examining. They were interested in seeking input from their clients and hearing how their needs could be better
met. I communicated with senior staff members as this research progressed to keep them up to date on findings in an attempt to avoid surprising them with criticism. They understand that I will be collecting opinions and feedback on their current operations, but are willing to listen to this feedback in relation to the empowerment evaluation approach as it might provide new insight on the needs of their clients.

I also realize that internal evaluators run the risk of being criticized for bias, in this case, because I may highlight results that support the empowerment evaluation approach because I was the one who suggested it. I began this research prior to taking on a full-time staff position with the organization, and continued it as a former staff member and current volunteer. Although I do have a stake in the Healthy Living Initiative, and could be viewed as spearheading the initiative, I also want this initiative to be able to continue without my direction, if the clients eventually support it. I reflected on the advantages and disadvantages of my insider role and took steps to conduct this research in an ethical way.

**Purpose and Research Questions**

The purpose of this research is to examine the implementation of an empowerment evaluation approach in a non-profit community organization within a Healthy Living Initiative. The specific research questions were:

i) What factors were considered by the non-profit organization when deciding to implement an empowerment evaluation approach into a Healthy Living Initiative?

ii) How was it integrated into program planning, implementation, and evaluation?

iii) What benefits and challenges were identified by organizational members (staff, volunteers, and clients) during the start-up phase?

iv) What factors affected the sustainability of the empowerment evaluation approach over the course of the research?
The remainder of this thesis will provide a review of the literature related to the purpose and will outline the methodology that will be employed to address the research questions.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

In this chapter, I will provide an overview of the empowerment evaluation literature and a review of relevant literature on youth in the decision-making process to provide a theoretical basis for my study.

Youth in the Decision Making Process

Youth development researchers have noted a shift in youth work in the past two decades from prevention (programs designed to treat and prevent the problems of “at-risk” youth) to preparation (building skills and supporting broader development for all youth) to participation and power sharing (actively engaging young people as partners in organizational and public decision-making). These shifts represent a broadening of focus from looking solely at individual-level outcomes to also examining the organizational and community-level impacts of youth participation (O’Donoghue et al., 2002, p. 17).

As stated in chapter 1, the term “youth at risk” was used to label youth as “problems” that required “cures” during the 1990’s. This label also served as an effective discourse in keeping youth at the margins; keeping their voices silent because, with this label, any input from them would not be considered useful. But a more recent focus on youth involvement has lead researchers, policy makers, and program evaluators to involve young people as research partners, working to better understand their lives and the institutions that influence them (O’Donoghue et al., 2002).

Midnight basketball programs were an example of “youth at risk” strategies to provide an active venue on weekends at midnight for male youth in an effort to provide a constructive outlet and avoid the engagement in negative behaviours, (e.g. theft, vandalism, alcohol or drug use, pregnancy). Although these programs experienced some success, (Collingwood, 1997; Witt & Crompton, 1996) they were focused on individual level outcomes and it was unclear whether or not these programs had long term effects on
the youth involved. Shifting the focus from specific prevention activities to building skills on a broader level may be able to have, as O’Donoghue et al. (2002) contends, larger, community level impacts that will prepare youth for the future instead of keeping them trapped in a cycle of prevention programs.

Including youth in the decision-making process can be beneficial for the organization as well as for the youth themselves. One of the effects of the personal and structural marginalization of many young people in our society is the significant loss of their power of decision-making – a loss that keeps them at the margins (Brown, 1991). Young people can be active, valuable members of groups traditionally made up only of adults, bringing a refreshing youthful perspective and recharged energy to the group (Fiscus, 2003). A study done by the Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion (Cargo et al., 2003) identified a lack of youth involvement as a concern and took a positive approach to youth health by focusing on the development of their empowerment potential through active community participation. Similarly, research on student participation in decision-making and change efforts in schools have found that students highly valued having their voices heard and “honored”; gained a stronger sense of their own abilities and built student awareness that they can make changes (Mitra, 2004). These examples make a compelling argument to continue to change the shift of research “on” youth to research “with” youth.

**Historical Perspective on Evaluation Theory**

The Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire, was one of the first and foremost to discuss “education of the people” as a means to empowerment (Freire, 1970). Considered radical to his time, Freire advocated for people to learn for themselves, become educated, and speak for themselves in order to rise above their situation and break free of oppressive
forces. In a way, his work can be linked to the basis for the modern day empowerment evaluation approach that seeks to "foster self-determination" of program participants through evaluation. The same values are present in empowerment evaluation theory that Freire espoused: collaboration, empowerment, advocacy, and illumination ultimately leading to self-determination (Fetterman, 1996, 2001).

In contrast, traditional evaluation methods have been based largely on quantitative methods, originally borrowed from the medical field, and designed and carried out by professional evaluators from outside the organization. The evaluators often decide what is to be studied, what methods are to be used, and what conclusions may be drawn from the findings, with little or no input from the intended beneficiaries. One limitation of this type of evaluation includes the gathering of irrelevant or invalid knowledge and a lack of utilization of the results (Coombe, 1997; Cousins & Earle, 1992; Wallerstein, 1999). When the outside "experts" determine the questions to be asked and the items to be researched, they are fulfilling their own needs and not the needs of the community or the "end-users" of the results. This often creates a gap between the knowledge that is gathered as a result of the research and the knowledge that would be useful to the program participants. In this way, the methods used in traditional evaluation often reinforce the powerlessness of community members and the power imbalance between experts/professionals and the community (Coombe, 1997; Cousins, et al., 1998; Wallerstein, 1999). Furthermore, community members do not have the power to control the outcomes of the research and therefore may not use the results. Some argue that knowledge has become the single most important basis of power and control in our society (Maguire, 1987) and if the knowledge gained by conducting evaluations in a community is kept in the hands of "experts", the power remains with them and is not
shared with the participants. Collaborating with community participants can attempt to share the knowledge and thus the power, which in turn, will decrease power imbalances.

Many forms and applications of collaborative research and inquiry have been emerging over the past few decades because of the limitations associated with traditional approaches (Cousins & Whitmore, 1998). In the mid-70s, the National Institute of Education developed and supported the use of stakeholder-based evaluation as a way to enhance the use of data at the local level and respond to the fact that evaluation results have real value for organizations, but are rarely utilized (Cousins & Earl, 1992). The distinctive feature of stakeholder-based evaluation was to enhance relevance and seduce political interference by introducing all possible interested parties to the evaluation early and engaging them in the planning of the evaluation. The stakeholder approach involves members in a consultative way while the evaluator remains as the principle investigator (Cousins & Earl, 1992). The rationale for involving stakeholders in participatory evaluations is to increase the utilizations of the evaluation findings (Mark & Shotland, 1985).

In the evaluation field, one label that emerged with increasing frequency as a descriptor of collaborative work is participatory evaluation. This can be described as collaborating with individuals, groups, or communities who have a decided stake in the program, development project, or other entity being evaluated (Cousins & Whitmore, 1998). The participatory approach of evaluation offers an alternative approach to the stakeholder-based approach in that it further refines the focus from consulting with all potential stakeholders to involving only the primary users of the findings. This participatory approach of evaluation engages a relatively small number of primary users, comparative to the stakeholder based, in the “nuts and bolts of problem formulation,
instrument design or selection, data collection, analysis, interpretation, recommendations and reporting" (Cousins & Earl, 1992, p. 400). In this approach, the primary users are thought to be the key decision makers, who will most likely make use of the evaluation recommendations. Brandon et al. (1993) expanded on this idea by calling for program beneficiaries to also be included in the evaluation process. The rationale is that beneficiaries will broaden the focus of evaluations, thereby enhancing the educational or social consequences of the findings. By including only the decision-makers, important perspectives may be overlooked. By adding the beneficiaries as well as the decision makers, the evaluation findings are one step closer to those who are supposed to benefit from them.

Empowerment evaluation is a type of evaluation technique that strives to overcome issues of traditional evaluation and also takes evaluation beyond the purposes of determining a program’s worth and providing formative data for program evolution, and focuses on the participation of the program participants in the evaluation process (Wallerstein, 1999). Participation, collaboration, and empowerment are becoming requirements – not just recommendations – in many community-based evaluations (Coombe, 1997). Evaluation has the potential to build a dynamic community of transformative learning, thereby contributing to the empowerment of disenfranchised communities (Fetterman, 1996).

**Empowerment Evaluation**

New approaches in evaluation and even new ways of knowing are needed if we are to expand our knowledge base and respond to pressing needs... Evaluation must change and adapt as the environment changes, or it will either be overshadowed by new developments or – as a result of its unresponsiveness and irrelevance – follow the path of the dinosaurs to extinction (Fetterman, 1996, p. 25).
Empowerment evaluation has roots in community psychology, action anthropology, and action research. Community psychology focuses on people, organizations, and communities working to establish control over their affairs. Participatory research and action research are among a range of participatory and collaborative methodologies designed to "empower" individuals and communities (Laverack & Wallerstein, 2001). There is much debate on the term empowerment and I will attempt to discuss the main points of this debate in their relationship to empowerment evaluation.

Rappaport's (1995) work on empowerment theory has been particularly influential on empowerment evaluation. Empowerment is defined as:

*an intentional, ongoing process centered in the local community, involving mutual respect, critical reflections, caring and group participation, through which people lacking an equal share of valued resources gain greater access to and control over those resources* (Rappaport 1995, p. 802).

Labonte (1993) contends that empowerment can be a 'dangerous' term and that it can be a transitive and an intransitive verb. Used transitively, empower means "bestowing power on others, an enabling act, sharing some of the power we might hold over others" (p. 51). The danger in this definition is that the empowering agent remains the controlling actor in the relationship thus defining the terms of the relationship over the subject, who becomes the "object" to be empowered. Intransitively, empower means the "act of gaining or assuming power" which identifies no object. It is this intransitive use of empowerment that has become acceptable in terms of creating an environment that is conducive to empowerment rather than trying to "empower" others. In these situations, the empowering act exists only as a relational act of power taken and given at the same instance.
Cargo et al. (2003) describes the importance of this reflexive relationship in creating an empowering environment for youth when adults gave up responsibility for speaking, decision-making, and action, thereby making it available for youth to take. As evidenced in Cargo et al. (2003), creating an empowering environment for youth allowed them to become enabled and take on responsibility for the project themselves.

Empowerment evaluation was the theme for the 1993 American Evaluation Association annual meeting and served as the basis for David Fetterman’s presidential address the following year. “This launched the dialogue that acknowledged the significance of this approach as a contribution … as a tool in helping us refine and redefine evaluation use” (Fetterman, 2001, p. 9).

In contrast to traditional external evaluation, empowerment evaluation is explicitly designed to become an ongoing, sustainable part of planning and action, which is a means of institutionalizing and internalizing the evaluation process (Coombe, 1997). Empowerment evaluation moves participatory evaluation further along the continuum of participant involvement, from limited participation to an ideal of full control, to where those being evaluated help set the agenda, participate in collecting and analyzing data and determine the use of the results (Coombe, 1997; Fawcett et al., 1996; Dugan, 1996). While it shares many of the same stakeholder-centered processes and goals as participatory evaluation, empowerment evaluation gives the stakeholders, including the program participants, the primary role in the evaluative activities, with the evaluator acting more as a facilitator or “coach” than a team player (Sullins, 2003). Empowerment evaluation as a capacity-building process is grounded in the tradition of participatory inquiry, research and evaluation. Through participation in the process, those involved will
increase their skills and knowledge and gain the ability to conduct and understand the evaluation, and all of its components on their own terms.

Some have suggested that empowerment evaluation does differ from other collaborative evaluation approaches in the emphasis placed on stakeholder takeover of evaluation functions over time...the empowerment evaluator’s role as consultant, trainer, and facilitator should allow him to gradually disengage form the project (Schnoes, 2000, p. 54).

Its aims are to legitimize community members' experiential knowledge, acknowledge the role of values in research, empower community members, democratize research inquiry, and enhance the relevance of evaluation data for citizens (Fetterman, 2001).

Empowerment evaluation also derives from collaborative and participatory evaluation and has strongly influenced and been influenced by action research (Fetterman, 2001). Stakeholders typically control the study and conduct the work in action research, similar to the process of empowerment evaluation. Fetterman (2001) contends that action research and empowerment evaluation, although citing many similarities, differ in the fact that empowerment evaluation is driven by the concept of self-determination and, unlike action research, is conducted collaboratively by a group rather than an individual. Patton (1997) suggests that many of the key concepts of empowerment evaluation are not unique to this approach - participation, collaboration, data usefulness, and coaching, are not unique but are components of any good evaluation process.

In the revised text on empowerment evaluation, Fetterman (2001) explains that the assessment of a program’s value and worth is not the endpoint of the evaluation – as it often is in traditional evaluation – but is part of an ongoing process of program improvement. He also claims that this context acknowledges a simple but often overlooked truth: merit and worth are not static values. In this way, the process of
empowerment evaluation is one that must be continual in order to be effective, recognizing that an evaluation of a program at any given point in time becomes obsolete almost as soon as it is completed. In order to conduct an effective empowerment evaluation, where the continual process contributes to the self-determination of the participants, both the process and the outcome need to be intended. Because empowerment and self-determination cannot be given to someone, it seems that a focus on using “empowering” processes, while undertaking the goals of evaluation, will achieve both purposes and create an “environment that is conducive to empowerment and self-determination” (Fetterman, 2001, p. 3). Sullins (2003) identified the core concepts of what defines empowerment evaluation as:

the purpose is to mutually assess one’s program and work towards improving it, while the corresponding values involve facilitating stakeholders of a program to promote self-sufficiency and improve their own program. (p. 396)

More than one case study utilizing an adaptation of the empowerment evaluation approach (Schnoes et al, 2000; Sullins, 2003) found that stakeholder involvement, although stated as a key to the success of the approach, was difficult to maintain.

It appeared more empowering to have the evaluator primarily responsible for the evaluation, taking stakeholders’ mission, values, goals, and needs into consideration while planning and executing the evaluation (Sullins, 2003, p. 94).

The researchers then took on more of the evaluation responsibility, while creating an empowering process for the participants, thus focusing their main goal on empowerment rather than stakeholder involvement.

**Self-Determination and Empowerment Evaluation**

By its very name, empowerment evaluation leads one to assume that it seeks to “empower” individuals, or to create empowering opportunities. But it is self-
determination, not empowerment per se, that forms the theoretical foundation of empowerment evaluation. Fetterman's own description of empowerment evaluation does not include a detailed description of empowerment, but he refers to Zimmerman's (year is unknown) work on empowerment theory. The literature is rather vague on what it looks like if empowerment is achieved, who is empowered and what they are empowered to do (Sechrest, 1997). In her adaptation of the empowerment evaluation approach, Sullins (2003) refers to the promotion of self-sufficiency to improve participant's programs and "empowerment" as the purposes and values of empowerment evaluation and does not refer to self-determination. "Empowerment evaluation can create an environment that is conducive to empowerment and self-determination" is the explanation used by Fetterman (2001, p. 3), but because the two terms are used almost interchangeably, it can create confusion as to the degree of difference between the two and leaves interpretation up to the reader or the individual researcher.

It is the emphasis on self-determination that is the defining focus of empowerment evaluation... and it is this that distinguishes it from participatory and collaborative evaluation. [Empowerment evaluation cannot be] distinguished by empowering outcomes alone, but rather by being a participatory and capacity-building process targeted at groups lacking the power of self-determination whose actual power of self-determination is subsequently increased through the tools and processes of evaluation, including the evaluator's explicit advocacy of and working in support of the goal of self-determination (Patton, 1997, p. 148).

Another difficulty with having the goal of self-determination, or being "empowered", comes in measuring success. Shnoes (2000) applies and examines the empowerment evaluation approach in a community based initiative and recommends that the idea of "being empowered" must have real practical consequences which can be achieved if evaluation outcomes are meaningfully linked to significant programmatic decisions.
The literature does not provide a scale or measurement of empowerment or level of self-determination experienced by the participants, so it seems that self-determination as a goal is ambiguous when evaluating success.

At the very least, future empowerment evaluation efforts may want to measure stakeholders' perceptions of empowerment and their evaluation knowledge and skills before and after the pilot evaluation to provide insight into the capability of empowerment evaluation to empower program stakeholders (Secret et al., 1999, p. 127).

If self-determination is the goal of empowerment evaluation, then somehow a measure of whether or not this is achieved must be worked into the assessment of “success”.

Internal and External Evaluators

Empowerment evaluation is very clear on the role of the evaluator. An outside evaluator is often used to facilitate the empowerment evaluation process for groups who are unfamiliar with the process, but the assumption is that the evaluator will act as a coach to the program participants and eventually hand over the role of evaluation to the participants. The use of external versus internal evaluator has been debated in the evaluation literature and has changed over the last few decades. Mathison (1991) reported the decline of external evaluation contracts over the previous two decades in favour of internal evaluation involving in house research units and personnel. This shift is based on a recognition that evaluators must understand and be understood by the host organization. This concept is also supported by Coombe (1997) who stated “perhaps objectivity is gained not through detachment from the setting but through deep involvement in and reflection about the setting” (p. 295).

A distinguishing feature of empowerment evaluation is the fact that “program participants conduct their own evaluation; an outside evaluator often serves as a coach or additional facilitator” (Fetterman, 2001, 3). One of the goals is to teach the program
participants to conduct their own evaluations, thus being responsive to external forces that can be highly unstable (Fetterman, 2001). The empowerment evaluation methodology requires an internal evaluator because the evaluation process is designed to become institutionalized and on-going, which can only occur if the program staff and participants are able to conduct the evaluation themselves and embed it in the decision-making process.

For this proposed research project, I took on the role of internal evaluator because I am a former staff member and current volunteer of the case study organization. But I also viewed myself as an outside researcher, concerned about determining the merit or worth of the process. Maintaining a critical lens throughout this project was difficult, but important in order to provide meaningful outcomes to the research and to the organization.

Although being introduced over a decade ago, empowerment evaluation has not been extensively examined in different settings. I view this research project as another way to explore the theory in a practical case setting and contribute to the current base of literature. Little research has been conducted using youth participants, particularly girls, and this is one way in which this research project will make a contribution. Having the opportunity to discuss the girls' interest in decision making in the Healthy Living Initiative also proved to be an interesting portion of this case study.

**Challenges of Empowerment Evaluation**

Evaluation assists groups and organizations to understand the usefulness, problems, and successes of the programs and services they provide. The two instrumental purposes of evaluation are to determine a program's worth and to provide formative data for program evolution (Wallerstein, 1999). Without evaluation, this type of data may
never be collected and ongoing improvements may not be made. Most non-profit organizations find evaluating programs and services difficult due to resource and time constraints as well as intangible goals (Andrews, 1996). It typically occurs only when mandated by a funder, and few participants in community-based efforts have the skills, knowledge, or tools needed to make effective use of evaluation in service to the community (Coombe, 1997). Even if an organization understands the importance of evaluation, it is not always feasible to spend the necessary staff time and resources conducting it, particularly on an on-going basis as advocated by proponents of empowerment evaluation.

In my experience with non-profit organizations, informal evaluation is often the norm and feedback is received through email, phone calls or comments during casual conversation. This type of evaluation is problematic because the organization may never hear from those who do not enjoy their experiences, thus ignoring “those who are not there”. Having evaluation procedures embedded in the work of the organization, these concerns are more likely to be addressed. If the evaluation becomes part of the routine operations of the organization, the time and resource constraints may be minimized over time. As well, if evaluation becomes an institutionalized part of the organization’s work, both positive and negative feedback will be sought on a continual basis and then incorporated into the planning process (Fetterman, 2001). The current literature on empowerment evaluation examines case specific studies, but as of yet, no longitudinal studies have been conducted that would test the theory of institutionalization. Indeed, Fawcett et al. (1996) indicate that a degree of self-determination in evaluation may promote the institutionalization of the evaluation methods.
By incorporating the client’s voice into this research project, the organization will examine the involvement of youth in an empowerment evaluation approach. The organization strives to meet the needs of the clients involved in its programs, but has not yet found a way to incorporate their input into the planning and evaluation of programs. The involvement of young people is theorized to “benefit young people, their programs and communities and evaluation itself” (Sabo, 2003, p.1). It is hoped that through this research project, the organization will develop an understanding of how to incorporate specific client feedback into their program planning, evaluation and implementation. Whether or not the clients are supportive of the empowerment evaluation approach, important information will be gained to assist the organization to make decision on their processes in the future.

In the next chapter, the methods used to examine empowerment evaluation in the case study organization are provided.
Chapter Three

Research Methodology

In this chapter, I describe the site where this case study took place, how I introduced empowerment evaluation to the non-profit organization, and who the study participants were. I then describe the research methods utilized to address my research questions. Details of data collection are then explained, along with data analysis, the role of the researcher, and ethical considerations.

Flexibility allows research to evolve and emerge through interactions with the community and can be achieved by drawing on multiple methods of data collection (Ristock & Pennell, 1996). For this research, the techniques that were employed included observations, focus groups, interviews, and a document analysis. These data collection tools are consistent with a case study research strategy where the purpose is to examine how organizational members interpret processes around them (Marshall & Rossman, 1995).

Case Study Site

The non-profit community organization that was chosen for this study has been in the community for over 40 years and is affiliated with a national organization. The organization is “committed to enhancing the confidence, self-esteem and well-being of girls and young women through supportive friendships with caring women” (Board of Director’s Manual, 2006). The organization serves a specific geographic area with a total of 14 full and part time staff members and over 400 actively engaged volunteers. The organization currently supports over 260 ‘mentoring matches’ between trained adult women and girls and young women between the ages of seven and eighteen. At the time of this research, they had approximately one hundred girls and young women on the
waiting list to be matched with a volunteer. The organization has a diversified revenue base, with approximately 30% coming from federal, provincial, and municipal grants and the remainder from various private grants, foundations, donations, and fundraising activities.

The primary focus of the organization is to create and support the mentoring matches between girls and young women in the community and trained, adult women who volunteer to spend three to five hours per week together. The organization supports a team of professional counseling staff whose role it is to train and screen volunteers, match them with a young woman and then support the match by offering counseling and referrals to other resources when necessary. The organization also employs a full time fund development manager, marketing and communications manager, two office support staff and an executive director who is responsible for the overall operation of the organization. As a non-profit organization, it is governed by a volunteer board of directors who work with the executive director to run the operations of the organization (Figure 2). The current decision-making structure of the organization does not include the clients. It is an adult oriented top down approach without input from the clients.

Healthy Living Initiative

Since 1998, the organization has made a commitment to providing opportunities for volunteer mentors and clients to engage in healthy living activities. As part of its goal to foster increased self-esteem and confidence in the clients, the organization launched a Healthy Living Initiative. The Healthy Living Committee oversees this initiative and is made up of approximately 5-7 staff and volunteers who are responsible for various programs or volunteer activities of the organization (see Figure 1). These members
Figure 2

Organization Structure of Clients, Staff and Volunteers

VOLUNTEERS

Clients

Volunteer Mentors

Matches

Program Committees

Volunteers

Board of Directors

STAFF

Executive Director

Counseling Department

Fundraising Marketing/Communications

Administrative Office Staff
include a representative from the Activities Committee, a volunteer run committee that plans and conducts three to four group activities per month; a representative from the First Nations Committee, also a volunteer run committee that plans First Nations educational and cultural activities; the manager of programs and services, who oversees the counseling department; other staff and community volunteers. The Healthy Living Committee works on achieving its mission through the production of educational materials, workshops, newsletter articles, and group activities focusing on being physically active and having fun.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the committee has not yet sought input or feedback from the clients on the activities that they plan or host. They are therefore operating from a traditional planning and evaluation model whereby the staff and volunteer committee members meet and discuss ideas and then, based on resources, plan and hold the activities. The activities are advertised in the quarterly newsletter and through a weekly email newsletter that is sent to all of the volunteer mentors and other supporters.

Presently, healthy living activities are informally evaluated based on attendance, verbal comments of participants, and general comments of committee members in attendance. Committee members have discussed the necessity of obtaining feedback and input from clients but have not yet implemented any new ideas, so the informal method remains the evaluation method.

**Role of Researcher**

It is important to further identify my social location as it relates to this research. I am a Caucasian woman, married with a young child, raised and formally educated in Canada. I came from an upper middle class family and was encouraged to participate in sport and physical activity throughout my life. I have a strong network of family and
friends who live close by and remain my supporters. I realize that most of the girls in this study do not come from similar backgrounds and therefore had very different experiences growing up. I believe that physical activity is an important part of life for physical, mental and emotional health and I believe that many girls and women have been deprived of the advantages and benefits of regular physical activity. It is this underlying belief that guided me to make the career and subsequent educational decisions in my life. I acknowledge that my employment and volunteer history and my social location will also shape my analysis of the results.

As the principal investigator in this research study, it is important to explain my interest and involvement with the case study organization. I met a former Executive Director of the organization through an informal lunch group that provided a networking opportunity for women in similar positions. She informed me of the newly created volunteer ‘Sport Club’ in this organization and I subsequently joined this volunteer committee to share information from the non-profit advocacy women and sport organization where I was employed at the time, and because of my personal interest in physical activity. After leaving my employment with the women and sport organization, I still remained an active volunteer with this committee and later became engaged in contract work and subsequently full time work with this organization. As a volunteer and contract employee, I feel I was able to establish a good working relationship with the Executive Director and with other staff and volunteers. As a full time staff member, I established a good working relationship with the executive director and staff at the organization and maintain many contacts with the volunteers who have been involved with the Healthy Living Committee since my initial involvement. My job description did not involve interaction with the clients of the organization, but the interactions I have had
are through the volunteer activities involved with the Healthy Living Committee and attendance at these activities. I left employment with this organization towards the end of 2005, prior to commencing the research and data collection of this study, but still remain a member of the Healthy Living Committee as a volunteer. A level of trust had already been established with the organization and they were enthusiastic about this research and expressed their willingness to assist in any way possible.

**Introducing Empowerment Evaluation**

I introduced the empowerment evaluation approach in 2003 at a Healthy Living Committee meeting. The approach was explained to the committee and discussed in detail. The committee unanimously chose to adopt this approach, which is explained further in the next chapter. The committee proceeded to follow the three steps of empowerment evaluation as outlined in Fetterman (2001) at a series of scheduled meetings. The first step was establishing a mission for the program. The second step was taking stock, identifying and prioritizing the most significant program activities and rating them on a scale of 1 (low) to 10 (high) in terms of how well the program is doing in each of those areas (Figure 3). Each person’s name was identified on the chart with her rating of each program and they had to verbally explain this rating to the group. This develops accountability and provides an open forum for discussion where all members can understand differing perspectives of the programs (Fetterman, 2001). From these ratings, the committee chose five key areas on which to focus their efforts: ‘active’ component of activities (including camp); ‘Growing Up Female’ workshops; sports activities; First Nations activities; and cooking and nutrition workshops. The third step involved charting a course for the future, where all committee members developed strategies to achieve desired goals in these five key areas. All of these meetings were
### Figure 3

**Healthy Living Initiative Activities Rating**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity Description</th>
<th>LH</th>
<th>PS</th>
<th>IL</th>
<th>SG</th>
<th>TL</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Cooking and Nutrition Classes</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>33.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. WOW Workshop (12 matches)*</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Healthy Living Forum*</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>29.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Sport Activities – rock climbing, curling, biking</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Active component at “Activities”</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Newsletter insert</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Newsletter article</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Fitness Group activities</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Sexual Health Workshops*</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Summer Camp activity</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>43.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. First Nations Activities</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* These activities were categorized under “Growing Up Female” workshops.
documented and remain as minutes of these meetings for the committee.

As a member of the Healthy Living Committee, I introduced the empowerment evaluation approach as a way to incorporate the feedback, input, and involvement of clients into the planning and evaluation processes of the Healthy Living Initiative. The committee unanimously agreed that it is important to gather feedback and ideas from the clients, but had no method in place for doing this beyond an informal method. As the one who introduced this approach, I had more responsibility in implementing the approach and guiding the committee on the process of implementation. This position of responsibility was an advantage because, as the researcher, I was able to view the process of implementing this approach first hand and experienced the challenges and benefits of this process and gained direct feedback from the committee.

The disadvantage of this position was that I may have been viewed as being personally attached to the approach, as the one who introduced it, and been viewed as wanting to “ensure” successful implementation. Being aware of the potential conflict of interest in relation my position on the committee, I strove for self-awareness and strategies for negotiating this tension that were recorded in my field notes (Ristock & Pennell, 1996). It was important for me to be aware of how my actions affected the project and how the committee members viewed my position as researcher. Where possible, I sought the assistance of other committee members in introducing concepts to the general membership and gaining their feedback throughout the process so that the project remained important to the entire committee. Although I believe the empowerment evaluation approach is a good fit for this organization, I was open to examining the implementation of the approach and gathering data that will assist the organization to implement this approach or an alternative. The ultimate goal was to find a method for the
organization to evaluate their programs and services that would be most beneficial for the organization and its clients.

**Recruitment of Study Participants**

A total of 19 members of the organization participated in my study (8 clients, 9 volunteers, and 2 staff). Client participation was sought through the organization’s e-newsletter and by personal invitation through the counseling staff. They were invited to participate in a one-hour focus group that occurred in November 2005, December 2005, and February 2006. The first focus group was arranged at the office of the organization and included lunch. Two clients registered for this workshop, but only one showed up and I conducted a one-to-one interview with this client. The second focus group was arranged following a skating party organized by the Activities Committee and six clients participated. The third focus group was to be followed by a dance workshop, which was cancelled due to personal circumstances of the instructor, but two clients agreed to participate in the focus group. The focus groups were held with only the clients participating, although they were all brought to the focus group by their volunteer mentors. I asked for and received parental/guardian consent from all participants to conduct the focus groups and to tape record the focus groups (Appendix A).

One focus group was held with the volunteer mentors on an evening in November 2005. This focus group was advertised through the organization’s e-newsletter and was held at the office of the organization. I conducted this focus group and received informed consent for participation and to record the session.

The members of the Healthy Living Committee were invited to participate in a focus group through a request that I sent in a group email. Interviews were conducted with two former members of the Healthy Living Committee as they were members of the
committee when it chose to go ahead with the empowerment evaluation approach. One member was currently on maternity leave and the other was still a staff member of the organization. Informed consent was received from all participants in the focus group and the focus group was tape recorded and transcribed.

Data Collection

The methods used to collect data were document analysis, observations of meetings, the four focus groups and three interviews (1 client, 2 committee members).

Document Analysis

Documentation is a source of information that is easy and unobtrusive to obtain and can be quite informative (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). The analysis of the documents was an attempt to verify the existence of the structure and values of the organization (Ristock & Pennell, 1996). The documents analyzed were the Board of Director’s Manual (2005/2006), organizational and program brochures, website content, minutes of the Healthy Living Committee meetings, and program evaluation forms (Appendix C). Ristock and Pennell (1996) suggest the importance of analyzing what is not said, for example implicit or conflicting values, rather than merely confirming what is explicit. This analysis provided insights on why the organization set up a Healthy Living Initiative. I also looked for information on the organization’s current methods of evaluation and program planning and how they sought input from their clients.

Observation of Meetings

Observation of meetings was another informative technique used to collect data. The empowerment evaluation approach was introduced to the Healthy Living Committee in 2003. I attended two committee meetings during the time of data collection, one in September 2005 and one in January 2006. The committee meetings were regular
meetings of the committee to discuss the Healthy Living Initiative with a planned agenda and items that were discussed. I received consent from the committee members and tape-recorded and took notes at these meetings.

The observation technique was used at the beginning and part way through the data collection phase to allow for further follow up in the focus groups and interviews. Observation was used to provide insight into how the empowerment evaluation approach has been integrated into program planning, implementation, and evaluation (research question #2). It also provided insights into factors affecting the sustainability of the empowerment evaluation approach (research question #4). Observations generally entail the systematic noting and recording of events, behaviors, and objects in the space of study (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). I did not have a strict observational checklist, but I did document the discussion of the committee members as it related to empowerment evaluation and observed their current planning and evaluation techniques. I wrote field notes after the meetings upon further reflection of the discussion. There were no objections to me taking on a researcher role at this meeting, and I did obtain informed consent to do so. I have a good rapport with the committee and have previously discussed this research with them.

The most challenging aspect of my role as researcher at meetings was to observe more and participate less. Marshall and Rossman (1995) discussed the role of the researcher from strict observer to full participant and suggest that some sort of participation is usually necessary by the researcher to meet the demands of reciprocity. I continued with my participant role with the committee so that I did not direct the meeting, but was also seen as a participant on the committee. Although I regularly attend committee meetings, I had not attended a meeting as a researcher, nor have I taken the
time to reflect thoroughly on the committee meetings, which gave me a different viewpoint as an observer once I began my data collection.

Focus Groups and Interviews

Focus group interviews are group discussions exploring a specific set of issues. They are ideal for exploring people’s experiences, opinions, wishes and concerns (Barbour & Kitzinger, 1999). In order to discuss the Healthy Living Initiative, and to inquire about the empowerment evaluation approach, focus groups were held. The advantages of focus group interviews are that this method is socially oriented, studying participants in an atmosphere more natural than artificial experimental circumstances and more relaxed than the environment of a one-to-one interview (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). The results are often believable and have high face validity. Interviews are more like a “conversation with a purpose”, and provide a useful way to get large amounts of data quickly (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 108). Although focus groups were originally the only type of interview planned, it became necessary to conduct three one-to-one interviews as well.

Focus groups, like all interviewing techniques, have some challenges that the interviewer must be aware of. The interviewer has less control over a group interview than an individual one, which can result in irrelevant discussions (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). It becomes very important for the interviewer to become skilled at keeping the discussion on track, making sure all individuals participate in the discussion and handling the group dynamics. Also important is for the researcher to avoid being judgmental, presenting them selves as experts or making assumptions, which close off exploration (Barbour & Kitzinger, 1999). The facilitator needs to encourage interaction between research participants, clarify ambiguous statements, and enable incomplete sentences to
be finished. One of the advantages of focus groups is that interesting and unexpected avenues may be pursued, and it is up to the facilitator to think on their feet and decide whether to explore these avenues or bring the topic back on track. Keeping the discussion on track, in all focus group settings, was a challenge. I wanted to encourage discussion, but when the discussion became completely irrelevant to the purpose of the focus group, I had to remind the participants of the question that was being asked and guide their discussion back to the research. It is difficult to avoid making assumptions, and in a few cases, when reviewing transcripts, I noticed that I assumed what response meant rather than probing for more information. Listening to the focus groups and transcribing the discussion prior to conducting the next focus group assisted me to avoid this problem the next time.

The focus groups with clients attracted clients with a variety of interests. The first interview was useful as it gave me an opportunity to ‘test’ my interview questions (Appendix B) and, because the client was very proficient at answering questions, we were able to have an enjoyable conversation. She was forthcoming, but not in a dominating way, but was able to provide good insight into her motivation for attending, or not attending activities, and her thoughts on the current adult oriented decision-making structure in the organization. The second focus group had five clients attending and was conducted following a skating party. This focus group was more challenging because of the group dynamics. Two clients attended because they were friends and they were very vocal during the interview and comfortable in the setting. One client attended simply because she was the sister of a client and just “tagged along”. This client admitted her motivation for attending was the hot chocolate and cookies and she did not provide a lot of insight into her thoughts about the organization. It seemed that she and her mentor
were not able to attend a lot of activities and I got the sense that she just wanted to participate in any activity, but did not get the chance to very often. The other two clients expressed their opinions, but sometimes needed more probing to be included in the discussion. This particular group had many innovative activity ideas to offer, were keen on the Healthy Living Initiative and three of the six wanted to be more involved in the future. The final focus group attracted two clients who did not know each other. They were both quite vocal, and although one appeared quite shy, she turned out to have quite strong opinions, but was not as vocally strong as the other. These two provided great insight into feelings of being included in, or excluded from, the decision-making structures created by adults. They had similar experiences with the decision-making structures in their school settings, and both had ideas about future activities. Although their ideas were very different, they both were able to express their opinions. Both wanted to be more involved in the future.

The focus group with adult volunteer mentors was conducted at a separate time from the client focus groups. The volunteer mentors are adults and were invited to attend an evening focus group that included ‘wine and cheese’ refreshments. I was intrigued at the diversity of volunteers that were attracted. Two were new to the organization in the past year, two were long-time volunteers and the other two were in the middle. I hosted the meeting at the office of the organization because I knew they were all familiar with it and hoped it would assist in creating a relaxed atmosphere. They all seemed comfortable in this setting and about half of them knew each other from organizational meetings or activities. They kept the conversation flowing and we actually went over the time allotted and everyone stayed until we were finished the interview. I asked them what they knew about the Healthy Living Initiative and whether they would like to become more involved
in it in the future. Some came to the focus group to learn more about it, some knew about it and others did not. Only a few wanted to be more involved in the future as some already felt ‘over-committed’ with their role in the organization. I also asked them if they thought client input was important, if they are currently asked for their input and whether they would like to be asked. I probed them for challenges to gaining feedback from volunteers as well as from clients to find out what the barriers to implementation would be, in their opinion. In some cases they were speaking from their experiences with the girls or young women they mentor and trying to explain the challenges in communicating or seeking input from them.

Another focus group was held with three members of the Healthy Living Committee (1 staff and 2 volunteer mentors) and two interviews with former members of the committee, to collect data regarding the first research question on the factors that were considered when deciding to implement an empowerment evaluation approach. The interviews were relaxed and comfortable ‘conversations’ where I was able to gain a lot of information on some of the early decisions of the Healthy Living Committee. The focus group with three of the current committee members offered insight into their thinking on the empowerment evaluation approach and their current understanding of obtaining client input. I had a good rapport with all of the participants and the interviews as well as the focus group went over time as we continued to discuss our ideas and thoughts on engaging clients in the Healthy Living Initiative.

After receiving consent from the participants, the focus groups and interviews were tape-recorded. I facilitated the focus groups, which made detailed note taking difficult, so I relied on the transcripts of the focus groups for my data collection. It was important to record the discussion, behaviours, and events that occurred during all focus
groups and interviews through my reflexive field notes that were taken immediately after the conclusion of each focus group and interview.

**Data Analysis**

All data from the focus groups, interviews, and meeting observations were transcribed verbatim and entered into Atlas.ti. The data was coded in relation to the findings that were relevant to the research questions (Appendix D).

“Data analysis is the process of bringing order, structure, and interpretation to the mass of collected data” (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 150). The analysis of qualitative data is trying to gather themes and make general statements about the categories of data collected. Coding is a way to organize the data that is collected and refers to “a variety of approaches to and ways of organizing qualitative data” (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p. 27). Coding will link different segments or instances in the data that can then be brought together to create categories of data.

I followed the analytical procedure outlined by Marshall and Rossman (1999) that identifies six phases: (a) organizing the data; (b) generating categories, themes, and patterns; (c) coding the data; (d) testing the emergent understandings; (e) searching for alternative explanations; and (f) writing the report. It was also recommended to create an initial guide for categories and potential coding schemes. For this research, the categories and resultant coding of the data was based on their relationship to the research questions. I began with general codes that related directly to the research questions and coded the data. These five codes were: 1) Factors considered when implementing empowerment evaluation, 2) Integration of empowerment evaluation, 3) Benefits of empowerment evaluation as identified during the start up phase, 4) Challenges of empowerment evaluation as identified during the start up phase, and 5) Factors affecting the
sustainability of the empowerment evaluation approach. After reviewing the data initially, I went over that it again and created sub-codes for data that were repetitive and could be grouped together under one theme. The resultant coding scheme was as follows:

1. Factors considered when implementing empowerment evaluation  
   a. New approach presented  
   b. Engaging the clients  
2. Integration of EE  
   a. Limited implementation  
   b. Committee turnover  
   c. Evaluation forms  
3. Benefits of EE as identified during the start up phase  
   a. Empowerment  
   b. Innovation  
4. Challenges of empowerment evaluation as identified during the start up phase  
   a. Input  
   b. Access  
   c. Lack of Resources  
5. Factors affecting the sustainability of the empowerment evaluation approach  
   a. Commitment  
   b. Interest  

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained through UBC Research Services (Appendix E). As part of the approval process, agency consent was also granted. Discussions occurred on separate occasions with the volunteers of the Healthy Living Committee and with senior staff members.

Informed consent was obtained from all research participants and parental/guardian consent was also obtained from the clients under the age of majority who participated in the study. All personal and organizational names were assigned pseudonyms to protect the anonymity of the research subjects. I clearly explained that their choice to participate in this research, or their choice to drop out at any time, in no way jeopardizes their future participation in the organization.
Chapter 4

Results and Analyses

This chapter will outline the results obtained by describing the context of the case study site and how, the clients, volunteers, and staff view the benefits and challenges of implementing empowerment evaluation in the Healthy Living Initiative.

Case Study Site and Focus Group Participants

Background information on the clients, volunteer mentors, and staff who participated in interviews, focus groups, or meetings observed are summarized in Table 1.

Clients

Eight clients of the organization participated in this study and ranged in age from ten to fourteen. The clients of this organization range from age 7 – 18 and when they reach the legal adult age at 19, they “graduate” from the program. The majority of the clients come from “families with a single parent who is receiving income assistance or working for low wages, living in social housing and are experiencing family or social distress related to family conflict, loss or trauma, past or present abuse, poverty, developmental challenges, or physical disability” (Board of Directors manual, 2006). Clients are referred to the agency if it is felt that they can benefit from a relationship with an adult female mentor and ‘friend’. Family, friends, social workers, teachers, school counselors, the Ministry of Children and Family Development, and other professionals can refer girls and young women to this program. The only requirements of the potential client is that she wants to be in a mentoring relationship with an adult female, and agrees to meet with the mentor once a week for at least a year.
Table 1

*Table of Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Years in Org</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Volunteers:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sue</td>
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<td>single</td>
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<td>middle</td>
<td>college</td>
<td>single</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christine</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>late 40's</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>limited</td>
<td>diploma</td>
<td>single/disabled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane</td>
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<td>middle</td>
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<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anne</td>
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<td>middle</td>
<td>univ</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leslie</td>
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<td>middle</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jennifer</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Métis/Polish</td>
<td>unempl.</td>
<td>college</td>
<td>single</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patricia</td>
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<td>40</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>middle</td>
<td>some univ.</td>
<td>single</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>8</td>
<td>30's</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>middle</td>
<td>univ.</td>
<td>married/1 child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff:</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>30's</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>middle</td>
<td>univ/grad</td>
<td>married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>50</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>middle</td>
<td>univ</td>
<td>divorced/1 child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clients:</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caitlin</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>mixed*</td>
<td>low</td>
<td></td>
<td>has a single mom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>mixed</td>
<td>low/social assistance</td>
<td>has a single mom</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sofia</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>mixed</td>
<td>low/ social assistance</td>
<td>has a single mom</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>13</td>
<td>visible minority*</td>
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<td></td>
<td>has a single dad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>11</td>
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<td>low/ social assistance</td>
<td>has a single mom</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jill</td>
<td>&gt;1</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>First Nations</td>
<td>low</td>
<td></td>
<td>has a single mom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angela**</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>low/ social assistance</td>
<td>has a single mom</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ella**</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>low</td>
<td></td>
<td>has a single mom</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*ethnicity unknown, but indicated “mixed ethnic origin” on application*  
* ethnicity unknown, but indicated “other visible minority” on application*  
** indicates that the client’s mentor also participated in the study

1 Pseudonyms have been assigned for all participants in this study.
2 Low income was defined by >$20,000/year income; majority are self-defined
When filling out the application form to refer a child to the organization, ethnicity and family income are optional questions left up to the discretion of the family to include. The statistics of the organization's program reveal that over 66% of the clients have had contact with a social worker through the provincial government. Two of the clients who participated in this study were identified by the organizational database as Caucasian, one is of First Nations decent, four were of mixed ethnic origin, and one identified as ‘other visible minority’. For these eight clients, four families indicated they were receiving social assistance and all eight indicated they were on low income. Seven of the eight clients have a single mother and one has a single father. The statistics of the organization indicate that 47% of the clients do not report ethnicity, of those who do report, 19% are of First Nations decent, 23% are Anglo-European, 4% are Chinese, 4% are Asian or South Asian, 2% are Black, and 1% is other. Sixty-eight per cent of the agency clients are parented by a single mother, 14% by a single father, 10% by dual parents, 7% are in a Foster/Group home, and 1% was unknown.

**Volunteer Mentors**

Nine female volunteer mentors participated in this study. To become a volunteer mentor with this organization, there is a specific training and screening program aimed at training the volunteers on their volunteer job as well as eliminating any volunteers who may have negative motives for a relationship with a girl or young woman. Although the concern of pedophiles or potential child abusers targeting youth serving organizations has become widely publicized in the last few years in the media, this organization turns away one or two potential volunteers per year, usually for reasons such as refusing to agree with the diversity policy or mental health issues or instability. After 46 years in the community, this organization has never had a complaint filed against a volunteer mentor.
The organization has an equal rights/diversity policy that they give to all potential volunteer mentors and is posted on their website that indicates they do not discriminate against individuals “on the basis of race, culture, religion, sexual orientation, class or ability” (organizational website, 2006).

All potential volunteer mentors attend a one-hour ‘information session’ that is hosted by a current volunteer mentor, to give a general overview of the program. The potential volunteer can then submit an application form along with a criminal record check and personal and professional references. The mentor then attends an ‘orientation session’ that is facilitated by a member of the counseling staff who outlines the obligations, details of the volunteer position, and provides some training for the volunteer position. The potential volunteer mentor then participates in an individual interview with a member of the counseling team and, if the volunteer meets all requirements and is accepted into the program, they are then matched in a mentoring relationship with a client, which is commonly referred to as a ‘match’. The professional counseling staff also meets with clients prior to setting up a match so that the interests of the clients are a factor in the matching process. There are currently 260 mentoring matches in the organization and 110 new matches were made in 2005. The volunteer mentor agrees to meet with the girl or young woman she is matched with every week, for three to five hours for the first year. Matches enjoy doing a wide range of activities together including making crafts, playing sports, watching movies, and just hanging out and talking (organizational website, 2006). The organizational belief is “that each client benefits immediately from the relationship formed with a caring, supportive woman and benefits in the long term by gaining self-esteem and confidence to make positive life choices” (organizational website, 2006). After the first year, the time requirement is not monitored.
by the staff and is based on the needs and time schedules of the individual client and mentor; some matches continue to meet every week, some more frequently, some less frequently. The match will remain members in the organization for as long as they remain in a mentoring relationship or friendship, until the client reaches the age of nineteen. The average length of a match for the organization is 2.55 years. If a match is not working out, and either the client or volunteer mentor suggests it may not a beneficial match, the counselor will attempt to rectify the situation or will end the match if both parties agree that is the best course of action. In 2005, 32% of matches ended without completing the one-year commitment due to reasons including moving, loss of interest; irreconcilable differences, or conflict with the parent. The client and the volunteer mentor can be placed back on the waiting list to be re-matched if they choose to stay involved.

Fifty-five per cent of volunteer mentors self-report their ethnicity. Of these, 41% identify as Anglo-European; 9% as South Asian, Chinese or other Asian background; 2% as Middle Eastern, 1% is African American or First Nations decent, and 1% reports a mixed race ethnicity. Of the nine volunteer mentors who participated in this study, one was of Métis decent and the remaining mentors were Caucasian. One volunteer was unemployed at the time, one identified herself as low income, one as low/mid income, and the remaining six were of middle income. At the time of application, 38% of volunteer mentors were 19 – 25, 22% were 26-30, and 21% were 31 – 40 years of age.

The age range of the volunteer mentors who participated in this research was from 30-40 and the length of time in the organization varied from less than one year to over eight years. One volunteer mentor identified herself as married with a child, one identified herself as having a disability, five identified themselves as single and three did not identify marital or partner status. Seven of the volunteers had a diploma, college, or
university background and two did not identify their educational background. This case study did not set out to include only ‘matches’. There were three matches and the remaining clients and volunteers participated without their match.

Staff

Two full-time staff members participated in this research study. One was a part of the focus group with the Healthy Living Committee and one was interviewed individually. One staff member was in her early 30’s and one in her early 50’s and both were Caucasian. One staff had been with the organization for over seven years, while the other had been with the organization for one year. Both staff members have a university background, one is married without children and the other is divorced with a child.

Youth at Risk

The clients of this organization could be identified as “youth at risk” based on their family environment (Collingwood, 1997; Witt & Crompton, 1996; Ministry of Small Business, Tourism and Culture, 1996; Parks and Recreation Ontario, 1999; Health Canada, 1994). But, the “youth at risk” label was not mentioned by the volunteers or the staff during interviews or meetings, nor is it mentioned in any of the documents produced by the case study organization including the Board of Director’s manual, program brochures, website, agency policy and application forms, and newsletters. This coincides with Cargo et al.’s (2003) approach to youth health by focusing on the development of youth through active community participation and focusing on their assets rather than their deficits. Instead of focusing on the problems or challenges that the clients may be facing, the volunteer mentors approach their mentoring relationships or ‘friendships’ in a positive way and focus on the fun that the two can have in their time together. The mentoring program is described in the following way:
Our program is aimed at both prevention and intervention as research has shown that a warm, supportive relationship with a caring adult is a key factor in the helping children deal with the challenges in their lives over which they often have no control (program brochure, 2006).

The volunteer mentors focus on creating a relationship as described above. They are not brought in as experts or counselors to the girls nor are they brought in to solve any problems or to replace a parent or guardian. They are simply brought in to be a friend to a girl or young woman who has expressed an interest in being a part of this type of relationship.

The volunteer mentors who are matched in a one-to-one relationship with a client receive general information about the girl or young woman they are matched with, such as where they live, who is their parent or guardian, the school they attend, the reason for the client being referred to the agency, and the client receives the same information on their potential mentor. The counselor arranges a meeting at the home of the client and introduces the client to their mentor and the parent or guardian. At this meeting, the client and their parent, and the volunteer mentor agree to the “ground rules” of the match, such as meeting once per week, communicating if a change in schedule is needed, and the match officially begins.

Program of Activities

The organization offers a regular program of group activities and workshops for the matches that are organized by the volunteer committees, currently consisting of adult volunteers and some staff. The Healthy Living Initiative was set up to ensure that some healthy living workshops, educational materials, and activities focusing on health and recreation are provided as part of these activities offered each month. In some months, as many as three or four educational, cultural, and recreational activities and workshops can
be offered. The activities are provided free of charge and are arranged by volunteers. Occasionally, there is a token cost, but usually only for the adult mentors. The organization also has various “funds” that they can use to assist in any costs for clients if they cannot pay any fees for activities. Annual activities for matches include a summer camp; summer picnic; and spring, Halloween and winter parties. As well, First Nations cultural activities are offered through the First Nations Mentoring Program. The First Nations Committee that organizes these events is made up of women from various ethnicities including, one Métis, two First Nations, three Asian and four Caucasian. Many of the activities and workshops are offered as a part of the Healthy Living Initiative, which is designed “to promote self-esteem by educating, encouraging and empowering girls to make healthy lifestyle choices” (organizational website, 2006).

The programs provided by this organization are intended to give the matches a place to spend time together, with other matches in a group setting, to try something new and to have fun. They are not a pre-requisite, nor are they mandatory; in fact, some matches do not participate in any of the organized activities. There is currently no way for the organization to find out reasons why some matches do not attend. The fact that matches continue to register and show up for activities is proof to the volunteers that these activities are being well received and are meeting a need, even though they have never reached out to those who do not attend to find out if they could potentially include more matches in the activities, or provide activities that reach out to a potentially broader audience.

**Implementing Empowerment Evaluation - Factors Considered**

Empowerment evaluation is an approach that was presented by me, in my roles as a staff member and a graduate student pursuing a master’s degree, to the Healthy Living
Committee for implementation in 2003. The Healthy Living Committee at that time
decided to go ahead with this approach because they agreed that seeking more input and
feedback from the clients and volunteers was a good idea. Only two of the Healthy
Living Committee members that were present when this decision was made remained on
the Healthy Living Committee at the time of this research, in the fall of 2005. One
volunteer and I (even though I am no longer on staff) are still members of the committee
and the current Executive Director of the organization, who was a staff representative on
the original committee, remains with the organization. The coordinator of the First
Nations Mentoring Program was let go due to a loss of program funding, the two
volunteers who were co-chairing the Activities committee stepped down after being
involved with the committee for 5 and 8 years respectively, and the staff representative
took another position within the organization and a new staff member was hired. Staff
and volunteer turnover is an unavoidable part of organizational evolution, and is
particularly prominent in non-profit organizations (Slack & Parent, 2005). However, this
provided an opportunity to examine the research questions in a natural environment to
determine how the decision was carried on by new members and was subsequently
interpreted by committee members who were still involved.

The current Executive Director of the organization, who was a member of the
Healthy Living Committee when the empowerment evaluation approach was initially
agreed upon, was asked what the determining factors were in going ahead with this
approach. Her response was:

...the biggest factor was that we were approached to do it...it became ‘can
we implement it?’ (Roberta, staff member).
In this statement it is clear that the organization did not seek out methods for increasing client input or new evaluation techniques, but when approached by me with an alternate method, the organization was receptive. This implies that the organization may have continued along its current path of planning and evaluating activities if another option had not been presented to them.

Empowerment evaluation is a strategy that seeks to help program participants evaluate themselves and their program to improve practice and foster self-determination (Fetterman, 2001). This became one of the main reasons for implementing this approach because there was interest in increasing the input and feedback of the clients by providing a process where the girls and young women's voices would be heard and acted upon. It was apparent when another member of the original Healthy Living Committee was asked why this approach was chosen:

...coming up with activities that the girls will attend or want to attend, and giving them the choice ... the power to make decisions (Catherine, volunteer).

There were a number of activities provided for the clients of the organization to attend, along with their volunteer mentor, most of which were free of charge and organized in a top-down fashion by the volunteer members of the committees. Some activities are well attended, some are not well attended, and some are cancelled due to no attendance. As Catherine stated, it was a task of the committees to determine activities that will interest the clients and then offer these activities to them. When the activities are not well attended, it then becomes the task of the committee to determine why. They would do this based on anecdotal information and their own thoughts and ideas as discussed at follow-up meetings. They have no way of finding out why clients do not attend activities,
only a method of gathering evaluation comments from the participants who do attend events.

The Healthy Living Committee thought that empowerment evaluation would be a strategy to assist them in avoiding unsuccessful activities by increasing client input and involving them in the planning of activities. Similar to the theory underpinning empowerment evaluation, where clients “continually assess their progress toward self-determined goals and to reshape their plans and strategies according to this assessment” (Fetterman, 2001, p. 4), committee members believed that if the clients were involved in the planning process, chose their own program goals and strategies, they would be able to attract other girls and young woman and increase the participation and interest in the programs. They also hoped that by giving the girls and young women opportunities to make decisions, they would choose activities that also would be sought after by their peers. At the time of this research, the Healthy Living Committee had not yet invited clients to join the committee or attend a meeting to discuss their ideas, but they agreed that inviting clients to attend a brainstorming workshop to plan activities should be the next step.

Participants will then be invited to join the committee or to assist with organizing activities, or to become involved in the planning and evaluation of activities in a way that they suggest. I think that with the staff and volunteer turnover, a lack of leadership was experienced and the empowerment evaluation approach was ignored and thus was not completely implemented. Looking back, I think the committee and the staff was relying on me to implement this approach. But I was looking to the organizational management and the chair of the committee to follow through with the next steps. I experienced some tension with my role as researcher, staff, and committee member and was unsure how to
I did not want to force the implementation of the empowerment evaluation approach because I wanted it to be a genuine priority of the organization. While I waited for empowerment evaluation to re-surface as a topic at the committee meetings, the organization experienced significant turnover. The chair of the Healthy Living Committee took maternity leave, a staff member on the committee took the role of Executive Director, the committee representative from the First Nations Mentoring Program was released from the organization due to a funding cut, and two long time volunteers on the committee stepped down. With this turnover, the committee did not meet from March 2004 until September 2005 and, as a result, little progress was made with the next steps of implementing the empowerment evaluation approach.

As a volunteer with the Healthy Living Committee and as a staff member of the organization, I brought the empowerment evaluation approach forward to the committee for consideration because I believed it would be beneficial to this organization. As reflected upon in the following excerpt from my footnotes, this was based on my previous experience where I noticed that only adults were in control of decision-making.

That is just something I have always noticed in my 5 or 7 years with [this organization], and I am not saying its bad and I'm not saying we put out a bad service, but I do think there is room to get more input from the [clients] (researcher footnotes).

As a result, the committee received little input from the girls and young women and there were limited opportunities to allow them to bring forward their ideas or feedback. This confirms the literature that suggests that youth often have little say, little power and few opportunities to voice their opinions (Fiscus, 2003; Mitra, 2004; Brown, 1991). As noted by Brown (1991):
...[this is] a loss which is not alleviated by the strategies of many human services organizations, which simply maintain their clients in their marginalized position. (p. 41)

Without implementing change, the organization would continue on with its adult-oriented top down decision-making structure. When this reasoning was brought to the committee for consideration, there was unanimous agreement that it would be a good idea to seek more input and in effect, to try to change the structure to allow the clients to step forward and take part in a more meaningful way.

There are likely multiple reasons why this type of evaluation procedure was not considered previously and the main factor may have been that no one had ever championed a new process or questioned the status quo. Implementing anything new takes time and energy and the majority of committee members are volunteers who have multiple roles within the organization where they are required to demonstrate leadership and make decisions. While I did not pursue this line of questioning in depth, there were indications that these adults felt they were in the best positions to make decisions for the young female clients and they may have been unwilling to invest more time than what they had already committed. It appeared that norms about how to do the work were accepted uncritically as one volunteer said:

*If it ain't broke, don't fix it* (Patricia, volunteer).

The Executive Director indirectly agreed with this statement when she referred to how the volunteer committees were working at the organization:

...the activities, they are running, there's no problem with them, no one has any complaints about them, people are going to them, so that speaks to the, people value them, our committee is fantastic ... so you know when your time is stretched, you spend your time on the things you can identify wow there are issues here or this is something we really need to improve. The activities have always been something that just seem to go along and everybody likes them* (Roberta, staff member).
This quotation suggests it was assumed that the current adult-oriented and top down approach to decision-making was working because no complaints had been received. Ironically, it was assumed that “everybody likes them” even though there was no process in place to receive feedback from the girls and young women who participated in the activities.

**Integration of Empowerment Evaluation**

When this research project was conceived, one of the questions to be examined was how the empowerment evaluation approach had been integrated into program planning, implementation, and evaluation. Empowerment evaluation has three steps according to the approach advocated by Fetterman (2001). The first step is to come up with a mission or vision statement for the program or service in question. The second step, taking stock, involves identifying and prioritizing the most significant program activities. One suggestion is to have program staff members and participants rate how each program is doing on a scale of 1 to 10 and discuss the ratings. The third step involves stating goals and strategies to achieve their ‘dreams’ for the programs, with an emphasis on program improvement. Strategies are designed to accomplish program goals and efforts are monitored using credible documentation obtained through ongoing evaluation, which then becomes part of the continual planning process.

After the Healthy Living Committee agreed to adopt the empowerment evaluation approach, two consecutive meetings were held in the fall of 2003 where the first three steps of the empowerment evaluation approach were followed, as outlined above. This included the adoption of the following mission statement for the Healthy Living Initiative: “to promote self-esteem by educating, encouraging and empowering girls to
make healthy lifestyle choices” (program brochure, 2005). The committee then went through the exercise of rating the activities in the Healthy Living Initiative and chose 5 key program areas to focus on. They then developed strategies for each area and ideas for how to reach their goals. The members of the committee were then tasked with taking the strategies that had been identified back to their representative committees (First Nations committee, Activities Committee) to gain input and agreement with the 5 key areas, as mentioned in chapter 4, and the specific strategies that involved their respective committees.

The meeting that was then scheduled to be held, to go over this input from the other committees, did not occur. This was the time when the organization began to experience the staff and volunteer turnover that affected the make up of the Healthy Living Committee. A meeting was scheduled for June 2004, but there is no record of minutes and it appears as though the meeting was cancelled and was not re-scheduled until July 2005. At this time, the strategies and 5 key areas identified in the fall of 2003 were outlined to the new members of the committee and new plans for activities were made.

Minimal discussion occurred at this meeting (Healthy Living Committee minutes, July 2005), and in hindsight, I wonder if minimal discussion meant a lack of understanding of the empowerment evaluation approach, instead of unanimous agreement, as originally interpreted. The subsequent meetings that I observed (September 2005 and January 2006) contained a lack of questioning regarding the empowerment evaluation approach and the further implementation of it, again pointing to a lack of interest or understanding of the process needed to complete implementation. “Evaluators teach people to conduct their own evaluations and thus become more self-sufficient”
The training that occurred in 2003 was not transferred to the new committee in 2005 and this new committee should have received some training on evaluation as part of their introduction to this committee. The training on evaluation would have assisted them to understand the need to include clients in planning and evaluation and to have multiple methods for obtaining client input.

Although the initial steps to the empowerment evaluation began in 2003, it was not completely implemented over the course of this study. My observations were that there was a hesitancy by the committee to invite clients to participate before the new committee had established itself and put in place a system for planning and evaluation. Although this is contrary to the empowerment evaluation approach, in that the clients should have been invited to participate in the first three steps of the empowerment evaluation process, it did not happen. When empowerment evaluation was not mentioned, when no one questioned why the next meeting had not been scheduled, I began to wonder if I should continue to ‘push’ this through or if I should wait until others began to question why implementation was not occurring.

Simultaneously, the Healthy Living Committee received a grant for funding which included the production of printed materials on the Healthy Living Initiative. Much of my time, of which only a fraction is spent on the Healthy Living Initiative, was spent on producing the deliverables for this grant and integrating the materials into various levels of the organization. Although this is not part of the empowerment evaluation approach, it took priority because it was attached to funding. Unfortunately, it happened at approximately the same time as the adoption of the empowerment evaluation approach and took priority because funding issues are always moved to top priority in this non-profit organization. My job description at the time was to increase funding and I
took personal responsibility on new grants that came in and made sure the deliverables were completed. Much of the progress that was made on the implementation of the empowerment evaluation approach was due to my personal time commitment outside of my job, and when my personal time became more limited, the Healthy Living Initiative and implementation of the empowerment evaluation approach, was ignored. Taking on the role of facilitator, it was my job to train the other members or “coach” them into conducting their own evaluations (Coombe, 1997; Fetterman, 2001; Sullins, 2003), so that eventually, they could plan and evaluate the program without my input. Maintaining my position as the “expert” on empowerment evaluation, although unintentional, was an obstacle to implementation. The expertise needs to be shared with the group, so that one person is not relied upon to continue the process, and the evaluation responsibilities become shared (Fetterman, 1996). The goal with training is to have the evaluation procedure become institutionalized and avoid “re-training” of new volunteers and committee members. Secret et al. (1999) question “the extent to which these skill and commitment to evaluation are maintained by empowered program stakeholders in the long term” (p. 127). This remains a question that is of interest to researchers.

In an effort to increase input and feedback from volunteers and clients, one of the strategies that has been adopted is to hand out simple, half page evaluation forms at the end of each activity for the clients and their mentors to fill out and return to the activity organizer. The Healthy Living Committee has taken on the responsibility of revising these “Activity Evaluation Forms” and ensuring that these forms are handed out at each activity put on by the organization (see Table 2). With this evaluation form, the committee feels it will receive immediate feedback on the activity, information as to why the client attended, as well as providing the opportunity for the clients or volunteer
mentors to indicate whether they would like to assist with planning or organizing future activities.

This evaluation form is the first concrete step taken by this organization to seek feedback on the activities provided for the clients in an effort to integrate the empowerment evaluation approach. The limitation of this method is that they will only be seeking input and feedback from those who attend activities. They still have no way of knowing why clients do not attend the activities, which would be very valuable information for them. Another limitation to this method is filling out forms each time can become a chore if clients frequent activities.

Table 2

Activity Evaluation Form

1. Did you enjoy this activity? Why or why not?
2. Why did you attend today?
3. Have you attended other activities in the last year? (YES/NO)
   If yes, what recent activities have you been to?
4. What other activities would you be interested in?
5. Would you like to HELP US or be more INVOLVED? (YES/NO)
   If YES, would you like to:
   ___ volunteer on a committee ___ other (please explain)
   ___ help organize an activity ___ help at the next activity
   Provide your name and phone or email and we will contact you!

Thank you!

Although the organization has 260 current mentoring matches, the activities tend to attract much lower numbers of participants. There are many reasons why this happens. Some matches do not want to attend activities because they just spend their time doing activities by themselves and do not wish to participate in groups, some cannot make the
time of the events, or are not available on weekends when most activities are scheduled. Others are unable to get in contact with their match early enough to register for events and some are just not interested. Some of the larger group activities, such as the summer picnic and Halloween party can attract up to 40 matches (80 participants in total), but some of the smaller activities may only attract 5-10 matches. This could be a direct result of the clients having no input in planning and decision-making and feeling no ownership or interest in the activities currently being offered. There is no guarantee that the comments on the form from the girl or young woman will not be influenced by her mentor, as they are attending together. They can also not guarantee that everyone will fill out a form and return it. One volunteer mentioned that she and the girl she mentors enjoy filling out forms in the following comment:

I usually look for the evaluation... she enjoys the evaluating... she loves it... she wants the form, even if she just writes “good” and “like”, she wants to do that. I am big on participating in evaluation type activities too, so I look for that stuff, and if I don’t see a form, I usually give it anyway, that’s kind of just how both of us function (Paula, volunteer).

Another volunteer echoed a similar comment:

...well I know that whenever there is an evaluation form at the end of a workshop it is my [client] that wants to fill it out (Christine, volunteer).

By the mere fact of volunteering to come to the focus group, the clients and volunteers who participated demonstrated their personal interest in sharing their opinions, and it is not known if this interest is more wide spread. With the small sample size, it cannot be determined how many girls and young women, or volunteers, will share this opinion, and enjoy filling out an evaluation form, but it is encouraging that there is some interest in this evaluation method.
During one client focus group, the participants were asked if they would feel comfortable filling out forms and handing them in to the organizers when they did not enjoy an activity. Both clients replied “yes”. I was surprised by their eagerness to respond and explained the question again, but they seemed undaunted by the question or the circumstance and answered “yes” again. Upon reflection in my field notes, I wrote the following passage:

*The girls seemed eager to provide their opinion and to respond to my questions. I noticed their lack of intimidation of me, as the researcher, or by my questions* (researcher footnotes).

I think their responses demonstrated the clients’ eagerness to have their opinion heard, therefore emphasizing the need to provide more opportunities for them to have a say in decision-making. It is also possible that they just could not imagine the feeling of intimidation if they had to respond negatively to the adult activity organizers or maybe they imagined that they could stand up to any circumstance, without having experienced that situation previously.

Clients were not asked specifically if they would like evaluation forms to fill out, instead they were asked if they would like to provide input and feedback and how they would like to do that. The clients’ ideas for gaining their opinions on activities before they were planned were “email”, “more groups” and “mail”. No one specifically mentioned an evaluation form, but they may not have thought of it as an option, or they may have assumed it was already a method being used if they had seen one or filled out an evaluation form at a previous activity.

There was no documentation of reaching out beyond these evaluation forms to clients who do not attend activities, but once the data from these forms has been captured, the committee may decide to send out a targeted email, mail, or an on-line survey to all
clients asking for their input and feedback on an annual basis. The organization has a schedule of “match reviews” that are done in person by a counselor with the client (and a parent/guardian if the client is under 12) to review the mentoring match. This could provide an opportunity in the future for the counselor to ask the client about the program of activities in person, ask for their ideas on new activities or feedback on activities they have attended and invite the client to attend a brainstorming meeting, an activity or a committee, thereby further integrating the empowerment evaluation approach more.

The organization has been developing a strategic plan for the last 12 months and is in the process of completing the staff input portion, which includes the work plan to achieve desired goals. A staff person, who is a member of this committee, discussed how empowerment evaluation will be integrated into the strategic plan when she said:

*I think it can probably end up being part of the strategic plan. The reason being we have to have staff assigned to it. We can’t just say to [the office assistant] oh guess what, we are doing this now. All of the hours she works are accounted for, so in order to make this work, it has to be part of the strategic plan* (Sandra, staff member).

Having this particular staff member on the Healthy Living Committee is beneficial in ensuring that the staff time necessary to implement the empowerment evaluation approach will be embedded in the strategic plan for the organization. Without this, it would have to rely on volunteers, which would provide less organizational integration of the approach. The staff time necessary includes time to input the data collected from the evaluation forms. This data needs to be entered into a spreadsheet so that it can be collected in a consistent manner and forwarded to committee members for their review.

An important step of this evaluation process is making sure that the information collected is then utilized and that clients have a say in what to do with the information. The key tenet of empowerment evaluation is having the clients involved in program
planning and, although the evaluation forms is only one way of collecting feedback, it is important for the clients to be at the table, having a voice, when the decisions are made to deal with the information that has been collected and to plan the next steps. Fetterman (2001) contends, "people often feel empowered and self-determined when they can select intermediate objectives that are linked to larger, global goals" (p. 7). By having the clients involved in the next steps of planning the activities program, based on the feedback received through the various evaluation techniques, the clients will be able to set out plans for future activities that will be linked to larger Healthy Living Initiative objectives to better benefit from the empowerment evaluation approach. Thus, empowerment evaluation has the potential to benefit the organization as a whole.

When examining documents of the organization, there is little or no written evidence that the empowerment evaluation approach has been adopted as part of the Healthy Living Initiative. It is recorded in the Healthy Living Committee meeting minutes, but does not appear in the Healthy Living brochure that was produced later by the organization. The brochure does contain one bullet point that asks for "activity ideas", but this form is directed at the adult volunteers, not the clients, and it does not encourage them to seek these ideas from the girl or young woman they are matched with. Although there is a section on "Planning" in the Board of Directors manual, which is updated annually, there is no mention of the empowerment evaluation approach or any method of evaluation. The planning section is dedicated to the annual planning that has been taken on by the board, with limited staff input, and the annual or bi-annual objectives that have resulted from this planning process. No materials have been created that are directed at the clients or that involve ideas or input from the clients.
In an examination of the manual, the website, and all informational brochures, there is no evidence to suggest that the organization seeks input or feedback from the clients it serves. In this case, Ristock and Pennell’s (1996) suggestion of analyzing what is “not said” provides more information than what is said. That is, even though the Healthy Living Committee has adopted the empowerment evaluation approach, they have not integrated it into organizational materials, raising questions about how committed the organization is to the approach. When asked, committee members were unable to explain how it has been integrated because they were unsure. The staff member referred to the strategic plan for the organization and that empowerment evaluation might appear in those documents. The organization may have been assuming I would assist with updating the manual to include information on the empowerment evaluation approach, but I am no longer employed there. I also think that they view this as a specific committee function and it is up to the committee to print their own materials to be included in the manual, especially if they want to mention something specifically.

Benefits of Empowerment Evaluation

The benefits at the start-up phase of implementing empowerment evaluation were another area that was examined. As will be revealed below, the responses regarding benefits fell under two main themes: empowerment and innovation.

Empowerment

*I see the word empowerment and I think about how it applies to this social group of girls. ... Giving these girls empowerment, they don’t have a lot of that in their life* (Anne, volunteer).

The term empowerment evaluation intrigued some of the volunteers because it resonated with their personal goal for getting involved with this organization as a mentor. However, the above quote, although well intentioned, demonstrates a lack of understanding by this
particular volunteer, and most likely by other volunteers, on the meaning of empowerment. Labonte (1992, p. 51) contends that empowerment can be a dangerous term when used transitively as “bestowing power on others” rather than intransitively, meaning the “act of gaining or assuming power” which identifies no object as having the power. The goal is to create an environment that is conducive to empowerment rather than trying to “empower” others. Cargo et al. (2003) describes an empowering environment for youth as one where the adults give up responsibility for decision-making and action, thereby making it available for youth to take. In future discussions of empowerment evaluation, and when the term “empowerment” is raised, it will be important for me to explain the term and explain that the volunteers are only able to create empowering environments for the girls and young women, they cannot “empower” them directly. If the adults of this organization want to do their part to “empower” the clients, they need to follow the steps of the empowerment evaluation approach and include the clients in the decision-making structures where they are able to gain responsibility. Even if these guidelines are followed, empowerment may remain an elusive target (Scriven, 1997; Patton, 1997; Schnoes, 2000). Without proper guidelines or a measure of empowerment it is difficult to determine who becomes empowered and how. Future research needs to be conducted in this area to determine exactly how and if empowerment occurs.

When asked what benefits they saw of gaining input and feedback from clients through the evaluation forms, one volunteer had this to say:

...another benefit I see, for the [girls] it gives them empowerment, they have a say. It’s not always just your [mentor’s] opinion. I always get [her] to fill out (the evaluation form)... and they just feel like they are more involved with the activities that way. It’s like, hey, your opinion counts (Jennifer, volunteer).
The evaluation forms are meant to be a voluntary exercise for the clients, although this volunteer alludes to the fact that she “gets” the girl she mentors to fill out the form. It needs to be stressed that the information collected will only be useful if the clients participate willingly and with interest. If the client fills out the form to satisfy or to please her mentor, the information collected will be less useful to the organization. This is also another reason why it is important for the committee to develop more than one method of seeking information from the clients.

The clients unanimously agreed it was a good idea to ask for their opinions prior to planning activities and when asked, the girls and young women were clear about what they like or dislike and about how they wanted to be treated. For example, one client responded:

...for some stuff I’m sure it might be better for [the organization] to just decide that, but you know, its fun sort of too if they ask you what do you think about that idea, do you think it’s a good idea... and then you know, they get to know what [we] also want to do (Ella, client).

This client appears to believe that it is ‘okay’ for adults to make decisions at times, possibly because she has bought into the “adults know best” way of thinking and has experienced adults making decisions for her during her life. O’Donohue et al. (2002) found that “youth, too may need experiences that alter their frames about what is possible for young people” (p. 23) before they can realize their potential in a decision-making capacity. But this client also believes that it is important to find out what the clients want to do and not just rely on what the adults “think” they would enjoy. She associates being asked with having ‘fun’, and she feels she would be able to tell the organization what she and her peers would like to do for activities. This demonstrates the benefits of the process.
for both the client and the organization. Another client agreed that it would be beneficial to gain their input:

*I think it would be better... because most of the time, it is really boring activities* (Caitlin, client).

With this comment, the client referred to activities that involved a lot of sitting down, which she found “boring” because there was not enough “active” movement and “running around”, which is ironic given the goals of the Healthy Living Initiative. This client clearly had a high energy level and wanted to be very active. Because of the diverse mix of clients, and their diverse tastes in activities, it is important for the organization to involve a diverse mix of clients when planning activities. Fiscus (2003, p. 59) emphasizes the importance of diversity and stresses that “recruiting young participants from groups not traditionally asked can be very powerful and yield long-term benefits.” These important perspectives are currently being missed by this organization because they are not reaching out to those not attending activities to get their perspectives on planning and evaluation. Nor are they making a concerted effort to make sure they reach out to a diverse mix of volunteers and clients. Currently, only those who come forward are included, thus missing a large portion of the 260 matches who may have interesting and new perspectives to offer.

Another important comment that came from a client when asked if she would like to provide her ideas and input is the following:

*Yah. Otherwise it is just about adults* (Jill, client).

Although a short statement, it holds a great impact for this organization. This is a clear reflection of this client’s view on how decisions are being made on programs that are being provided for the youth in the organization. By including only the views of the adult
decision-makers, she is suggesting that important perspectives of the clients are being overlooked (Brandon et al., 1993). In citing myths of youth participation, O’Donohue et al. (2002) contends that those who defend more adult-controlled policies and practices view “youth as problems to be fixed or dependents to be taken care of” (p. 19), rather than as resources to be engaged in creating change. It appears that this organization is treating the youth involved more as dependents and has taken on the role of making decisions for them, rather than treating them as more equal partners. Although not malicious in intent, this behaviour can be devastating to youth who may become used to an environment where their opinion is not counted or valued. In an organization striving to build the self-esteem of girls and young women, the current decision makers need to re-think their structures and how this may affect the youth whom they are striving to build up. As evidenced in Fiscus (2003), youth gain confidence when involved in meaningful ways and can develop new skills and leadership experience while becoming role models for their peers, all valuable reasons to engage the current clients rather than trying to “take care of them”.

“Youth participation has been linked to greater organizational sustainability and effectiveness” (O’Donohue et al., 2002, p. 16) and the committee is hopeful that by receiving more input and feedback from the clients, and providing activities based on this input, that increased ownership over the programs will occur that will lead to increased participation. This is evidenced by the following statement:

... when you talk about empowerment it’s all about getting their buy in, you want to give them what they want and how do we know unless we ask (Patricia, volunteer).

This volunteer understands that they cannot give the clients what they want without asking them and also believes that the process of involving the clients may increase their
ownership in the program. Sullins (2003) found similar motivation for establishing empowerment evaluation in a drop-in centre:

Staff and consumers hoped that by becoming engaged in evaluation skills, consumers would learn to take more ownership of their center and help it continually grow and develop (p. 390).

Self-determination is another major element of empowerment evaluation and clients in the focus groups were asked if they wanted to be asked by the organization for their input prior to planning activities in an effort to gauge their interest. Mitra (2004) found that students gained a stronger sense of their own abilities when they participated in decision-making. In one focus group, two clients were discussing their frustration with the lack of input at their schools regarding activities that were being planned for them:

_Yah, like at school I wanted them to change the grade 7 grad... we tried telling them but they are not really listening and they’ve tried to take a step, now they are going to Playland_ (Jill, client).

When asked if the school asked them or just planned the event without consultation, she replied:

_Nope, they didn’t ask._

When asked how they feel when their input is not used, this same client replied:

_On the outside I’d be like, who cares, but I think I’d be angry and sad._

These quotes demonstrate how the clients want to be consulted on activities and events that affect them. It also demonstrates how, unless asked, they will not share how upset they may be with the process. These again reinforces the need to reach out to those clients who do not come forward with their opinions, because they all have opinions, but they may not choose to express them unless specifically asked.
Collectively, the data collected supports the argument to continue to change the shift of research "on" youth to research "with" youth and treating the girls and young women as partners in the decision-making process (Fiscus, 2003).

**Innovation**

The program of activities provided are meant to engage both the volunteers and the clients so they can participate in them together, and, although the activities program is supplemental to the "core" mentoring program, it has evolved into an integral part of the organization, and one that sets it apart from other similar organizations.

Innovation was another recurring theme under the benefits of the empowerment evaluation approach and the notion of being able to provide innovative activities for the clients. The committee is always looking for new ideas that will attract a larger number of clients as well as new clients that maybe have not participated in the past. One client stated how she felt she could provide valuable information to the organization:

*I can like tell them what activities, I think other [participants] would enjoy* (Jill, client).

This client alludes to the fact that the organization needs to be told what the clients would enjoy participating in by the clients and that the adults may not always "know what is best" for the girls and young women. Another client suggested that the age difference between the girls and young women and the adult decision-makers may play a role:

*...plus things are way different then anyway. Like when people on the board were younger it was probably different* (Ella, client).

Both quotes are symbolic of the clients who participated in this research. Although their statements are simple and concise, upon examination, they are very telling and reflect the desire of the clients to be involved and to have a say, where the current planning and evaluation system does not let them have a role.
Based on my experience in this organization, I know there is a tendency to repeat the same activities year after year if they have been successful. One volunteer stated her desire for innovative new ideas rather than a repetition of the old ideas.

*I think it keeps us from falling into a routine, or a rut* (Patricia, volunteer).

Another volunteer commented on the difficulty she has in coming up with mutually agreed upon ideas with the young woman she mentors, suggesting that, as a middle class adult, she may not know what is best:

*I think the brainstorming should come from the [girls]. I keep thinking I have good ideas, but they are met with 'ugh' and 'eyeroll'* (Sue, volunteer).

Both of these statements support the inclusion of the clients in the planning process in order to gain new, fresh, and innovative ideas that will intrigue the clients and meet their needs for new activities. This last quote also emphasizes the need to engage the clients to discover their ideas that will be based on their personal experiences and backgrounds, which are different from those of their mentors.

When asked what their favorite activity was that they had attended, one client said “snow tubing” and she explained why:

*Because it's really fun and it gives you some exercise as well* (Angela, client).

This particular client was interested in exercise as she felt it was important. She also suggested a running or jogging program as part of the Healthy Living Initiative and the following quote demonstrates her understanding that exercise is good for both mental and physical health:

*Because it helps your mental, it helps your legs* (Angela, client).

Other clients also demonstrated their interest in exercise and being healthy as part of their interest in participating in the activities offered. Two clients were brainstorming various
locations of 'jungle gyms' and other places where you could be active for the following reason:

... because they have stuff to play on and you can run around and exercise and have fun at the same time (Jaimie, client).

The interest expressed by these clients is noteworthy given that the research indicates that children in low-income families are much less likely to participate in organized sports (CPRA, 2001; CFLRI, 2001). Although children and youth living in poverty in Canada lack access to recreation opportunities, these clients did have experiences with some type of recreation and enjoyed it enough to want to repeat it. It appears that the majority of the clients that participated in the focus groups were interested in recreation or exercise and they may have been attracted to the focus group because it was about the Healthy Living Initiative. Further investigation will be necessary to discover the extent of the interest in physical activity of the clients.

Innovation can be gained from having clients added to committees and seeking out ideas from new sources as reflected by Fiscus (2003,) in the following quote,

...young people can be active, valuable members of groups traditionally made up only of adults, bringing a refreshing, youthful perspective and recharged energy to the group. (p. 58)

When asked, the clients were able to come up with a list of new activities that the organization could put on, including: yoga, swimming, an art contest, participating in fun runs, games at the beach, rock climbing, surfing, tennis, motivational speakers, hiking, active games, and group outings to jungle gyms.

The girls interviewed had many ideas based on their personal interests. Some involved getting a group of clients together to play games or have art contests with various art supplies and prizes. One group indicated their desire to have a toy or food
drive, or to raise funds for the homeless, or for “kids in foster homes that don’t get anything”. The fundraising is an interesting idea from these clients because it demonstrates their empathy towards others that may be as a result of their own gratitude for receiving the services that they do from this organization and a willingness to help others in the community. This is an excellent example of the new and refreshing ideas that the clients can bring to the program - ideas that have not been conceived by the adult committee members who are focused on raising funds as a survival strategy (Slack & Parent, 2005). This was acknowledged in the following quote by a volunteer:

It is a good way to see if we are providing what the [clients and volunteers] require from this whole program, also gaining input and seeing what the different interests are. What we like and what they like are maybe two totally different things (Jennifer, volunteer).

The realization that there are probably differences that exist between what the volunteers are planning and what the clients would want to see is an important first step in implementing empowerment evaluation. Now, the volunteers need to take the next step to engage the clients and tap into their ideas and their interests more by allowing them to have a greater role in decision-making.

Challenges of Empowerment Evaluation

There were many challenges brought forward with the implementation of the empowerment evaluation approach, suggesting that is not as easy to implement as implied in the literature. The three main themes I identified were: input, access, and lack of resources.

Input

Input is the first thing needed to start the evaluation process. If input it sought and not received, the committee has to review its process and find a new way to get input instead of assuming that there is a lack of interest.
One of the challenges in obtaining input is always getting people to fill out something. At the end of something most people are trying to go home... if you get people to take it with them, you may not get it back (Sandra, staff member).

The members of the committee are currently focused on the evaluation forms as their main method of receiving input from clients. But, as evidenced by the above quote, it may be difficult to gain input this way. The next step for this committee is to implement other methods of gaining input that are more consistent with the empowerment evaluation approach and go beyond simply obtaining evaluation forms. According to Fetterman (2001) “goals should be established in conjunction with supervisors and clients to ensure relevance from both perspectives” (p. 31). He continues by suggesting a brainstorming approach to generate a new set of goals (Fetterman, 2001). Clients need to be brought into this process of brainstorming to become engaged in the planning process since they have not been involved in the process up to this point. The evaluation forms could be used as part of the committee’s method of “documenting progress” (Fetterman, 2001, p. 34) towards the goals, once the goals have been established with the clients being included in the process. A brainstorming meeting with clients, volunteer mentors, and committee members should be the next step in establishing new goals that the committee can monitor using the evaluation form method. Seven out of the nine clients in this research study indicated their interest in being involved in the future, which provides a good rationale for including the clients not only in the planning process, but also engaging them in the work of the committee.

When asked if they would like to give their feedback, the clients unanimously agreed that they would. Unfortunately, the clients have not yet been involved in the Healthy Living Committee, so they were not part of the decision-making when the
evaluation forms were chosen as a method of feedback. It would have been useful to have the clients input prior to developing the evaluation forms, but the committee will have to include them at a later time in order to get their feedback on the forms. Because they may be unaware of the evaluation forms, the clients did not respond directly that they would fill out an evaluation form after an activity, but they did indicate their willingness to respond to on-line forms and to surveys received by mail. Both involve time and the effort of writing a response, so evaluation forms may be a successful way to gain feedback from the clients, but it will need to be tried for a period of time to see if it is effective.

When asked how the organization could ask her, one client’s response was to send “letters”, and when asked if she would respond to mail, she added:

*Yes,...I love mail* (Ella, client).

Most other clients who participated in this research echoed this response, but it is not known if the majority of clients share this view. Study participants all indicated a willingness and an interest in receiving mail or email. Due to their young age, mail may still be an exciting form of communication for them and, although expensive and traditionally having a low response rate, it may be an effective form of communication for at least some clients.

One volunteer theorized on why the young woman that she mentors is reluctant to participate:

*... she is really bright, really insightful, but she is really reluctant to get involved and I don’t even know if she is aware of it* (Anne, volunteer).

This volunteer, and the committee, need to analyze why it is that this client, and possibly others, appear to be “reluctant” to get involved. It is possible that this client has not been
asked for her opinion in a way that is meaningful to her or maybe she has not been asked directly. Maybe she thought only her mentor was being asked for her opinion and therefore kept her opinion to herself. It will be important for this committee and for the volunteers to make sure that if information is wanted from the clients, that they are asked directly and in a way that is understood and meaningful.

**Access**

Access was noticed as another theme that was repeated when discussing challenges of the empowerment evaluation approach. With the challenge of getting input, there is a need to reflect on how that input is sought to ensure that everybody involved has access. The options suggested by the clients in the focus group were email, mailed out surveys and meetings or focus groups, similar to the one they were attending. It was also suggested by one client that a “feedback box” could be included on the website. The challenge of access with email and website surveys or feedback is if everybody does not have regular access to email or the internet. It is difficult to gauge how many clients have regular access to email, but many of the clients in the focus groups indicated that they do have email. Two out of the eight clients who participated, indicated that they do not have email or do not have computer. One client had this observation about client access to email:

*Well, obviously not every [client] has an email, but sending out letters to those who don’t, so we have a say in what we want to do* (Jill, client).

She clearly emphasized the need for the organization to contact all clients, not just the ones with email, so they can have a chance to participate in the planning and evaluation of activities. The majority of the clients interviewed could have just assumed they would be able to answer by email because it is a widely accepted form of communication by
their peers. They may have been reluctant to admit that they do not have access to email, or they may have assumed that they could access email through other sources if required, such as school, the library, friends, or their mentor. Because many of the clients come from low income families, it cannot be assumed that they do not have email access, as records indicate that many do. As well, being from low income families does not provide a guarantee that even if they do have a computer with internet access that this access will remain consistent in the future. This presents the challenge of maintaining an email list that may have consistent changes. One client responded to the question about how to gain input with:

Well, they send a lot of emails, and lots of [volunteers and clients] have emails so they could send one saying you know, this is [the organization], we were thinking of doing this, respond and tell us what you think of this idea (Ella, client).

Another challenge with email access was brought up by this volunteer about the young woman she mentors:

...[she] gets her email privileges taken away quite easily (Christine, volunteer).

Another challenge brought up by a volunteer about the young woman she mentors was:

...she doesn’t have email or a computer and they rarely have a phone, so it would have to be in a separate location that we would come and attend (Leslie, volunteer).

More research by the organization will have to be conducted to determine if email is a viable way to contact clients.

Physical access is another issue that was raised by the clients. When asked how they get to events, they replied:

Usually I just walk to my friend’s house, or I meet my [mentor] some place (Jaimie, client).
Usually my [mentor] meets me somewhere and then picks me up in her car (Caitlin, client).

I usually walk (Melissa, client).

The organization currently relies on the adult mentor to bring the girls and young women to events, as many of the clients are not of age to drive, in some cases are too young to take the bus alone, and may not have a car at home. The client will have limited ability to attend events or meetings based on their mentor’s schedule, which creates another challenge to involving clients in the planning and evaluation process. As Fiscus (2003, p. 62) states, “if youth are involved as equal partners, groups need to find a time to meet that allows all to attend.” Taking access issues into account will be important for the committee to gain, and maintain, the involvement of the clients.

Lack of Resources

Another challenge to implementing the empowerment evaluation approach is the resources available.

Fetterman (2001) discusses the limitations of empowerment evaluation including that fact that it is time consuming and more difficult than traditional evaluation. Other examples of attempts to implement the empowerment evaluation process have agreed that significant amounts of time, energy and resources need to be devoted and available (Secret, 1999; Schnoes, 2000). These may be reasons why empowerment evaluation has not yet been implemented in this organization. The time and resources needed to implement this approach has not yet been allocated to ensure complete implementation. Although the staff and committee agreed to this approach, it appears they have been trying to implement it without spending any more time than they traditionally have on evaluation. Resources to take over this shortfall were not allocated, and the
implementation process was delayed. In the final chapter, I talk more about what the organization and I could have done to increase capacity to possibly enhance the uptake of the empowerment evaluation approach.

Resources are currently not allocated to create a direct communication link to the clients. Even though some clients do have email access, they are currently not receiving opportunities to get involved with the decision-making structure. A communication gap is created because the organization sends information to the adult mentors hoping it will be passed on to the client.

We do have a couple [clients] on the e-news list and they are [ones] who have specifically requested to be on it. They tend to be the older [clients]. I don’t know if the [adult mentors] pass it on so much. I don’t think that a lot of our [clients] have email, but I do think that the [mentor] sort of screens through the e-news for the things that interest them and then pass that information on. So, definitely I think the way that that is set up it does create a gap for all the information to get to the [client] because it is only natural that the [mentors] are only going to present the ones that they are committed to attending. We don’t really have a direct communication link that way (Roberta, staff member).

Without regular contact from the organization, the clients will be less likely to be asked for their feedback directly as any requests that are sent out via email, such as the e-newsletter, will always go through their adult mentor first. The organization needs to find a way to contact the client directly if they want to gain their individual feedback that is not influenced by the adult mentor. One client mentioned this in her comments:

...usually the [mentor] gets the events coming up and [we] usually don’t have time to go so it would be nice to get the schedules for the [girls and young women] too (Haley, client).

In this case, the client may not be aware of some activities that are being offered, unless the mentor brings it to her attention. If the organization wants to make sure that
information on an activity is sent to the clients, they will have to make sure that they have some form of direct communication with the clients.

Once the organization devotes the resources needed to implement the empowerment evaluation approach, then they will have to pay attention to the other practical challenges, such as input and access.

Sustainability

The sustainability of the empowerment evaluation approach was the final research question of this research project. As it is still in the early stages of implementation, I attempted to find out what the staff, volunteers and clients thought about the potential sustainability of this process. Two sub-themes were repeated under sustainability were commitment and interest.

Commitment

The general theme on commitment that was repeated by staff and volunteers was that the organization needs to embrace this approach in order for it to work, as reflected in the following quotation:

... commitment, that starts at the top I guess, in the organization. Where, in the greater scheme of the 'must haves' and the 'nice to haves', I guess a decision has to be made on that. Because it will fall by the wayside if its not, if a commitment is not made to it, right? (Patricia, volunteer).

Patricia states her concerns about not having a commitment and how items typically get placed low on the priority list. Another volunteer echoed this statement:

... 100% commitment to follow through on it...from staff, and not that it gets left behind on the wayside somewhere and you are wondering where; because I am all about, okay when am I getting this form, will I get it by my next meeting so I can introduce it; like, people need to be accountable, and I think this is also a way of showing that, yah, we are accountable and this is what we are doing and this is what is happening (Jennifer, volunteer).
Her statement also reflects her own personal need to have this commitment from the organization in order for her, as a volunteer committee member, to fulfill her obligation to the organization to follow through on the evaluation process. She does not want to tell the membership that a process is going to happen if it is going to be left “on the wayside” by the staff members who need to get her the information so she can be accountable.

Although the empowerment evaluation literature does not mention the necessity of having an organizational commitment, it would seem appropriate that the organization needs to be committed to the process in order to make sure it happens. Schnoes (2000) contends that:

...stakeholders must find it useful to commit to a level of responsibility for the evaluation effort that may be greater than that required in more traditional approaches. The scope and manner of this new mode of participation have not been made entirely clear in the existing literature. (p. 63)

The examples used in the literature reflect an assumption that an organizational commitment exists before the steps of an empowerment evaluation approach are followed. But, as evidenced in the comments by the staff and volunteers in this organization, a commitment needs to be expressed for them to continue with the empowerment evaluation approach.

**Interest**

Interest in the process will be another factor that will affect sustainability of the empowerment evaluation approach. When it becomes embedded in program planning, it will still be necessary for the clients, volunteers, and staff who are responsible for the process, to keep it running. When one client was asked if she would be interested in being a part of this process in the future, her reply was:
Yes, I would, and there would probably be a lot of others who would too (Ella, client).

In fact, six out of the eight girls and young women who attended the focus groups replied that they were interested in being involved in the empowerment evaluation process, through the Healthy Living Initiative, in the future. Some also agreed that they would like to have a leadership position as well. It will be important for the organization to utilize the information gathered from the clients in order to keep their interest. Fiscus (2003, p. 62) found that “if [youth] can see their opinions are valued, they’ll remain interested, constructive participants”. One client was intrigued with her involvement in the planning and evaluation process and likened it to the student council at her school:

*I want to make a “Council” – you know like a Student Council... I don’t know... you could have just 12 or so [clients] they could, just figure out some plans and it might be easier* (Jill, client).

One client also expressed her interest in being involved in a focus group or meeting:

*Yes, because then you don’t just express your feelings, you make friends* (Caitlin, client).

Volunteers also expressed their interest in being involved by providing their input:

*I always like to be asked for my input or opinion, yes... I think the [clients] would like it too* (Sue, volunteer).

These statements display an interest by the clients to be involved with their peers and to be involved in the decision-making process of the organization. The initial reaction from clients and volunteers, as well as the commitment from staff to integrate this process into the strategic plan of the organization, reflect positively on the potential sustainability of the empowerment evaluation approach in this organization.

Recommendations for the organization on how to move forward with the implementation process and how to actively engage clients in the decision-making
process appear in the next chapter, along with recommendations for the clients and for further research.
Chapter 5

Discussion and Recommendations

In this chapter, I will address the question “what is to be made of it all?” (Wolcott, 1994, p. 12). I will summarize the study’s findings in relation to the literatures on the empowerment evaluation approach and youth decision-making. Finally, recommendations will be made for the case study organization, for the clients, and for further research.

Implications for the Literature on Empowerment Evaluation

Empowerment evaluation is a strategy that seeks to “help program participants evaluate themselves and their program to improve practice and foster self-determination” (Fetterman, 2001). Empowerment evaluation theory is very intriguing as it incorporates program participants, in this case, the clients of a non-profit community service organization, into the program planning and implementation through an evaluation process that becomes institutionalized in the organizational practices. The aims are to allow the program participants to become empowered through collaboration, shared decision-making and program implementation, and provide them with increased self-determination. A fairly recent theory that was introduced in 1993 by David Fetterman, it has scarce examinations of practical applications beyond those facilitated by the theory’s creator or by the empowerment evaluation team that he works with at Stanford University (Fetterman, 2001). This study addressed a gap in the literature by examining the implementation of the empowerment evaluation approach in a non-profit organization that included the perspectives of female youth who are clients. As the statement below suggests, implementing empowerment evaluation can be challenging:
Many elements must be in place for empowerment evaluation to be effective and credible... participants must have latitude to experiment, taking risks and responsibility... an environment conducive to sharing successes and failures... an honest, self-critical, trusting, and supportive atmosphere is required. (Fetterman, 2001, p. 6)

Additional required elements identified through this case study were a commitment by the organization and a strategy for including the clients based on their input. The members of the Healthy Living Committee, who saw the implementation of this approach as their responsibility, viewed organizational commitment as critical. They were adamant that this approach not get left “left behind on the wayside somewhere” and that there is “100% commitment to follow through” to ensure it continues.

In the literature, it appeared that a commitment is assumed to be in place prior to the undertaking of this approach. The case study site agreed to take on the empowerment evaluation approach, but based on this research, their degree of commitment is questionable. It was also difficult for the clients to become committed as they were not included in the planning or implementation of the process. Upon analysis, no documentation of this commitment appeared, and no steps to implement the empowerment evaluation approach had been taken two years after the organization agreed to it. From my experience with this organization, I think they may have agreed to something without considering all of the organizational implications that go along with this, such as staff time and resources. Because of the turnover that is characteristic of non-profit organizations (Slack & Parent, 2005), a detailed outline of what is entailed in that commitment in terms of staff time and organizational resources would help ensure continuity. This can be significant in the start up phase, and hopefully, as the process becomes “institutionalized” and “part of the normal planning and management of the program” (Fetterman, 2001, p. 6) the resources needed, will decrease.
Currently, the organization is still struggling with implementation. They have evaluation forms, as part of their method of gathering input and feedback that they are trying to have distributed at each activity, but these were decided upon in a top down fashion and it is questionable whether clients will be interested in filling them out for each activity. These are then to be returned to the organization for input by a staff member into a spreadsheet so that the information can then be given back to the committees for evaluation and planning, yet no clients currently sit on the Healthy Living Committee. The struggles with implementing this process is the staff time needed to input the data once it is returned and more time should have been taken to involve clients in decision-making about this process. One of the staff members has said that it will need to be included in the overall strategic plan of the organization in order to become part of an employee’s work plan. If this does happen, then this portion of the process will become institutionalized and part of the ongoing work of the organization, but it is questionable whether this process is desirable. There were no clients present when the committee came up with this idea, which goes against the approach advocated by the theory of empowerment evaluation. The theory states that planning and evaluation are to be participatory processes that will increase the self-determination of the clients who are lacking in the power of self-determination (Patton, 1997), but the committee reverted to the top down adult oriented process that they have used in the past and determined an evaluation process that they felt comfortable with instead of including the clients in this decision-making process. This was most likely done in this manner because it is a quicker process to make a decision with only the committee members present and because, as evidenced earlier, the committee did not have a complete understanding of the empowerment evaluation process and the importance of including the clients in the
decision-making and not just asking them for feedback. The committee needs to include clients in planning and evaluation so that they can have direct feedback that can be used in planning activities and evaluating them. Not only would this be useful to the committee, it will also have many benefits for the clients, such as skill development and experience working with committees.

As stated by Patton (1997), it is “the participatory and capacity-building outcomes targeted at groups lacking the power of self-determination” that is a determining factor in empowerment evaluation. Because the approach was not completely implemented, it would be assumed that neither the volunteer committee members, nor the clients, received increased self-determination. Unfortunately, in this case, the capacity building that was done in the beginning stages of empowerment evaluation was not transferred or repeated with the new committee members. When the committee experienced staff and volunteer turnover, the new committee was not taken back to the beginning stages of empowerment evaluation. As the facilitator, I should have started the process again with the new members and reviewed the mission statement and repeated the process of evaluating the current programs, as outlined in the initial steps of implementing empowerment evaluation, as was done with the original committee. I thought that if the information put together by the previous committee was brought to the new committee for discussion, and potential changes, it would have similar results as repeating the process. Upon further reflection, the new committee missed out on the original capacity building that took place and inherited a process instead of creating their own. The committee would have been better able, and interested, to follow through on the empowerment evaluation process and take it to the next steps of implementation if they had gone through the initial steps themselves. This also would have facilitated a more
shared leadership model instead of relying on me as the facilitator to champion the process and see it through to implementation. I think that as the original leader of the empowerment evaluation process, I was viewed by the organization to be the champion and the only one who was going to implement this model. This is not a role that I intended to take on, but one that was assumed as I did not spend the time necessary to develop shared leadership and to develop other champions in this process. A shared leadership structure would have been able to continue implementation even through the changes in staff and volunteers that did occur.

A glaring weakness in the process to date is the fact that the clients have not yet been engaged in the planning and evaluation process and have not yet had the opportunity to learn the tools or processes to evaluate the Healthy Living Initiative. Clients need to be included on the committee so they can have a say in the planning as it takes place and they can be part of the evaluation of the programs as they happen. Capacity building needs to take place with the clients as well to better enable them to have meaningful participation in the planning and evaluation process. Simply asking for client input, without giving them tools and experience on what exactly planning and evaluation are, is not going to equip them to become involved in an empowerment evaluation process. For meaningful participation they need to be able to understand the process and contribute to the decisions that are made. If the committee is to embrace client participation, they will include the clients in training on evaluation and planning as well as giving them information on the past work of the committee and including them in the process of coming up with a working model for the committee that everyone agrees on.

In order to provide empowering environments for their clients, the committee will need to bring in the clients and engage in a collaborative process to determine what type
of evaluation processes to implement. The clients will need to be given tools and educated on different forms of evaluation in order to increase their capacity to make these decisions. Simply allowing the clients to “sit in” on a meeting will not increase their self-determination. It is also important to include an equal number of clients to volunteers on the committee to ensure that a power imbalance is not created. Having one or two clients included may only provide token input and not really give the clients any power to have a voice in decision-making. The committee will need to give up some decision-making power to the girls so they can then take the power (Cargo et al., 2003) and feel the benefits of being involved and having a meaningful role in the decision-making. Giving up power must mean allowing the clients to have a say in the decisions and for the committee to decide collaboratively, and treat the client input with the same weight as the input from the adult volunteers. Allowing the clients to be engaged in the process is the beginning, but actually giving up the power needs to be demonstrated in real terms by allowing the clients to give collaborative input on items such as setting the agenda, leading the discussion, and deciding on outcomes (Frisby et al., 2006). The process is to be collaborative, so giving up total control is not desired, and realistically would not occur in an organization with adult oriented structures already in place, but is a factor for the organization to keep in mind. A collaborative process will allow all parties to feel they have been heard and had the opportunity to contribute to the outcomes that are decided.

It is possible that the organization may engage the clients without allowing their input to change the status quo. In this research, six clients expressed an interest in having future involvement, and, although six out of the eight interviewed is considered positive feedback, it is only a small percentage of the 260 clients in the organization. This small
percentage may make the organization reluctant to allow any changes in the current planning and evaluation process because a majority of clients will not be represented. To gain more client input, I think I should have attached my research to events that consistently draw a large number of client participants rather than trying to have additional activities that competed with other activities put on by the organization. The timing of my study was not conducive to attending some of the larger events, unfortunately, but for future input for the committee they will need to look at such events as Summer Camp, the Summer Picnic and the Halloween party as possible avenues to access large numbers of clients and seek their input and interest in future involvement.

When the clients and the current decision makers exist in an unequal power structure, it may not be realistic for a small percentage of clients to influence change within an organization that traditionally has not included the clients in decision-making. The clients are generally from low income families, have multi-ethnic backgrounds and are all under the age of 18 while all of the current decision makers are adult and generally are white, middle-class women. For the girls and young women in this organization to state their desires and articulate ideas for changes to this group of women who currently hold the power, may be difficult. These girls and young women may not have experience voicing their opinion or working on a committee where everyone collaborates towards a final decision. Given their backgrounds and family situations, they may be used to having others tell them what they should do and what they should want and may not be able to express their own feelings and ideas. And if they are able to do so, it does not guarantee that change will occur. If the girls and young women become involved in the decision making process, attempt to have their ideas heard, but see little or no evidence of their ideas being implemented, it is likely that they will lose interest and may disengage from
the process. Cargo et al. (2003) found that youth’s self-confidence was linked to adults believing in them, which strengthens the need for the committee to take the clients’ role seriously and not treat it as a token.

The committee needs an inclusive strategy to reach out to the girls and young women who may not attend the activities and to the participants who may not be interested in filling out evaluation forms. I have suggested to the Executive Director and to the committee that we should host one or two meetings a year where the clients are invited to “brainstorm” new ideas and get their feedback on previous activities as well as ideas for the upcoming year. Both were receptive to this and I have volunteered to assist in organizing an event for the fall. When asked, the girls and young women in the organization suggested email or mail surveys as a method of gaining their feedback and also expressed an interest in attending meetings. Six out of the eight participants wanted some type of involvement in future decision-making. Two clients indicated that email may be a difficult communication tool due to lack of a computer and this needs to be taken into account given that most of the clients are from low income families. All of the clients agreed that receiving something in the mail would be a good form of communication, but this is questionable as mailed materials are expensive and may not be read. On the other hand, as the focus group participants were between ten and fourteen, mail is rare and may be exciting to receive, so this may explain why they were keen to receive it. Experimenting with different forms of communication, based on the feedback received from the clients, would provide the organization with information regarding the best strategies to reach and involve their clients.

Six out of the eight clients also indicated that they would be interested in getting together in a group format again, similar to the focus group format. One client phrased
her reason for this as "you not only get to express your feelings, you get to make friends", which is an indication of their desire for social contact with the other youth in the organization. Some of the girls and young women who are referred to the agency program have reasons such as: low self-esteem, lack of friends, or are socially isolated (Board of Directors manual, 2006). These reasons back up the desire for social contact with this new group or potential friends in this agency and may fulfill their need for socializing as well as their desire to be involved in planning, implementation and evaluation of the Healthy Living Initiative.

Although the participants in the study were interested in future involvement, the details of that involvement were not completely discussed. As stated by Coombe (1997), implementing the empowerment evaluation approach “takes a great deal of time, effort, and personal commitment which both evaluators and community members may find difficult to make” (p. 303). The clients in the focus groups indicated that they would be able to attend meetings, fill out surveys, and answer emails in an effort to provide their opinions, ideas and feedback to the organization. Some of them indicated their interest in taking on a leadership role and joining a committee or starting a “client council” similar to a Student Council. But, according to the empowerment evaluation literature, the participants (clients) are to become responsible for carrying out the continual evaluation and subsequent planning of the program along with the other volunteer and staff committee members. Sullins (2003) also alludes to the fact that Fetterman:

...assumes that with the facilitation of an evaluator, stakeholders are capable of and willing to invest in the ongoing processes of evaluation design, implementation, and analysis in order to continually assess and improve their program. (p. 395)
The time, effort, and commitment, may be difficult for these clients to make on a continual basis which may not contribute well to the empowerment evaluation approach. The need for continuity of the same participants is not outlined in the literature, but with the turnover of the committee members, volunteers and the clients, it is difficult to predict what level of consistency may be maintained with this procedure. It will be of interest to examine the success of the empowerment evaluation approach in a committee that experiences a high degree of turnover and whether that impacts the effectiveness of it.

**Implications for the Literature on Youth Decision-Making**

The youth decision-making literature advocates for making youth a partner in decision-making and planning. Recent literature indicates that youth are capable of contributing to formerly adult groups and committees and can add value, not only to the group, but to the organization and the community, while improving their own feelings of satisfaction (Cargo et al., 2003; Mitra, 2004; Fiscus, 2003).

Although this case study site was not far enough into its implementation to research clients involved in the process, I was able to talk to the them about their interest in being involved in the process. Seven out of the nine clients indicated they were willing to be involved in the Healthy Living Committee in the future. They indicated all levels of involvement from “helping out at activities; to “make them more fun” to “attending more groups like this”. They also indicated their willingness to fill out surveys that were emailed or mailed to them about their ideas and feedback on activities. The organization should consider engaging youth with interactive meetings and brainstorming sessions, consistent with suggestions by Fiscus (2003) of keeping youth members involved. Activities like “go arounds” and “brainstorms” that ensure everyone’s voice is heard and “inviting youth to facilitate meetings or participate in other meaningful activities on
behalf of the group” (p. 62) would facilitate this involvement. It would be more engaging to them to join the Healthy Living Committee than to simply respond to on-line surveys and questionnaires. The organization will need to make a concerted effort to reach out to their clients in person and make sure they have many opportunities to participate.

One unique area in this research study is the relationship that the clients of this organization have with a volunteer mentor. Their involvement in this organization is reliant upon this relationship and the activities are arranged for the matches to participate in together, which is consistent with the mission of the organization to “increase the self-esteem of the child through a one-to-one relationship with a female adult mentor”. This would create a unique dynamic at a planning or brainstorming activity because it would not just be for the clients, but also for their adult mentors. The same would be offered for any committee participation, as it would have to be open to the adult volunteer mentors to accompany the girl or young woman they are matched with as well. The groups would have to be facilitated in a way that allowed the girls and young women to voice their opinions without being influenced by their volunteer mentors and in a way that the volunteer mentors are not allowed to dominate the conversations. For example, at a meeting or workshop session, the group could be divided into an adult group and a youth group where they could brainstorm their ideas and then share them in the large group discussion afterwards. This would also provide an interesting way to display similarities and differences between the two groups. It would be interesting to examine this method and see what the results were and whether or not the girls and young women felt they were able to get their ideas and opinions across in a meaningful way.
Recommendations for the Organization

I think it has become clear that this organization needs to reach out to the clients and include them much more in the planning and evaluation process. They need to develop a system or structure that will assist the staff and volunteers to do this on a consistent basis. Recommendations for the organization include:

1. Host quarterly planning meetings and invite client participation. Send a dedicated email to the membership and have the counseling team invite their clients personally and encourage participation. Providing food and ice breaking activities would help to create a welcoming environment, especially for new comers.

2. Invite clients who express interest in joining the Healthy Living Committee and develop a meeting time and strategies that allows for their active participation. The first meeting with clients should review the previously established goals and discuss possible evaluation methods.

3. Send information and notices of activities directly to the clients so that they can make their own decisions about what they would like to attend or participate in. Develop a client list to receive the e-newsletter. Once the clients have been receiving regular contact from the organization, they will be more familiar and hopefully more willing to respond to future requests for input and feedback.

4. Include materials in the training session of volunteers that specifically refer to treating youth as equal partners; that explain the nature of empowerment; and that emphasize the need to resist the urge to “take care of the client”.

5. Send an annual survey to all clients asking for their ideas and input. Provide some sample ideas so that those who have not participated in the past have a reference point. Set out guidelines for using this data in a time sensitive manner and ensuring that youth are present when the data is analyzed and used for planning purposes.

6. Offer leadership roles on committees for clients in the organization and ensure there is an environment created that will allow the clients to take on the leadership and decision-making roles.

7. Make a statement of commitment to the empowerment evaluation approach and publish it in the organizational materials, such as the Board of Director’s manual, the program brochures, and the website.

8. Add to the current list of organizational values: a commitment to receiving input and feedback directly from the clients and a commitment to treating youth as equal partners.
9. Invite youth to be involved in a planning session that outlines the planning and evaluation process for the organization, including timelines, inclusiveness strategies and guidelines for the utilization of data collected.

10. Add youth to all program committees and make committee guidelines stressing the importance of having the clients represented on all program committees and the need to arrange committee meetings to allow all to participate.

11. Create materials that are directed at clients that seek their input and involvement on various committees and allow clients to have input and be involved with the design and content of these materials. These materials can be given to new clients as they enter the organization.

**Recommendations for the Clients**

The clients of the organization, the girls and young women, are the ones who are to benefit from the programs and services offered by this organization. The clients need to understand that they have the right to speak up, to express their opinions, to get involved with the planning and organization of activities and events that are put on for their enjoyment. The clients who participated in this research study indicated their desire to become more involved; they just need a forum for getting involved, which must be created by the organization in consultation with them. Recommendations for the clients include:

1. Find a way to get involved and express your opinion to the organization. Consider participating in planning meetings that seek youth input and feedback.

2. Participate in organized activities to help you think of new ideas.

3. Tell your mentor of any ideas or feedback and ask for assistance to get these ideas to the committees that make the decisions.

4. If you feel comfortable, take a leadership role in a committee along with other clients.

5. Suggest ways that the organization can include youth in program planning and evaluation. Tell them how you would like to be involved and what they can do to facilitate this.
Recommendations for Further Research

This research study was limited in scope, as it was a single case study conducted at one point in time. A major limitation was that only 8 of 260 clients participated in the study and more research is needed to determine if the views uncovered are more widespread. Never the less, it did raise some interesting questions that could be investigated in future research. For example, Secret et al. (1999) indicated a need to measure the self-determination of the participants in an empowerment evaluation approach to examine if self-actualization is achieved through this process. With this case study site, there could be an opportunity to set up an empowerment evaluation approach and to examine the levels of self-determination with the participants at the beginning of the process and examine comparative values at certain points throughout the process. There are other questions of context and time frames that can effect the implementation of an empowerment evaluation approach that could also be identified with further research.

1. Develop a scale to measure the self-determination of the participants at the beginning of an empowerment evaluation approach. Measure again to develop comparative values throughout the process and at an end point to see if self-actualization is achieved.

2. Examining this organization over time to see if the empowerment evaluation approach is sustainable, what factors are affecting the sustainability, and whether the empowerment evaluation approach becomes integrated into the organization’s practices beyond the Healthy Living Initiative.

3. Identify contexts of an organization and time frames that make implementation possible. Include factors such as inconsistent participants, staff and volunteer turnover.

4. Examine other organizations that target female youth to see if there are similarities or patterns that emerge.

5. Further research on organizations such as this case study site where the clients have a mentor to examine if the clients are able to participate fully in an empowerment evaluation approach.
REFERENCES


Appendix B

Focus Group and Interview Question Guide

Interview Questions for Healthy Living Committee Members (Volunteers/Staff)

1. How long have you been involved with this organization and in what capacity?
2. How long have you been involved in the Healthy Living Initiative and in what capacity?
3. Obtaining ongoing client input is a key feature of Empowerment Evaluation. Why do you feel this is important for the Healthy Living Initiative (or not important?)
4. What would be the challenges involved with obtaining this input? (RQ3)
5. What are the potential benefits of obtaining this input? (RQ3)
6. What other factors were considered when deciding to implement an Empowerment Evaluation approach within the Healthy Living Initiative? (RQ1)
7. What do you think are the benefits of this approach? (RQ3)
8. What do you think are the challenges to this approach? (RQ3)
9. How has the Empowerment Evaluation approach been integrated into program planning, implementation, and evaluation? (RQ2)
10. Do you feel that these changes are sustainable? Why or why not? (RQ4)
11. What would you like to see happen? What could be done differently?
12. Do you have any other comments regarding the Healthy Living Initiative or the implementation of the Empowerment Evaluation approach?

Focus Group Questions for Volunteers

1. How long have you been involved with this organization and in what capacity?
2. Why did you come here today?
3. What do you know about the Healthy Living Initiative?
4. Obtaining ongoing client input is a key feature of Empowerment Evaluation. Do you feel this is important for the Healthy Living Initiative? (RQ1)
5. Does this organization ask for your input on planning activities? Specifically, Healthy Living Activities? (RQ2)
6. Do you think it is realistic for the organization to gain feedback an input from the volunteers? The clients? (RQ3) Why or why not?
7. Would you like the organization to ask for your input and feedback on the Healthy Living Initiative? (RQ2)
8. Would you be interested in becoming more involved with the Healthy Living Committee beyond today’s meeting? (RQ4) How would you like to be involved?
9. If you could design the Healthy Living Initiative, what would you do?
10. How do you see your future involvement, if any? (RQ4)
11. Are there any questions that I haven’t asked that you think are important?
Focus Group Questions for Clients

1. How long you have been involved with this program?
2. Why did you come today’s meeting?
3. Have you attended group activities before? If so, which ones? Did you have a favorite one? Why was it your favorite?
4. What did you like about the activities offered by this organization? What don’t you like about them?
5. Have you heard about Healthy Living at this organization? Please tell me what you know about it.
6. How would you design the Healthy Living program?
7. Do you think it is a good idea to ask you (group) for your ideas and thoughts before the organization plans activities? How do you think the organization could do this? (RQ3)
8. How do you want the organization to ask for your input when planning activities? (RQ1)
9. Would you be interested in becoming more involved with the Healthy Living program beyond today’s meeting? (RQ4) How would you like to be involved? Would you be interested in taking a leadership role?
10. How do you see your future involvement, if any? (RQ4)
11. Is there anything that would not allow you to become more involved?
12. Do you have anything else to say regarding gaining your feedback or on the Healthy Living program? Are there any questions that I have not asked you?
Appendix C

Documents Reviewed

Newsletters – 4 (previous year)
Brochures – general and program specific (4)
   Values
   Programs
   Ethics/policies
   Evaluation procedures
   Input procedures

Healthy Living Committee meeting minutes (2003- current)
Website Content
E-newsletter
Information and orientation sessions package and script
Evaluation (Review) forms
   Volunteer – Match Review (4 month and 1 year)
   Primary Match Review (4 month and 1 year)
   Client – Match Review (4 month and 1 year)
   Volunteer – post match evaluation
Appendix D
Data Analysis Coding

Major themes

Factors considered when Implementing Empowerment Evaluation
   New Approach Presented
   Engaging the Clients

Integration of Empowerment Evaluation
   Limited Implementation
   Committee Turnover
   Evaluation Forms

Benefits of Empowerment Evaluation
   Benefits - empowerment
   Benefits - innovation

Challenges of Empowerment Evaluation
   Challenges - input
   Challenges - access
   Challenges – lack of resources

Sustainability of Empowerment Evaluation
   Sustainability - commitment
   Sustainability - interest