



# ENGAGING YOUTH IN BICYCLE ADVOCACY

A case study on why youth ride and 10 rules for adults working effectively with teens

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LEAGUE OF AMERICAN BICYCLISTS  
2013-2014 EQUITY ADVISORY COUNCIL

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**CAROLYN SZCZEPANSKI** is the Director of Communications and Women Bike at the League of American Bicyclists and provided staff support for the internship, as well as editing and design of this report.

**IMAGES** by Local Spokes. Learn more at [www.local-spokes.org](http://www.local-spokes.org) and view additional photos at [www.facebook.com/localspokes](http://www.facebook.com/localspokes)

## BACKGROUND

Local Spokes was a promise of a fun summer of biking all over the Lower East Side in New York City. But getting to help my own community develop biking infrastructure was the cherry on top.

In the Lower East Side and Chinatown neighborhoods, there are low-income residents, people of color, immigrant communities, and youth who lacked a voice when it came to neighborhood planning processes. Local Spokes, a coalition of nine community organizations, was created to develop community involvement in the planning of biking access and infrastructure for the LES and Chinatown neighborhoods.

Part of the initiative was a Youth Ambassadors (YA) Program, which included survey and visioning sessions to obtain opinions from the neighborhood and weekly, exploratory bike rides so we better understood the streets and urban planning. As part of the program, I learned about the community organizations near me. The coalition members came from different advocacy viewpoints, ranging from affordable housing to urban planning.

*The only way I can describe Local Spokes is that it was a pair of glasses that created a different lens when I looked at my neighborhood.*

Local Spokes also gave me a lot of opportunities to grow myself. I had a chance to improve my public speaking skills when I spoke to residents and commuters on the streets during the survey process and visioning sessions. I was invited and able to give my keynote speech at the Youth Bike Summit after gaining confidence — all thanks to Local Spokes.

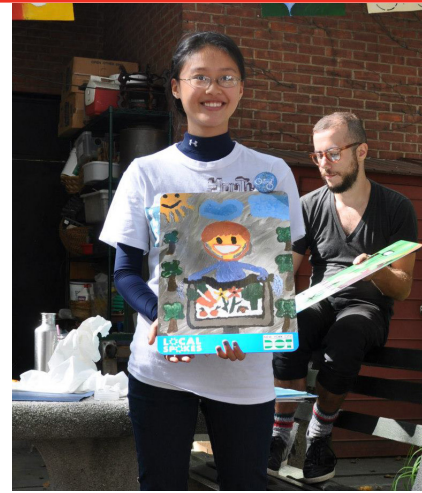
Most important of all, though, the Local Spokes YA Program allowed me to explore and influence change in my very own LES neighborhood. My bike gave me a voice in a community with a lack of voices.

In early 2013, I was invited to be a member of the League of American Bicyclists' first Equity Advisory Council, which is aimed at increasing the engagement and leadership of youth, women and people of color.

*To better understand the motivations and effective means of working with young leaders, I conducted a six-week, project-based internship with the League, working with the Local Spokes Youth Ambassador group in summer 2013.*

This report shares the insight and ideas gained from this project. It also includes lessons learned on creating a project-based youth internship and a national survey on youth and bicycling.

- Devlynn Chen



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## INTRODUCTION

Recently, the League of American Bicyclists has researched and created reports on motivations and obstacles that women and people of color face when it comes to biking. While the League has a growing array of information and statistics regarding women and people of color on bicycles, it currently lacks information on youth biking.

*My internship's goals were to research the motivations and obstacles of youth biking and to identify ways to engage youth in bicycling advocacy.*

As part of League's Equity Advisory Council (EAC), I am the youth voice. I try to give the members of the EAC a different perspective. But the challenge being on the EAC has been that not everyone on the EAC had experience working with youth. Therefore, they could not communicate appropriately. My study was to generate a survey to help adults in these situations by making a list of suggestions to deal with young adults in a work environment.

My motivation to start bicycling grew from having a not-so-busy summer. Local Spokes was a promise of a fun summer of biking all over the Lower East Side. *Local Spokes introduced me to the different aspects of advocacy that led me to the EAC.* First it was just learning about my cause. Then it built my enthusiasm for biking, which spurred my participation with Recycle-A-Bicycle's Youth Bike Summit.

Local Spokes is a coalition of nine community organizations based in the Chinatown and Lower East Side neighborhoods in New York City. Local Spokes advocates for biking, biking infrastructure and affordable housing. For the past three summers, Local Spokes has organized a Local Spokes Youth Ambassadors Program, engaging NYC high school students who live or go to school in the neighborhood. These Youth Ambassadors (YA) meet up twice per week for six weeks in the summer to learn about biking, biking advocacy and the advocacy topics of the nine community organizations.

For my internship, I worked with the YA as a case study. I created a two-part survey that involved answering questions about their motivations for riding and any obstacles that inhibit their riding. In addition to the survey, YA were guided through a series of discussions that led to the forming of a list of rules for adults on how to engage teens in an advocacy conversation.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF LOCAL SPOKES:  
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## WHAT MOTIVATES YOUTH TO RIDE?

This process started off with a survey that took information on demographics and questions that pertain to the motivations and obstacles of biking for youth. The survey was given to seven YA —five boys and two girls — during the first week of the program and given again during the fifth week of the program.

The first survey included the following questions:

» **DO YOU OWN A BICYCLE?**

A: Yes, No

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» **HOW LONG DO YOU RIDE?**

<15 mins, 15-30 mins, 30-60 mins, 60+ mins

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» **HOW OFTEN DO YOU RIDE?**

A: Never, 1x per week, 2x per week, 3x per week, more

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» **WHERE DO YOU RIDE?**

A: Neighborhood, Brooklyn, Manhattan, West Side Highway

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» **WHY DO YOU RIDE?**

A: Fun, Transport, Exercise/Health, Friends Ride, Family rides, Bike program

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» **MOST COMMON FORM OF TRAVEL?**

A: Car, Subway, Bike, Bus, Walk

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» **RIDING PREFERENCE?**

A: Alone, With other people

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» **DO YOU RECEIVE FREE OR REDUCED LUNCH?**

A: Yes, No

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» **ARE YOU COMFORTABLE RIDING ON THE STREET BY YOURSELF?**

A: Yes, No

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» **ARE YOU COMFORTABLE RIDING ON THE STREET WITH A GROUP?**

A: Yes, No

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» **WHAT WOULD MAKE YOU WANT TO BIKE MORE OFTEN?**

A: Open-ended

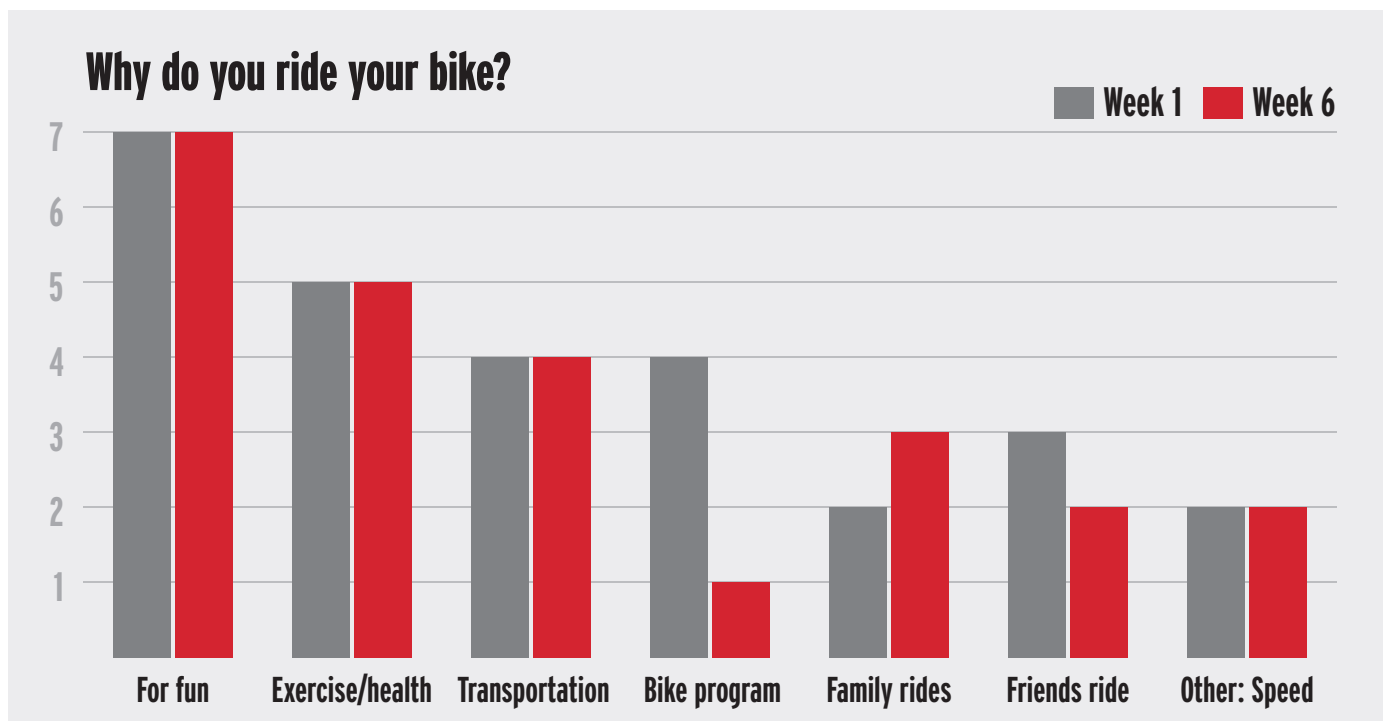
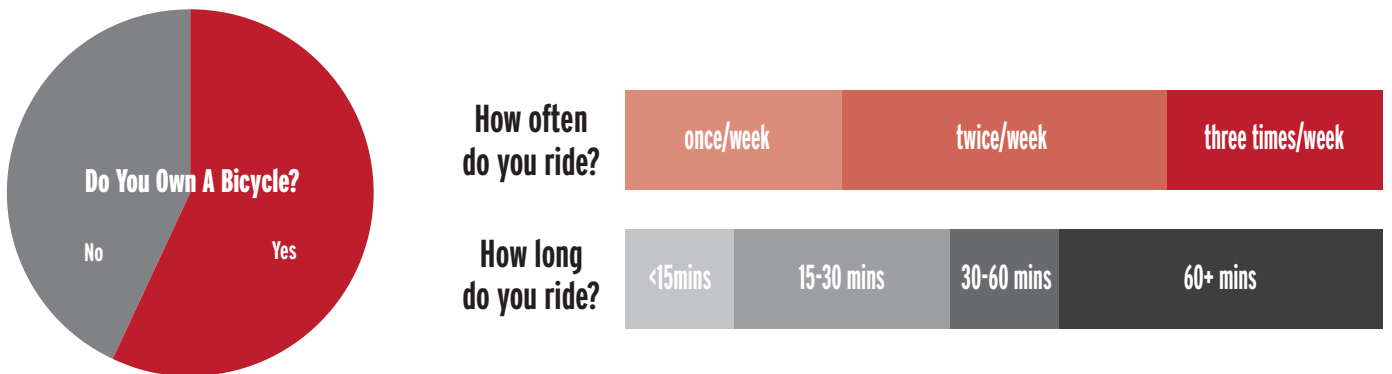
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## RESULTS

At the start of the Youth Ambassadors program, the survey showed that only four of seven participants owned a bicycle but, of those who did, ridership was high. Three YAs rode *more than an hour at a time* and five rode their bikes *at least twice a week*.

The survey also found that *biking was the third* most common form of transportation, behind the subway and walking, respectively. Car was the least common form of travel.

From the first survey, the biggest motivation for all the youth was *riding a bike for fun*, which was selected by all seven participants. The second highest ranked reason for biking was *exercise and health*, with five out of seven votes. Using a bicycle as a *mode of transportation* was also high, receiving four out of seven votes.



Responses for *What would make you want to bike more?* included:

- » Easier bike storage (“not living in a four-story walk-up”)
- » Having more places to explore
- » Good weather
- » Owning a better bike
- » Other people biked to with me
- » Smoother roads with car buffers

At the end of the program, the YA took another survey with similar questions to see if their experiences had an impact on their responses. At the end of the program, the motivations for youth riding were still the same — the majority of youth identified *fun, health* and *transportation*. Also, on both the first and second survey, two youth identified *speed* in the space to add additional motivations not listed.

There were some small changes between the two surveys. For instance, one additional youth selected my parents/family ride. There is a possibility that relatives of YAs are bike riders themselves and introduced YA to the program, which could explain the increase. The number of YA who selected bike program as a motivation decreased significantly (from four to one) in the second survey. This could be due to the fact that YA may not associate bike program with Local Spokes so close to the conclusion.

One lesson learned was the survey itself. The first survey included six open-ended questions that required youth to write short answers. This was not the most effective way to gain input — especially if we aimed to create a survey that could be distributed at a national scale. The major revisions to the second survey included utilizing all multiple choice or ranking questions, with space for youth to add additional insight.

The second survey also included additional questions based on the content of the YA program. For instance, five out of 7 YA said they would be *interested in joining a bicycle advocacy program*.

## GLOSSARY OF TERMS:

Youth are often unfamiliar with jargon or acronyms used by adults in bicycle advocacy. I developed this glossary to ensure youth are familiar with common terms we used in discussion.

LAB: League of American Bicyclists

LCI: League Cycling Instructor

EAC: Equity Advisory Council

Youth Bike: A movement involving the increase of youth ridership

YBS: Youth Bike Summit

RAB: Recycle-A-Bicycle

RBG: Red Bike and Green

POC: People of Color

RFP: Request for Proposal

FTE: Full Time Employee

ROI: Return on Investment

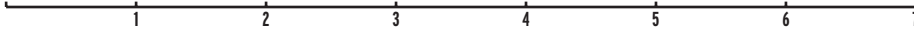


Do you prefer riding



by yourself

with other people



### I DON'T RIDE MY BIKE BECAUSE

- » IT'S NOT RELIABLE BECAUSE OF WEATHER
- » IT IS NOT SAFE
- » I HAVE NOWHERE TO PARK MY BIKE
- » I DON'T HAVE A BIKE
- » MY DESTINATION IS TOO FAR AWAY

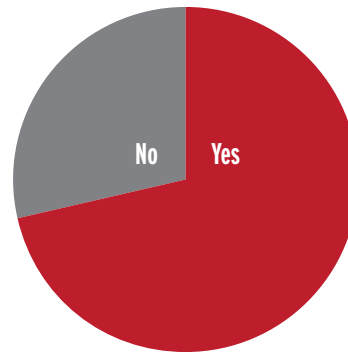
### I WOULD RIDE MY BIKE MORE IF

- » I HAD A BIKE
- » I HAD A GROUP OF FRIENDS TO RIDE WITH
- » I HAD MORE SPACE TO RIDE MY BIKE
- » I HAD A SAFE SPACE TO KEEP MY BIKE

1  %

In the second survey, 100% of youth said they felt comfortable riding on the street by themselves

Would you be interested in joining a bicycle advocacy program?



SEE THE APPENDIX FOR ALL WRITTEN RESPONSES TO OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

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## BRINGING YOUTH INTO BIKE ADVOCACY

Following the introduction and completion of the first survey was an introductory discussion on biking advocacy. Every Thursday for six weeks, advocacy-related discussions were led. The topics ranged from defining advocacy to developing a set of rules for adults to follow when trying to engage youth into the advocacy efforts. Some of the questions and answers are included below.

### *What is bike advocacy?*

- » Speaking out on the impact of bicycling
- » Trying to educate people about the pros and cons of bicycling
- » Provoking more people to participate in biking
- » Representation of people who bike

### *What do you think is the first step to being an advocate?*

- » Having a bike
- » Joining an advocacy group such as Local Spokes
- » Knowing biking rules
- » Learning about biking advocacy with friends would be the best way to start

### *What would make you more likely to become an advocate?*

- » The opportunity to participate / advocate in groups
- » Include bike rides
- » Make advocacy fun
- » Have someone they know ask them to join

### *What are the qualities of the ideal person to get you engaged in advocacy?*

- » Making advocacy fun
- » Being persistent in asking
- » Appealing to youth's emotions
- » Being a friend

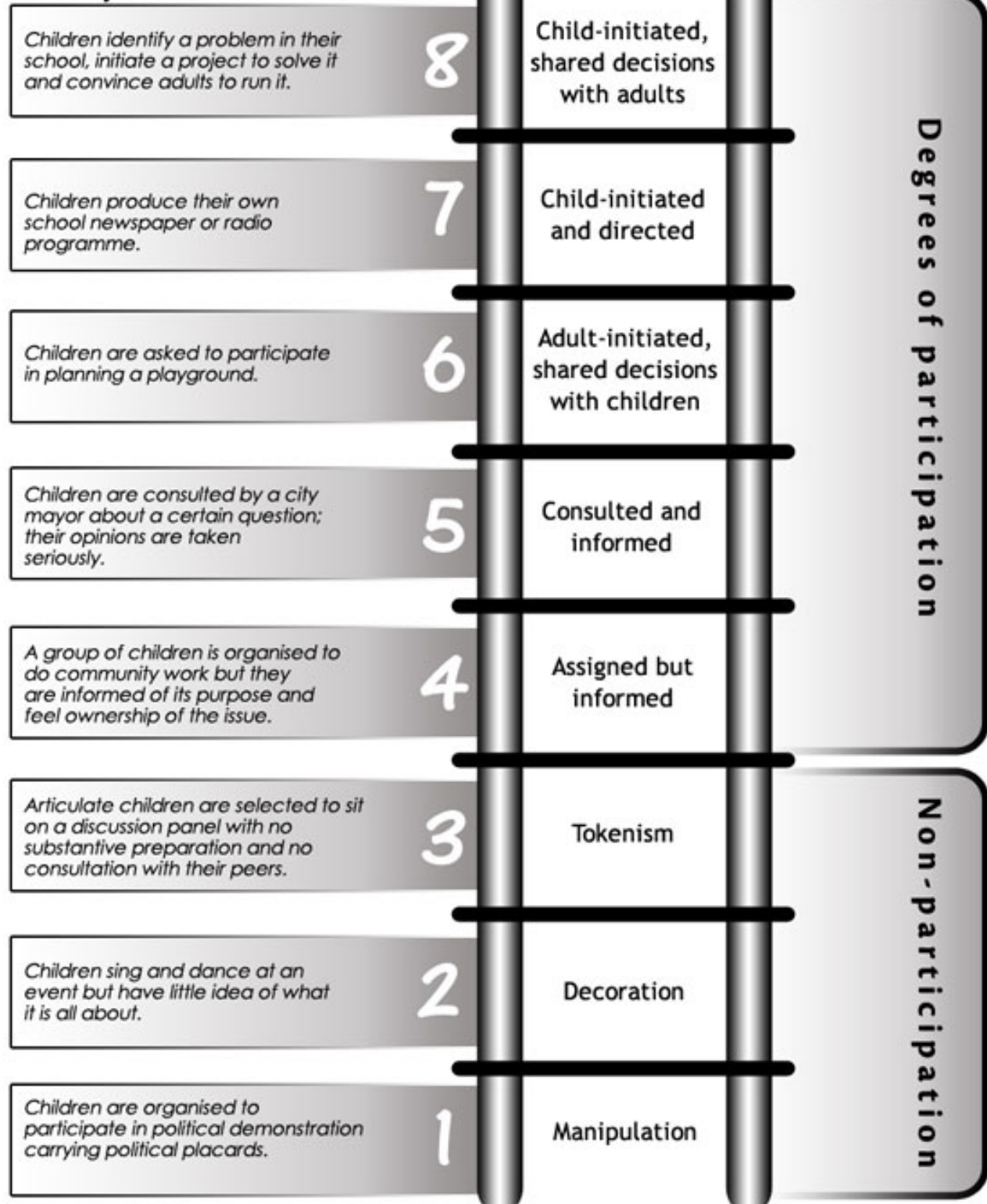
## ENGAGING YOUTH IN MEANINGFUL WAYS

In my outside research during the internship, I discovered Hart's Ladder of Participation. This ladder is a scale of youth participation when working on a project. The top rung is the one with most youth participation where the children initiates the project and adults are listeners, observers and facilitators. The bottom rung is when adults use children as a tool to carry out the adult's message.

In many opinions, tokenism, the third rung, is the most difficult to overcome even amongst adults who want to help young adults. *I think the best way to allow youth to surpass the tokenism rung is to trust that they have the ability to add and build the project.*

## HART'S LADDER OF PARTICIPATION

### Examples



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To assist in the building of that trust, another discussion with the youth was about what *adults say or do to discourage teens in situations*. The purpose of this was to get youth thinking about what students don't want from adults in order to get students to think about what they do want.

Some key responses included:

- » Comparing teen to a “superior” person
- » Telling teens that certain things are impossible
- » Saying that teen is not old or mature or smart enough
- » Patronizing teens

A recurring theme during the discussion on what adults say or do to empower teens was the *way adults spoke to teens*. Several specific situations were shared:

One of the YAs spoke about being a Team Leader of New York Cares, which gave her the responsibility of being the acting adult. In her role as Team Leader, she was asked for input from adults on suggestions to handle a situation. The adults had used a tone only reserved for speaking to other adults with her.

Another YA recalled flying alone on a plane and was spoken to as if he were an adult, instead of a child.

During a group ride, adults spoke to a YA with a condescending tone until the adult found out that the YA was a group ride leader. The YA was treated with more respect by not receiving orders and the adult seemed to care more by asking the youth how her day was.

Another YA's role as a Resident Assistant at school gave her more privileges and, similar to the youth who was a Team Leader, this youth was asked for input from adults when dealing with a misbehaved student.

The *development of rules* started with a discussion on situations where adults were discouraging to teens in order to present a problem. Next, we discussed situations where adults were *encouraging* to teens — the first steps towards finding a solution. With inspiration from the situations, the YAs were each asked to brainstorm three rules they would want adults to follow when it came to an advocacy conversation involving teens.

A dot survey was used to narrow down the collection of rules. The dot survey is when a group of people are asked to place stickers on ideas written on paper that they agree or disagree with the most. Then, they're asked to explain any trends or lack thereof that they see on the survey. The goal is to see which idea has the most stickers and which had the least stickers.

The YAs were given 10 stickers and asked to place, at most, two stickers on the rules they agreed with the most. The youth talked about why they agreed with certain rules, why they didn't prioritize some rules and if any of them disagreed with the rules. The eighteen rules from the brainstorm were narrowed down to 10 after the dot survey.

The rule with the most dots was *Don't assume that teens have nothing to offer*. The youth reasoned that it was not good to assume and therefore took priority amongst the rules.

*No judgment, Be respectful,* and *Always smile* all received eight dots each. The youth ruled that *No judgment* and *Don't assume that teens have nothing to offer* were very similar and could be combined. *Be respectful* was a rule that should always apply to any list.

There was differing opinions when it came to *Always smile*. One youth stated that by having adults smile all the time, the act becomes condescending to teens. In order for the teen to be treated equally, the adult had to be as authentic as possible. The other youth who wanted to keep the rule said that smiling is contagious and will generate an air of good feelings around the group. The compromise was to change the rule to *Keep a positive attitude*. This way, there would be good feelings around and the smile wouldn't be forced or condescending to teens.

Another rule that the YA felt was similar and could be combined was *Be fun and enthusiastic* and *Don't drone on and don't be boring*. The rule "Don't be condescending" was surprisingly not prioritized as the top five, even though the youth talked about this topic a lot when sharing positive experiences with adults. *Trust both parties* was surprisingly the only rule that did not receive dots.

A rule that didn't make the dot survey was *If youth wanted to be treated equally, they must first act like adults*. This rule was not applicable for the list since it was a rule for youth instead of adults.

The final product of the dot survey and the filtering became **10 Rules for Adults in Engaging Teens and Youth**. See page 14.



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# 10 RULES FOR ADULTS

## IN ENGAGING TEENS AND YOUTH

1. DON'T JUDGE AND ASSUME TEENS HAVE NOTHING TO OFFER
2. BE RESPECTFUL
3. KEEP A POSITIVE ATTITUDE
4. BE PATIENT
5. BE FUN & ENTHUSIASTIC (DON'T DRONE ON AND DON'T BE BORING!)
6. DON'T BE CONDESCENDING (i.e. SPEAK TO TEENS AS IF THEY'RE EIGHT YEARS OLD)
7. DON'T FLING INSULTS
8. DON'T BE BIASED; DON'T HAVE FAVORITES
9. BE AUTHENTIC
10. ASK FOR TEENS' OPINIONS

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## CONCLUSION

If the League and other advocacy organizations were to take action from my project's survey and discussions to generate more youth ridership, it should push for:

- » Safer places for bike parking
- » Provide bikes for youth or provide youth with Earn-A-Bike Programs similar to NYC's Recycle-A-Bicycle (a community bike shop)
- » Generate a list of destinations around the city for youths to explore
- » Provide a list of youth oriented group bike rides.

The survey results stated that all the youth identify fun as the number one reason to ride a bike. Some of the main barriers to youth riding are inclement weather, safety and parking concerns, lack of a bike available to youth, and far destinations. It would be interesting to have survey replies from across the nation, and the League will be working to collect additional data through this survey: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/youthbiking>

The biggest challenge of this project was to phrase questions in a way that youth become responsive. The barrier here may be that the youth did not understand or value the objective of the project. It is definitely possible for other advocacy organizations to replicate this internship to not only learn what motivates youth to bike, but to observe the difference in responses from different places. Different youth from different cultures may say that a better way to engage in the community is different than Local Spokes.

When adults interact with youth in advocacy, adults should remember that judgment and assuming youth have nothing to offer is the biggest way to be discouraging. In addition to following the 10 Rules, based on my experience and through this project, I would recommend:

- » Be aware of **school schedules** and other commitments teens have when involving youth in advisory roles or committees. For instance, I was often unable to attend the monthly meetings of the League's Equity Advisory Council because these calls were scheduled at a time when I was in school.
- » During meetings or discussions, consider facilitation that allows for everyone to **have a turn to speak** rather than open conversation, so youth aren't required to step in while others are talking.
- » Reconsider having a single youth voice and allow several or a **small group of youth** to be involved, so youth have peers in the process and aren't expected to speak for all youth.

For the League at the national level, consider creating a national youth coalition through Google Hangouts or other means. This might be more effective after a two-week bike advocacy "summer camp" where everyone meets, bonds, and sets an agenda in person to carry the momentum forward for the remainder of the year. Representatives from this youth group could then meet, face-to-face, with the League's Equity Advisory Council to bond and allow the youth to develop a voice within the EAC.

**LEARN MORE ABOUT LOCAL SPOKES AND THE YOUTH AMBASSADORS PROGRAM AT**  
**[WWW.LOCALSPOKES.ORG](http://WWW.LOCALSPOKES.ORG)**

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## CREATING A PROJECT-BASED YOUTH INTERNSHIP

The internship described in this report was a partnership of the League of American Bicyclists, Recycle-A-Bicycle and Local Spokes. Working in partnership with RAB, the League invited Devlynn to participate in the Equity Advisory Council as a youth voice. Over the first several months of the EAC, League and RAB staff identified challenges in engaging Devlynn in meaningful and comfortable ways. This internship came out of discussions on how to address this challenge and better understand the motivations, concerns and advocacy interests of youth.

Devlynn expressed an interest in a New York City-based internship during the summer of 2013, working with the Youth Ambassadors as a focus group. It was important to the League that this project be initiated and led by Devlynn, so, over a series of calls, with the agenda set by Devlynn, we created a workplan (see page 17) that included important aspects of the six-week internship. Including schedule and location, reporting process, goals, key steps, deliverables and compensation.

During the internship, Devlynn had contact with one specific staff member at the League through calls and email. Some of the discussions focused on: best practices for surveys, how to structure the report and how to tie the work back to youth involvement in the Equity Advisory Council. Devlynn also shared her work during a monthly EAC call in order to gain their feedback on her workplan and draft report.

Through Google docs, Devlynn shared her survey results and report and worked with League staff to edit the final draft of the report.

*-Carolyn Szczepanski, League Director of Communications, Women Bike*

We structured Devlynn's internship so that it was approximately three days per week: One day out in the field with the YA's riding and leading discussions; one day in the office with me meeting, planning, researching, writing; and a half day with our YA coordinator scouting the ride for the following week.

We felt that it was a good mix of interacting with peers, and having quiet planning, research, writing time. I was a little worried because typically for youth internships, I like to have a small group of students working on somewhat similar projects so they can gain meaningful peer relationships, be more empowered to ask questions, and achieve parallel play while working.

This model worked well for having a single intern.

*-Helen Ho, former Development Director at Recycle-A-Bicycle  
League Equity Advisory Council member*



# WORKPLAN

## Duration of internship:

» July 8 – August 16, 20 hours / week

## Schedule / location:

- » Mondays: Work with Local Spokes to plan how to apply advocacy to the topic of the week; work at Recycle-A-Bicycle on the survey and further research on motivating youth.
- » Tuesdays: Work at RAB to compile data from my weekly discussions and edit the survey.
- » Thursdays: Attend Local Spokes sessions to moderate conversation about advocacy.
- » Fridays: Scout the rides for the Local Spokes sessions with Dorothy (LS Staff)

## Reporting:

» Progress report every other Tuesday

## Goals:

- » Identify what motivates youth and what are key barriers to youth riding bikes
- » Identify key steps in engaging youth in advocacy efforts
- » Identify motivations and avenues to engage youth in national bicycle advocacy

## Key Steps:

- » Develop an online survey to find out what motivates youth to ride, what are major barriers
- » Conduct at least 10 interviews with Local Spokes Youth Ambassadors and others
- » Identify 5 ways to circulate survey to interested youth beyond NYC
- » Reflect on personal experience, interviews and external research as to how to better engage youth in advocacy decision-making processes, like the Equity Advisory Council
- » Reflect on personal experience, interviews and external research as to how to better engage youth in national advocacy, like becoming a member of the League of American Bicyclists

## Deliverables:

- » Preliminary survey results (can be in online format)
- » Notes or key quotes from youth interviews (Word doc)
- » 10 Rules for Adults to Help Encourage Youth (Word doc, for design)
- » Summary of findings and steps to engage youth in advocacy (Word doc, for design)



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# APPENDIX

## WRITTEN RESPONSES OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS: SURVEY 1

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### WHERE DO YOU RIDE YOUR BIKE?

Manhattan

Around the neighborhood

Brooklyn / Manhattan

Neighborhoods

West Side Highway

East River Park and around the neighborhood

East River Park, neighborhood

### ARE YOU COMFORTABLE RIDING ON THE STREET BY YOURSELF?

Yes: I feel comfortable about it because I [have] been around most of Manhattan before and I know ways to get to each location

Yes: I'm very careful and alert

It depends! In streets where they have a bike path, where only bike can go on, I am very comfortable

Yes: I have pro haxorz skillz and I'm very aware of my surroundings

Yes: I'm pretty confident about when I should stop or go

### ARE YOU COMFORTABLE RIDING ON THE STREET BY YOURSELF?

Yes: Because I like to spend time with my friends

Yes: More people watch my back

Yes: Because there's safety in numbers

Yes: I feel comfortable riding anywhere with more people

No: People don't go as fast as I do and, if one person stops, everyone behind has to stop

Yes: Easier to determine where to go

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## DO YOU THINK RIDING YOUR BIKE TO SCHOOL IS A GOOD IDEA?

Yes, because it's good exercise and you won't waste natural gases like with a car

Yes, it's a good form of transportation

Yes, because it's energy efficient

Yes, to get there faster

I do not. School is usually in the morning and biking depends on weather, which is not reliable

It is way too far and a train is faster -- meaning more sleep

More fun

## HOW WOULD YOU CHANGE YOUR ENVIRONMENT TO MAKE BIKING TO SCHOOL A REALITY?

More lanes and cars that yield to bikes

Have bike paths where all the streets are

I would make bike paths that go through the whole width of Manhattan

I won't

Bike racks in front of school

I would have to make more bike lanes around my school

I guess if I leave much earlier because biking is like a car and bus; it's a transportation vehicle

## WHAT WOULD MAKE YOU BIKE MORE OFTEN?

If I could go around certain areas, like Upper East Manhattan

Good weather, owning a bike

If I had a better bike

Nothing

If I didn't live in a loft walk-up; it takes a while to carry [a] bike upstairs

More places to explore on a bike

If other people want to bike with me

## WHAT DO YOU THINK BIKE ADVOCACY IS?

Don't know (x3)

People who try to get more people to bike. For example, this survey

Speaking up, getting involved in activities that may help provoke people to participate in biking

Speaking out about the good things biking does and creates

Some kind of ideas or a group based on bikes