

REAL STORIES

Motivate Middle and High School Students to Read, Think, and Explore Values Outside the Classroom

What Real Stories Is (and What It Isn't)

Real Stories is . . .

- A new approach that taps the **power of peers**. Teens-especially teens who read little else-are more likely to read and heed stories by their peers. *Real Stories* is a rich source of positive peer perspectives and information that teen readers find unusually compelling. In surveys, teens regularly report that they change attitudes and behavior as a result of reading these stories.
- An easy way to offer **voice and choice**. Strong middle and high school programs offer teens the opportunity to choose activities that interest them. The 25 stories and 3 fiction excerpts in the *Real Stories* program have been carefully chosen to offer teens the chance to explore many themes and issues and to explore their relationship to those topics.
- A springboard for **positive youth development activities**. Whether you want to kickstart a service learning program, get teens really talking in advisories or rap sessions, initiate creative arts activities, or just provide a space where teens can step back and take an honest, unpressured look at who they are and who they want to be, *Real Stories* includes the topics and activities that grab their attention and spark discussion.
- **Teen-tested**. The stories and activities in *Real Stories* have been tested by teens in afterschool programs, and their feedback has been used to revise and improve the program.

Real Stories is not...

- “Just a set of materials.” The *Real Stories* program is founded on a research-based positive youth development approach. The Leader’s Guide includes discussion questions, activities, and a general orientation, all based on youth development principles. Development Without Limits’ training shows staff how to integrate the principles and the practice, how to lead discussions and activities around sensitive issues, and how to connect the lessons to extension activities like service learning, media production, and the creative arts.
- A formal reading instruction program. Using *Real Stories* will motivate teens to do more reading, which is the foundation of improved reading skills. But it does not focus on teaching the mechanics of reading.
- “Standards-based,” or remedial. The reading and discussion activities in the *Real Stories* program implicitly support many learning standards. However, the main thrust of the program is to help youth explore and strengthen developmental tasks.

About the Real Stories Program

The *Real Stories* program was developed by **Youth Communication** and **Development Without Limits**. Youth Communication trains teens in writing, journalism, and leadership skills, and helps teens make their voices heard by publishing their stories in books, magazines, and on the web. Executive Director Keith Hefner won a MacArthur Fellowship for his work in youth development. Development Without Limits works with schools and community-based organizations to develop curriculum and train staff. They have provided professional development to hundreds of after school and summer programs nationally including Children’s Aid Society, LA’s BEST, The After-School Corporation and more.