Field Report
Linking Youth Into Society
By Andra Maria Valette
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Life Project 4 Youth Alliance promotes the personal development and professional advancement of impoverished youth.

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According to the annual report of the International Labour Organization (ILO) on world employment, the 2022 global unemployment rate for young people ages 15 to 24 was three times higher than the adult rate. More than 23 percent of youth, the same report indicates, are not in employment, education, or training—meaning that they are not developing the skills needed for decent employment, defined by the ILO as “productive work ... in conditions of freedom, equity, security, and human dignity.” And even if they are employed, young people are more likely than adults to live in extreme poverty, earning less than $2.15 per day, and to work in the informal sector, where they lack labor protections and benefits.

Entrepreneurs and marketing experts John and Laure Delaporte witnessed the pervasiveness of youth poverty during a year of global travel with their children in 2008-09. As soon as their travels ended, they launched an 18-month-long pilot project in Manila, Philippines, to coach 15 young people in entrepreneurial and business skills geared toward gaining decent employment. The Delaportes chose the Philippines, which was among their points of travel, because of the low cost of living and because English was one of its official languages. The country’s geographical position also made it attractive for potential expansion across Asia, where most of the youth live below the poverty line.

John Delaporte says the experience of working with the youth was “very rewarding, because in a short amount of time you could see them change their life and the lives of their families, forever.” The pilot launched the Life Project 4 Youth Alliance (LP4Y), an international federation of 17 organizations in 14 countries with the mission to help young people socially and professionally integrate into society. LP4Y champions empowerment and connection to each other and society as the levers that can lift youth out of extreme poverty. Since its founding in 2009, LP4Y has supported more than 6,700 youth in their 57 education and training programs spanning the globe.

ECOSYSTEM OF INTEGRATION
LP4Y created an “ecosystem of integration” to realize its mission. Social and professional relationships are the connective tissue that the youth cultivate as they travel through the ecosystem. Centers serve as the hubs for engagement. LP4Y’s ecosystem specifically consists of three layers of integration: local relationships, professional participation, and global partnerships.

To bring youth into the ecosystem, LP4Y volunteers go into slums and rural areas to meet and engage with local youth, who, depending on their expressed interest, are encouraged to apply to that center’s professional training for entrepreneurs (PTE) program. Approximately 1,500 individuals join the PTE program annually. The federation operates two PTE tracks: a six-month training and development program tailored for youth living in urban poverty, and a three-month green village program for youth living in rural poverty. In both tracks, participants devise a plan for their professional career aspirations and life goals. LP4Y pays the participants an allowance to cover their basic needs so that they can devote their full attention to the program.

Three pillars make up the PTE methodology: guidance, work experience, and professional exposure. LP4Y coaches, who are called “catalysts,” guide the youth through the program. “The catalysts are always there for us,” says Colline Pusta, a LP4Y graduate in the Philippines. Pusta found an interest in accounting while in the PTE program and now has an internship in

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They can mentor other LP4Y youth. The Stars Club, the alumni network where graduates become members of program graduates gaining employment. Graduates also become members of the life plans, with more than 70 percent skills in mock interviews. Visits, the youth practice their professional communication. Then, they participate in company visits to experience organizational culture and see how companies, from purchasing and sales to communications. “We try to make the youth actors of change—meaning it’s not us, the catalysts, that identify the need, find a solution, and do the [work],” LP4Y Nepal country coordinator Lorène Tonati says.

Professional exposure is a major component of the program because most youth have never experienced life outside of their neighborhoods. This second pillar is divided into manageable steps. First, the youth learn skills like leadership, teamwork, and time management through their MEIs. They also attend virtual trainings on basic IT (information technology), English, and professional communication. Then, they participate in company visits to experience organizational culture and see how company employees dress and interact with each other. They also attend workshops to learn about company operations. During their visits, the youth practice their professional skills in mock interviews.

At the end of the PTE program, the participants apply for jobs that align with their life plans, with more than 70 percent of program graduates gaining employment. Graduates also become members of the Stars Club, the alumni network where they can mentor other LP4Y youth.

**SCALING FOR INCLUSION**

From the beginning of the pilot project, the Delaportes believed proximity was imperative for building trusting relationships with the youth. LP4Y is run by volunteers, and all volunteers—including its founders—live modestly among the communities they serve. But they aren’t the usual type of volunteer—each has a contract that covers their basic needs, including health insurance, retirement benefits, visas, transportation, and a monthly allowance.

“Being a volunteer, having just a small stipend, makes you focus on what is essential,” Tonati says. She adds that she is “learning so much by being in Nepal, by working with different people, by being with the youth, and meeting the community.”

LP4Y’s volunteer-based structure is not a consequence of a lack of funding. The Delaportes financed LP4Y through private donations between 2009 and 2012, after which they established partnerships with former business clients and then slowly moved on to include government institutions like Luxembourg’s Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs and foundations like the BIC Corporate Foundation and KPMG Foundation. Now, LP4Y has more than 450 partners who fund its operations as well as provide professional-integration support to youth participants in the form of internships, traineeships, and employment.

“LP4Y is really trying to change the world, one youth at a time,” says General Electric (GE) biomedical engineer Carlos Walter Illsley Rangel, who created digital-content trainings that were used in the PTE program as part of GE’s partnership with the federation.

LP4Y’s strategy for country expansion is grounded in partnerships—the defining feature of the third and final layer of the ecosystem of inclusion. It initiates this work by creating alliances with organizations that have a similar mission and are willing to share knowledge about youth inclusion. Scaling efforts are facilitated by the founders’ belief that LP4Y’s pedagogy is universal and, therefore, the ecosystem structure is replicable no matter the location.

LP4Y’s partnerships have produced four initiatives that have helped the federation to scale globally and secure support for youth’s professional success. The first initiative, Youth 4 Change Network, was established in 2012 and is an international network of 91 organizations spanning 37 countries that share best practices about the social and professional integration of excluded youth. Founded in 2016, the Youth Inclusion Network (YIN) is a coalition of companies that provide youth with professional opportunities. The YouthLAB, created in 2019, consists of two innovation hubs: one in the Bronx, New York, which focuses on advocacy and gives youth a platform to share their experiences of environmental and social challenges; and the second in Seine-Saint-Denis, a suburb outside of Paris, where youth are trained to become LP4Y catalysts and volunteers. The fourth initiative, The Catalysts’ Co., launched in 2020. It is a team of international consultants with LP4Y experience who offer support to corporations, NGOs, and governmental institutions that are developing sustainability programs.

LP4Y has plans to build centers in Egypt and Sri Lanka and is currently awaiting final government approval before breaking ground. The federation is also exploring new channels—including their social media—as platforms for youth to speak out about issues related to their social and professional exclusion. If LP4Y’s history is any proof, its ecosystem will continue to expand around the world.

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