

individual



potential



growth

## Connect with Your Dreams

A Handbook for  
Make a Connection  
Participants



teamwork



MAKE A  
CONNECTION

## About Make a Connection

Make a Connection is a global program working to promote positive youth development by giving young people a chance to “make a connection” to their communities, their families, their friends, and themselves. Currently operating in more than a dozen countries, Make a Connection is a joint initiative of Nokia and the International Youth Foundation. For further information, visit: [www.makeaconnection.org](http://www.makeaconnection.org).

# What are Life Skills?

Below is a list of those core life skills that are increasingly considered vital for success in today's world.

- *Communication or interpersonal skills:* the ability to express yourself and communicate with people from different backgrounds or cultures.
- *Conflict management:* the ability to mediate conflicts among others and to manage one's own aggression or anger.
- *Contribution:* the ability to look beyond yourself and to contribute to the larger community.
- *Cooperation:* the ability to work in a group or a team, to compromise, and to lead.
- *Creative thinking:* the ability to develop creative and innovative solutions to challenges and problems.
- *Critical thinking:* the ability to ask questions and to challenge information, situations, and authority.
- *Empathetic skills:* the ability to connect with other people on a deeper level.
- *Managing emotions:* the ability to deal with one's own feelings and to express them (also referred to as "emotional literacy").
- *Respect for self and others* (cultural understanding).
- *Responsibility:* the ability to manage one's own life, to be accountable to other people, and to assume responsibility for things and people.
- *Self-confidence:* the quality necessary to make informed choices, resist peer pressure, and to develop a strong character.



“If you can  
*imagine it,*  
you can create it.

If you can dream it,  
you can become it.”

— William Arthur Ward,  
scholar, author, and teacher



## Acknowledgements

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## Introduction

# Welcome to Make a Connection!

**M**ake a Connection is a global program working to equip young people like you in countries around the world with essential “skills for life,” including greater self-confidence and the ability to think creatively, communicate effectively, relate to others, and give back to society.

This handbook is designed to complement those activities you will be participating in through Make a Connection. In the following pages, you’ll read the stories of other young people involved in Make a Connection programs in countries like Brazil, China, Hungary, and South Africa. You’ll see how young people in each of these countries are learning about themselves, while connecting to their gifts and goals.

Take Eva, for example, a 17-year-old in Hungary who reconnected with her passion for acting through volunteering her time to arrange a performance for disadvantaged children. Then, there’s Zama, a 24-year-old in South Africa who endured a three-year job search before tapping her inner strength through Make a Connection. Now, she’s not only more confident, but has secured a job.

Such stories, and your own, are at the heart of Make a Connection.

**“It is what we make out of what we have, not what we are given, that separates one person from another.”**

— Nelson Mandela, former South African President; Nobel Prize recipient



The pages that follow are filled with a variety of tools and tips for getting in better touch with your own gifts, talents, and goals. By the time you finish, our hope is that you will be better equipped to pursue your own dreams.

Make a Connection encourages young people to “think big” about their goals and dreams, while equipping them with valuable life skills to achieve them. Toward that end, this handbook is divided into sections that will enable you to:

- 1) Develop greater self-confidence,
- 2) Clarify your goals—both now and in the future,
- 3) Identify and overcome obstacles,
- 4) Take action to achieve what you want in life, and
- 5) Give back to your community in meaningful ways.

As you progress through this handbook, and the Make a Connection program, you may also wish to take advantage of additional tools available through the Make a Connection website ([www.makeaconnection.org](http://www.makeaconnection.org)). For example, take the Global Citizenship Test and test your knowledge of some of the most pressing issues facing our world.

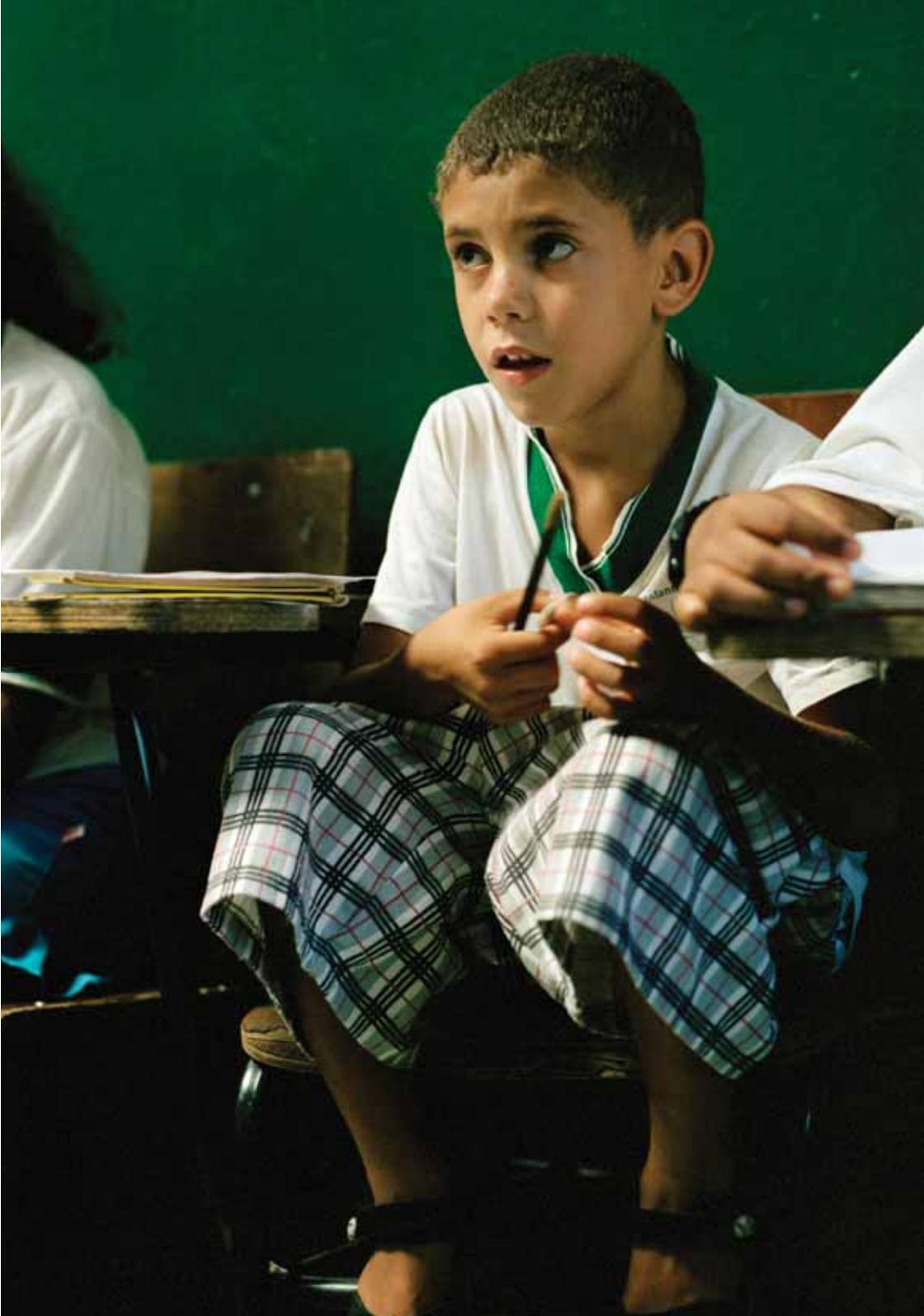
Our hope is that your experience with Make a Connection will be an exciting and rewarding journey. On this journey, you’ll have the opportunity to develop a deeper appreciation of your unique strengths and abilities, while becoming more aware of those beliefs and obstacles that may be holding you back. It’s also important to realize that on this journey you are joined by thousands of other Make a Connection participants around the world.

— Your Make a Connection team

**“We are all meant to shine... It is not just in some of us; it is in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same.”**

*— Marianne Williamson, author, lecturer*





## Chapter 1

# Building Self-Confidence

Self-confidence is an important ingredient contributing to one's success in life. How confident you are at any particular time influences how you think, feel, and act. It influences whether you feel comfortable trying new things, and what you can accomplish. Most of us can relate to what it's like to feel confident, and how we feel when we lack confidence.

How confident you are depends on a variety of factors, including how you have been treated by others (e.g., parents, teachers, friends), how good you feel you are at doing certain things, how you feel about your appearance, and what you've accomplished. People who are confident generally feel more comfortable with themselves and others, maintain a positive attitude, make friends easily, treat people with respect, are willing to try new things, and are not afraid to make mistakes.

This chapter features exercises to help you explore how confident you are, build your self-confidence, and overcome barriers to being confident. Self-confidence isn't something most of us have automatically. Rather we become more confident through expanding our experiences, developing skills, and learning to respect ourselves and others.

Often self-confidence comes with realizing and appreciating our own uniqueness in the world. Such was the case for 12-year-old Steven in Germany.

“Dream lofty dreams, and as you dream, so shall you become.”

— John Ruskin, 19th century English art critic

## GERMANY

### Learning to Value Yourself: Steven's Story

Steven, age 12, lives with his mother and nine-year-old sister in the German city of Bochum. While Steven was well loved at home, he often felt lonely and had trouble making friends at school. "They would pick on me because I wear glasses and have braces, freckles, and red hair," said Steven of his life at school.



Through Make a Connection, Steven began developing a friendship with Arndt, a 32-year-old business professional. In Germany, Make a Connection matches adult mentors with young people who could benefit from the companionship and encouragement of an older role model. Every week, Arndt would spend time with Steven—walking, talking, and exploring nearby attractions. The two would go to museums, ride bikes, and even visited a local safari park.

As a result of his friendship with Arndt, Steven started feeling less alone and more special. He also started pursuing his interests more. Arndt also taught Steven about what's important in life and that his appearance was nothing to be ashamed of. As a result, Steven has greater confidence and is more comfortable trying new things.



*Reflect on areas in your life where you seek to be more confident. What might help strengthen your confidence in these areas?*

## Developing Skills

Self-confidence depends on how we view ourselves. If we focus on things that we cannot do and do not try to learn new skills, we will be less likely to feel confident. If we recognize and develop our skills, our confidence will grow. How confident we are often depends on what successes we've experienced in life. It's not important whether your successes are large or small. What's important is how you felt afterward. Examples of "successes" include:

- Helping out a family member or friend
- Doing well in a subject in school
- Working with others to complete a group project
- Playing well as a team member
- Developing a skill, such as playing a sport or musical instrument or using a computer
- Making or building something
- Teaching someone a new skill
- Winning a contest or receiving an award

To develop confidence for the future, it's helpful to take stock of what you've accomplished in the past. The questions below aim to help you think about what you like doing, what you're best at, and your successes in life.

## Identifying Your Strengths

1) List five things you like doing most and why (e.g., painting or drawing).

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2) List three of your greatest successes.

Accomplishment #1: \_\_\_\_\_

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Accomplishment #2: \_\_\_\_\_

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Accomplishment #3: \_\_\_\_\_

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3) List the skills and qualities that contributed to your success in achieving those accomplishments listed above (e.g., planning, organizing, caring for others, physical endurance).

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## How Confident Are You?

Confidence comes from focusing on your talents and accomplishments and what makes you special and unique. The questions below seek to help you identify those areas in your life where you feel most sure of yourself and areas in which you might want to develop greater confidence.

1) I am confident in/when:

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Take time to think about why you feel confident in these situations.

2) List five areas of your life in which you'd like to gain greater confidence:

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3) For each of the five areas listed in #2, write down an action you could take to develop greater confidence. In some cases, you may want to list the name of a person who could help you work on this area.

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## Helping Others, Helping Ourselves

As we reflect back on our lives, it's not hard to think of people who have helped us gain confidence through their actions and their example. In the same way, we often gain self-confidence through helping others.

1) List the names of three people who have helped you develop confidence in a particular area of your life. What did they do to strengthen your belief in yourself?

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2) List the names of up to three people that you have helped gain greater confidence in themselves. How were you able to help them?

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**"We must cultivate our garden."**  
— Voltaire, French author, in *Candide*



## Chapter 2

# Setting Goals

**W**e all have dreams of what we want to be and achieve. These goals can range from doing well in school to excelling in sports to mastering a creative pursuit or securing a job or internship. Yet sometimes we lack clarity on what our goals are or don't know how to go about achieving them. Other times, barriers exist that we're not sure how to overcome. These can include internal barriers such as a lack of confidence or external barriers such as a high rates of unemployment where you live.

This section is devoted to helping you think creatively about your goals—both now and in the future. While your priorities may shift over time, it's much easier to move forward when you have clearly identified a goal you want to reach and a plan for achieving it.

For many of the young people involved in Make a Connection, the program has enabled them to reconnect with a special interest or strengthen their abilities. Through their experiences in the program, many are able to express their goals more clearly. Take Jerry, for example.

**“Whatever you do, or dream, begin it.  
Boldness has genius, power, and  
magic in it.”**

*—Johann Wolfgang von Goethe,  
German playwright and poet*

## PHILIPPINES

### The Importance of Setting Goals: Jerry's Story

Jerry, age 20, is one of more than two million indigenous youth in the Philippines. He grew up in the remote mountain village of Lambangan in the southern part of the country. While he completed eight years of school, Jerry had few opportunities to use his education. With little exposure to the world outside his village, Jerry devoted himself to working on this family's farm. Because he was shy, the idea of serving as a leader in his community never occurred to him.



Not long ago, Jerry participated in a leadership training program through Make a Connection. During the program, he was able to identify his strengths and areas for growth. He also learned more about how leadership is defined and cultivated in his own culture. By participating in exercises and group activities, slowly his shyness started to dissolve and his leadership potential began to emerge. While before the training Jerry says he could "barely look another person in the eye," now he is comfortable speaking before an audience.

Jerry believes much of his new sense of self is connected to gaining a better understanding of his culture. "After three days of training I began to realize there were good things in me and my culture," he says.

Jerry also became more focused on his goals through the training. He and his peers are now exploring ways of enhancing the productivity of the farms in their village. They've developed an action plan and are mobilizing other community members to reach their common goals.



*What barriers, if any, may be holding you back from identifying or achieving your goals?*

## Identifying Your Goals

It's easy to get so involved in our day-to-day lives that we lose sight of what we want to accomplish in the future and steps we might take to get where we want

to go. It's also important to distinguish between goals that are set by others (e.g., finishing a school assignment) and your personal goals (e.g., getting to know someone new, learning to play a musical instrument, or participating in a sport).

This section focuses on identifying your personal goals. A personal goal is something that is important to you. When setting personal goals, be sure your goals are clear, realistic, and achievable. Reaching your goal should depend on your own actions.

Having a goal, or goals, you want to achieve can motivate you if even your goals change over time. When you're unfocused about what you want to accomplish, you can have less energy and less drive to get things done.

It's also important to distinguish between short- and long-term goals. Short-term goals (e.g., getting a good grade) are those you hope to achieve relatively quickly. Long-term goals (e.g., going to college or becoming an artist) are more ambitious and may take you longer to achieve. Long-term goals are often closely linked with what you hope to achieve in life. Both types of goals are important. Your short-term goals often make your long-term goals possible.

In this section, take a few minutes to think about what's important to you, skills you might want to develop, and goals you want to achieve. Start small. Begin by identifying a few goals you can easily achieve in a short period of time (e.g., completing a photography project).

Defining your goals is easier if you are aware of what brings you joy in life and what special strengths you possess. As you get involved in activities through Make a Connection, you may want to keep a journal. Describe what has happened when you feel especially positive about what you're doing.



*"This one makes a net, this one stands and wishes.*

*Would you like to make a bet which one gets the fishes?*

— Chinese proverb

It can also be helpful to think about the people you admire—who they are and why you're drawn to them. If you're having difficulty identifying key goals you want to achieve, it's helpful to work on developing skills that will be useful to you, no matter what you choose to do. These can include skills in writing, public speaking, mentoring, teaching, or volunteering.

The following are several exercises aimed at helping you get in touch with what you enjoy doing and with your particular strengths and talents.

## Setting Short-term Goals

1) List three goals you would like to achieve over the next six months (e.g., learn how to play an instrument).

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2) Outline specific steps you will need to take to achieve each goal and when you want to finish each step.

Goal 1: By when:

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Goal 2: By when:

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Goal 3: By when:

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3) How will you measure your success?

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## Your Story: Five Years from Now

In this exercise, you will need to think about your purpose in life, and how it will influence your goals and what you hope to accomplish in the future.

1) Think about a major purpose you would like to pursue in your life (e.g., to help children learn how to read). Describe that purpose in the space below.

2) Make a list of three to five goals you will need to accomplish in the next five years in order to fulfill your purpose.

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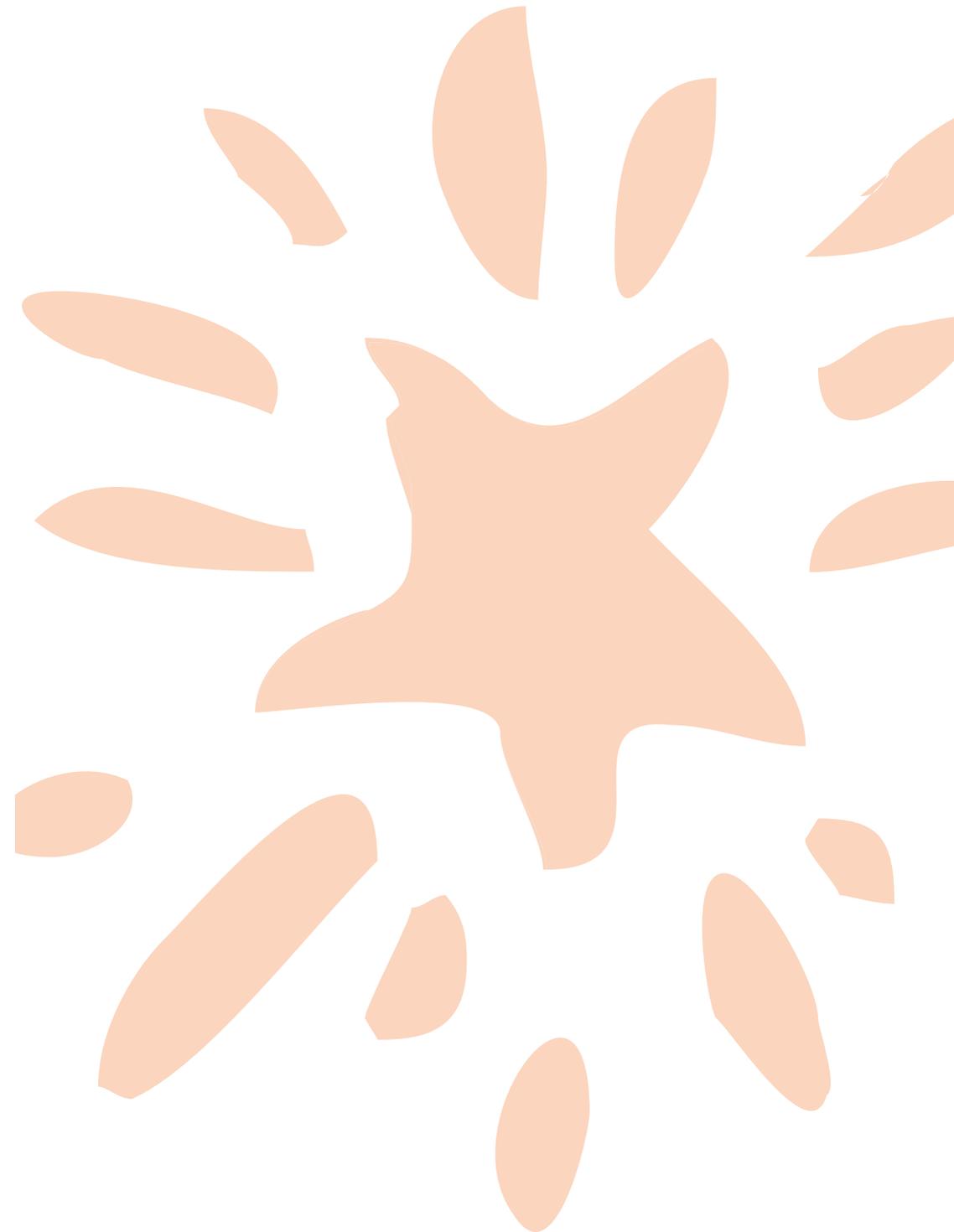
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“I shall pass through this world but once. Any good that I can do or any kindness that I can show to any human being, let me do it now.”

— Mahatma Gandhi

3) Write a one-page biography describing your life over the next five years and the steps you took to reach your goals and achieve your purpose. (You can use the space on the following page).



**“All that we are is the result of what we have thought. The mind is everything. What we think, we become.”**

— *Buddha*





## Chapter 3

# Overcoming Obstacles

Each of us faces obstacles. It's through working to overcome life's challenges that we learn and grow. Some are external, such as poverty and discrimination. Some of our obstacles are internal: lack of confidence, fear, self-doubt, negativity. Often we try to hide our shortcomings, without dealing with them directly. This section seeks to help you identify possible obstacles that may be getting in the way of you realizing your true potential.

In identifying our obstacles, it's important to realize the importance of our attitudes. Everyone sees the world differently, depending on how they grew up and the circumstances they have encountered. No matter what happens in your life, how you interpret those events is up to you. Emotions, fears, and life experiences can play a big role in determining how we view our reality. Those who have received a lot of positive encouragement from friends, parents, and other significant adults in their lives will probably have a more positive view of their future than those who have been criticized, treated badly, or given little encouragement.

In the following profile, Oscar becomes aware of how some of his own attitudes were holding him back.

**“When you go to a garden do you look at the weeds? Spend more time with roses and jasmnes.”**



— *Jelaluddin Rumi*  
Sufi poet

## MEXICO

### Overcoming Obstacles: Oscar's Story

Oscar, 15, grew up in Martín Carrera, a poor suburb of Mexico City. His father was an alcoholic and was always drunk. "With the little money he earned, he would drink it away," recalls Oscar. As a result, Oscar's mother often had to work, leaving him alone with his two brothers. "I couldn't stand either of my brothers," he says. "The older one was abusive and the younger one was annoying."



In response to problems at home, Oscar was often angry, taking out his frustration on those around him. During his first semester in a vocational school he got into a fight with some other students, left school, and never returned. "Those boys were extremely violent," he explains, "they were in a gang and had knives and guns with them all the time."

Through a neighbor, Oscar learned about Make a Connection and eventually joined the program, which in Mexico is called "iCámara! Ahí nos vemos." Through the program, young people are trained in how to make videos and document issues in their communities. These older youth, in turn, work with younger children, teaching them about social issues that affect their lives and communities.

Through the program, Oscar came to a deeper understanding of himself. "I found a place where I didn't need to hit anyone to gain respect," he says. "I no longer needed to be forceful or aggressive in order to get attention. On top of that, by working with kids I began to understand them and this allowed me to better understand my little brother." As a result, Oscar started bringing his brother to participate in iCámara! activities so he wouldn't be left at home alone.

"The program humbled me," says Oscar. "What's more, I've learned that I am capable of helping others because I can do valuable things and learn."

Oscar is now working on going back to school, "Now I need to study, not fight anymore," he says.



*Can you identify any attitudes or behaviors that might be holding you back?*

For Zama, a 24-year-old college graduate in South Africa, a major obstacle to her getting a job was a lack of assertiveness and self-confidence.

## SOUTH AFRICA

### Learning to Believe in Yourself: Zama's Story

Zama, age 24, grew up in Durban, South Africa where she completed her college degree in business. For the next three years, Zama endured a fruitless job search. While her academic credentials were impressive, she had little employment experience and few concrete job skills.



For Zama, looking for a job was at times a humiliating experience, eroding her already fragile self-esteem. During an interview for a position as a business analyst, she was asked if she could remember the exchange rate between the South African rand and the U.S. dollar three weeks previously. When she didn't respond with the exact figure, the interviewer, an African woman in her mid-40s, told Zama that her six-year-old child could do better. "At that moment, I felt I had no future," Zama recalls.

Not long afterwards, Zama found out about the Make a Connection program. She applied, was accepted, and now credits the program with turning her life around. Among those skills she gained were how to work well in teams, adapt to change, express herself verbally and in writing, and network for a job. Participating in the program prompted Zama to take more ownership over her job search.

"I can now take initiative freely and face new challenges without fear," she says. Reluctance to overcoming challenges is a pervasive problem for South African youth, Zama points out, along with other urgent issues such as HIV/AIDS, drug and alcohol abuse, and widespread unemployment.

Upon completing the program, Zama secured an internship with a leading consulting firm in Johannesburg. In the future, she plans to pursue a graduate degree in auditing and accounting. Her plans also include continuing to assist the members of her community in managing and saving money through a savings club started by her grandmother.



*Reflect on any similarities between Zama's story and your own life.*

Pessimism and self-doubt can be major obstacles to realizing one's potential. Through your experience with Make a Connection, we hope you will take time to reflect on habits, thoughts, and attitudes that may be getting in your way.

## ***The Importance of Developing a Positive Attitude***

One of the greatest tools for overcoming internal barriers is maintaining a positive attitude. We have a choice as to whether we view life from a positive or negative point of view. In his book, *A Long Walk to Freedom*, for example, former South African President Nelson Mandela writes about how important maintaining a positive attitude was during the 27 years he spent in jail for his role in the anti-apartheid movement.

To survive in prison, I developed ways to find satisfaction in my daily life. One can feel fulfilled by washing one's clothes so they are really clean, by sweeping a hallway so that it is empty of dust, or by organizing one's cell to conserve as much space as possible.

While I have always enjoyed gardening, it was not until I was behind bars that I was able to tend my own garden. A garden was one of the few things in prison that one could control. To plant a seed, watch it grow, tend to it, and then harvest it offered a simple but enduring satisfaction. In some ways I saw a garden as a metaphor for certain aspects of my life. A leader must also tend to his garden. He, too, plants seeds and then watches, cultivates, and harvests the results. Like a gardener, he must take responsibility for what he cultivates; he must mind his work, try to repel his enemies, preserve what can be preserved, and eliminate what cannot succeed.

Even while enduring years of hardship in prison, Nelson Mandela found ways to nurture a positive spirit, whether it was cleaning his cell or planting a garden. You might consider things you could do that also help cultivate a more positive attitude. Sometimes it's helpful to merely look at and appreciate everything that's going right in your life (e.g., having a supportive family and friends, being in good health, having interests you like to pursue).

## ***Identifying Barriers***

1) What are the external and/or internal barriers you feel are keeping you from achieving your goals and dreams?

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2) How might you work to overcome each of these?

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***"A journey of a thousand miles must begin with a single step."***

— Lao-tzu, Chinese Taoist philosopher



## Chapter 4

# Taking Action

**A**uthor Frank Tyger once said, “Your future depends on many things, but mostly on you.” You can have the most beautiful dream in the world, but nothing is likely to come of it unless your vision is combined with the drive to make it real. It’s important to realize that you, and you alone, are responsible for achieving what you want in life. Accepting that responsibility plays a major role in enabling individuals to realize their dreams.

In previous sections of this handbook, you’ve had the opportunity to think about your goals and identify potential barriers—internal or external—that could get in the way of your realizing important goals. Now it’s time to turn your thoughts into action. You can have the most beautiful intention in the world, but if you put it off, or make excuses, you’ll never achieve it.

Often, achieving an important goal involves taking some risk. No doubt it’s easier and safer not to try new things, but in the long run getting what you want from life will require stepping beyond where you are comfortable.

Sometimes the environment in which you live can play an important role in influencing how much risk a young person feels comfortable pursuing, and whether they feel their actions will eventually be rewarded. In rural areas of Poland, for example, high rates of unemployment have left young people feeling less hopeful about the future. Polish youth growing up in poor communities are overwhelmed by the negative influences in their lives, according to Maria Holzer, Executive Director of the Polish Children and Youth Foundation, which is carrying out Make a Connection in Poland.

“It is our belief that the best way to improve the situation of youth in Poland is to make young people realize that their future achievements depend solely on their own efforts,” she says.

To help stimulate Polish youth to take action on issues they care about, Make a Connection provides them with small grants to launch volunteer projects, such as tutoring children, cleaning up the environment, or organizing a community event. Participants not only get to help others, but gain valuable skills such as how to plan a project, develop a budget, and work as a team.

## POLAND

### Overcoming Fear and Learning to Believe in Yourself: Asia’s Story



Asia, age 21, grew up in the Polish city of Bydgoszcz and is the mother of a six-year-old child. Asia left high school at the age of 15 to care for her child, but always dreamed of finding a way to reach out to other children, especially those without many opportunities to play and have fun. When she heard about the small grants available through Make a Connection, Asia and some friends proposed a project and their proposal was accepted. Their goal: to give children, ages 6 to 15, the chance to explore their creativity through painting, singing, acting, and dance.

As she prepared to launch the program, which is called “A Smile for a Smile,” Asia grew worried. “What if the children don’t want to participate, or get bored?” she asked herself.

Then, as she started working with the children, she came to realize that they loved the chance to play and express themselves. She also let go of the need for everything to be perfect. During the group’s first performance of “Cinderella,” for example, many things went wrong, but when Asia saw the children’s mothers and fathers crying with pride in the audience, she realized the show was actually a big success.

Working with the children, and being recognized as a leader by community members, has made Asia feel far more confident. As a result of her experience, she plans to go back to school and hopes to one day work as a teacher or counselor.



*Can you think of an experience you have had when you were rewarded for taking steps to achieve an important goal? What obstacles did you encounter? How did the experience make you feel?*

## Role Models and Mentors

As you think about your goals and the steps you need to take to achieve them, it’s helpful to think of individuals whom you admire, why you admire them, and how they succeeded in realizing their dreams. Included within their journey may be important tips and advice you can follow in pursuing your own journey. Your most important role models may be close to home—a parent, grandparent, aunt, uncle, or teacher. There may also be famous people you admire—human rights activists, politicians, artists, athletes, entertainers, explorers.

In the exercise that follows you will be asked to identify those individuals whom you most admire. You will also be asked to think about those people in your life for whom you may serve as an important role model. Consider what about your beliefs and actions others may look up to.

## Identifying Lessons from Important Role Models

1) List three people whom you consider important role models in your life. What about them do you most admire?

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

What you admire about her/him:

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Name: \_\_\_\_\_

What you admire about her/him:

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Name: \_\_\_\_\_

What you admire about her/him:

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2) As you set out to undertake an important activity, it's important to realize you're not alone. Everyone has someone in their life who has encouraged them or provided important advice. Make a list of people who have helped you and how they've helped.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

How they've helped you: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

How they've helped you: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

How they've helped you: \_\_\_\_\_

3) It's important to realize that you, too, may be an important role model for others in your family, school, or community. Make a list of those who may look up to you and why.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Reason: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Reason: \_\_\_\_\_

## Taking Risks

Achieving what we want in life often involves taking risks, and moving beyond our normal routines. Sometimes we're forced to face our deepest fears—speaking before an audience, organizing people to support a cause, or allowing others to judge our creativity whether we chose to perform, paint, write, or dance. While some of our risks may involve taking a physical action, others may occur on a more emotional level (e.g., telling someone close to you how special they are, or expressing your love toward a parent).

When considering the risks you may need to take to achieve an important goal, it's important to distinguish between those that are acceptable versus those which may be so great that they place you or others in a difficult situation which may be hard to get out of. For example, you may dream of getting a job that is more satisfying and pays more than your current job.

However, leaving your current job to pursue a new position may involve more risk than you can afford. It's important to determine the positives and negatives of taking a major risk in your life.

## Taking Action

1) Describe the last time you took a risk and overcame a self-doubt or fear.

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What did it feel like?

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2) List up to five things you've always wanted to do in your life but never acted on (e.g., learning to play a musical instrument, learning how to speak a new language).

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3) Write down three things you can do to make them happen.

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4) What can you do today?

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“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed it is the only thing that ever has.”

—Margaret Mead, anthropologist and writer



## Chapter 5

# *Giving Back*

Finding ways to contribute to your community is a great way to reach out to others and address important social problems. It can also be very beneficial to you. Through reaching out to others, we connect in meaningful ways to those around us. We feel a part of society, as opposed to outside it. Helping others is also a great way to learn and develop new skills, and to see the impact of our actions on a particular social problem or individual(s).

Engaging in volunteer activities is a critical part of Make a Connection in many of the countries where the program operates. For example:

- In Brazil, teenagers and college students train as reading mentors who volunteer their time to teach children in poor neighborhoods how to read and the joys of learning.
- In Mexico, older teens learn video production skills so that they may work with younger children to document important social issues in their communities.
- In Turkey, youth train as volunteer educators who devote two hours each week to teaching disadvantaged children important skills such as how to use a computer or speak English.
- In the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland, youth apply for small grants to launch their own community projects, such as environmental clean up efforts, sporting activities for disadvantaged children, and special events that engage the entire community.

Connecting to one's community is a fundamental principle of Make a Connection. Building healthy, prosperous, vibrant societies depends on having citizens who are willing and able to contribute to their community and nation. Far from viewing young people as passive recipients of programs, Make a Connection recognizes that young people have a vital role to play in carrying out programs and contributing to their community.

Below, read how Daniel gained confidence in himself through reaching out to disadvantaged children.

## BRAZIL

### Learning Leadership Skills Through Teaching Children to Read



Daniel Bernardo da Costa, age 13, loves to read. He now shares his enthusiasm for books with children growing up in one of São Paulo's poorest neighborhoods through Make a Connection in Brazil, known locally as Mudando a História.

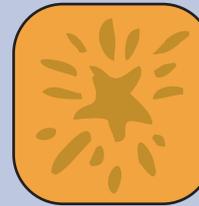
Daniel heard about the program from friends at school and decided to give it a try. Each morning he goes to a day care center where he reads to the children. In the afternoon he attends school. When working with the children, Daniel shows by his example how rewarding reading can be. "You can't force people to do something... you need to convince them," he says.

Daniel knows as well as anyone the problems that young people growing up in the *favelas*, or poor neighborhoods, of São Paulo face. His family moved to the city when he was six. Today his parents work as street vendors. "I live in a *favela* and I know people who are into drugs," says Daniel. "There's lots of violence, but it tends to be related to drugs... That's one reason I work with Mudando a História. I don't want to see the younger kids turning to drugs. Reading to them is useful. Books seem to help people feel less lonely."

In addition to serving as a mentor, Daniel has been trained to teach others to be mentors. Working with children and teaching his peers has increased Daniel's self-confidence and ability to work with others. "I feel like I'm a more responsible person than before," he says. "I get along with people better and find it easier to express myself. I know how to get people's attention now and I'm learning how to be a good leader."

The program has also enhanced his family relationships. "I feel like I'm a more responsible person than before," he relates. "My mom relies on me a lot more. I talk to my parents more today than I used to... it just seems like there's more to talk about."

While he is the youngest of Mudando a História's reading mentors, Daniel has proven that when it comes to sharing your love for books, age doesn't matter.



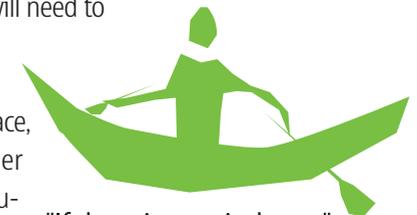
*Do you have hobbies or interests — like reading — that might be translated into a volunteer project that could help others?*

## Identifying Issues in Your Community

As you consider how you might contribute to your community, think about issues that are important to you. If you love nature, you might organize the clean up of a local park or plant a community garden. Additional examples include tutoring disadvantaged children, volunteering to help the disabled, or organizing a cultural or sporting event.

Conduct research to see if there is a group, or groups, that are currently addressing your issue. Find out more about such organizations and contact them to see how you might volunteer to help. Think carefully about the knowledge and skills you possess and how you might apply these.

If you prefer launching a new project, you might start by gathering a group of friends to discuss the issue and create an action plan for how you might start an activity. You will need to thoroughly research your issue, assign responsibilities, and determine what resources you will need (e.g., meeting space, supplies, equipment, money). Also consider identifying adult mentors in the community who might be willing to offer advice.



"If there is no wind, row."  
— Latin proverb

Below read about Zuhra's efforts to bring greater attention to issues facing children in Afghanistan.

## AFGHANISTAN

### Reaching out to Refugee Children: Zuhra's Story



Zuhra, age 20, was born in Afghanistan, the eldest of three children. Ever since she can remember, her country has been plagued by war and violence. As a young girl, Zuhra witnessed the devastating affects of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the civil war that followed. Children were often the greatest victims, with many living with their families as refugees without proper homes and access to education and recreational opportunities.

When she moved to London to attend college, Zuhra decided she wanted to bring greater worldwide attention to the plight of Afghan children. She began by talking with other Afghans living in the U.K. and eventually founded the Afghan Youth Council. In addition to building public awareness, the Council raises money to support projects in Afghanistan, such as the building of a library in a newly reopened school. While Zuhra had previous volunteer experience, she has relied on her passion for the cause and the guidance and assistance of other youth and youth organizations.

Says Zuhra, "It's good to spread the work among other people as it keeps the workload off one person as well as making others feel involved and using their potential."

While she must balance the demands of school with her volunteer work, Zuhra gratefully accepts the challenge. "The best part of my work is the feeling that I am contributing to my community," she says. "My work involves contact with people of all ages. The great friends that I have found through my work are a bigger satisfaction than any reward."



*More information on Zuhra's project, and resources on how to develop a volunteer project, are available at: [www.youthactionnet.org](http://www.youthactionnet.org) (see opposite page).*

## Exploring Youth Leadership Through YouthActionNet

Another way in which Make a Connection supports youth volunteerism is through YouthActionNet, a dynamic website created by and for young people. YouthActionNet highlights the vital role that youth play in leading positive change throughout the world.

Make a Connection participants are strongly encouraged to visit [www.youthactionnet.org](http://www.youthactionnet.org), and to learn more about what their peers around the world are doing to save the environment, foster peace, empower women, educate poor children, and address the plight of refugees.

For those just starting out or looking for inspiration, YouthActionNet offers a host of resources, including profiles of youth leaders; a calendar of international events; internship, job, and scholarship opportunities; tools for raising funds; and a library of materials across a range of issues including human rights, HIV/AIDS, and the environment. YouthActionNet also sponsors an awards program through which youth leaders may apply for US\$500 grants.

YouthActionNet offers hope that positive change is not only possible, but is taking place every day in communities around the globe. Says Sarah Davidson, a YouthActionNet award winner from the United States, "I grew up believing that everybody has the ability to change the world around them."

## Working as a Team

You will most likely be working with others in carrying out your volunteer activities. Working as a team can be creative, fun, productive, and satisfying. It can also be challenging if all members of the team are not committed to open communication and resolving problems and conflicts peacefully. Below is a list of certain behaviors that can strengthen teamwork, and those that can serve as obstacles to working together as a group.

Productive Behaviors	Unproductive Behaviors
Being willing to take risks	Being overly negative
Being open to new ideas	Being unwilling to compromise
Capable of proposing ideas	Being unwilling to commit
Being realistic about what is possible	Talking a lot without getting things done
Having knowledge of the issues being addressed	Not being able to make up one's mind
Being responsible and following through to ensure tasks are completed	Working all the time and not respecting other people's time

As you share responsibilities and cooperate on tasks as part of a team, friendships often develop and deepen. Building effective teamwork skills now will be beneficial to you throughout your life, both personally and professionally. Assuming responsibility within a team and ensuring goals are met in a mutually-supportive way is also critical to developing as an effective leader.

## Resolving Conflicts

Whenever you undertake a project as part of a group, disagreements and conflicts may arise. For example, members of the group may not agree on each individual's roles and responsibilities, or how to move forward on an important initiative. The ability to resolve conflicts peacefully is an important skill to nurture, not only in your volunteer work, but in dealing with issues at home, at school, in the workplace, or the broader community.

Remaining calm, listening, and taking the time to truly understand all sides of a conflict are important steps in coming to a mutually-agreeable resolution.

Conflicts often arise when we make judgments, or stereotype, people or situations, without taking the time to "walk in another's shoes," or truly understand the other person's viewpoint and how he or she feels. In working as a group, there are certain behaviors that can reduce the likelihood of conflict, and others that are likely to increase the chances for conflict.

Behaviors that help reduce conflict	Behaviors that can increase conflict
Listening carefully, seeking first to understand another's point of view	Failure to listen
Using a calm voice and avoiding aggressive gestures	Using a harsh tone of voice or crossing your arms
Agreeing on certain points	Being sarcastic, judging
Using humor, where appropriate, to reduce tensions	Accusing, blaming, interrupting
Apologizing, if necessary	Putting other people down

It's also important to be aware of the language you use in dealing with others, and whether your language and actions have the affect of making those around you feel good about themselves, or the opposite. Affirming statements, for example, include: "Good thinking," or "Nice job." Negative statements, on the other hand, include, "That will never work," or "Why did you do it that way?"

When faced with a conflict situation, there are certain steps you can follow to try and come to an agreement within the group. First, identify the decision to be made. Next, explore possible options, noting the advantages and disadvantages of each. Take time to discuss and evaluate each option based on your goals. Make sure that each person's views are taken into consideration and listened to. Once all options have been carefully considered, work to find a solution that is agreeable to all.



## Conclusion:

# *Pursuing Your Dreams*

The goal of this handbook was to help you think about your special talents, gifts, obstacles, and goals. Through these pages, you have traveled the globe, learning about the experiences of your Make a Connection peers in over a dozen countries. In the weeks and months to come, you will be learning more about yourself and your community through your involvement in Make a Connection.

As you continue your work through the program, we hope you will remember that you are part of a growing community of young people around the world who are sharing similar experiences through Make a Connection. We invite you to access additional learning and self-development tools that are available on the Make a Connection website ([www.makeaconnection.org](http://www.makeaconnection.org)). For those who wish to explore taking on leadership roles within their community, we also invite you to join the YouthActionNet community ([www.youthactionnet.org](http://www.youthactionnet.org)).

And lastly, we hope you will take time as you progress through the program to reflect on your experiences. No matter what, remember that you are a unique individual with special gifts to give to the world. As author Henry David Thoreau once wrote: “Go confidently in the direction of your dreams! Live the life you’ve imagined!”



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*“The program humbled me.  
What’s more, I’ve learned that  
I am capable of helping others  
because I can do valuable things  
and learn.”*

— Oscar, 15  
Mexico

**“I can now take initiative freely and  
face new challenges without fear.”**

— Zama, 24  
South Africa

**“Three days into the training I  
began to realize there were good  
things in me and my culture.”**

— Jerry, 20  
the Philippines



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