Defining Your Noble Purpose

It is vitally important that your Change Club defines its purpose, or ‘Noble Purpose’ as soon as you have decided on the issue you will address. As you may find, different individuals within your group might have slightly different interpretations of what it is that the Change Club is doing, so it is imperative to get everyone on the same page from the beginning.

The following exercise allows everyone in the Change Club to provide how they ‘see’ the issue, which will allow your group to paint a vibrant picture of the issue at hand. In Margaret Wheatley’s words, “The more interpretations we gather, the easier it becomes to gain a sense of the whole.”

This activity requires some preparation by the facilitator before the Change Club meets. Select your facilitator and ensure that she has made the required preparations.

Materials
Picture or photo that represents the issue (e.g. unsafe neighborhood to walk through)
Laptop
LCD projector and screen
Large Flip Chart
Markers

Script (indicated in italics)

“Now we are going to talk about the issue that your Change Club has selected. It is important that we are all clear about what it is that we are trying to change and how the issue is having an effect on people’s lives, before we decide how we are going to go about changing it. This activity will enable us to understand the different perspectives we each have on this issue.

Hold up the picture/photo so that everyone can see it. It might be best to paste the photo into a PowerPoint slide, which you can Illuminate on a large screen for everyone to see.

Now I would like you to look at the photo. I’ll give you a minute to do this.

Now I would like everyone to tell me in one, two, or three words – what it is that you see in this photo. Let’s list “What you see” on the flip chart.

Write out responses on the flip chart.
Next, I want you to tell me, how does this photo make you feel? I will list this on the flip chart here.

Write out responses on the flip chart. Make sure everyone has contributed to this.

Next, tell me - what would you like to see different in this photo? I will list this too.

What I’m hearing is that, you would like to see x things to be changed, so that x can happen.

This is great, because this helps us define what it is that our Change Club will be working on. So if we could say in one sentence, what is this group’s Noble Purpose - that is, it’s purpose, it’s goal – what would it be?

Write out responses on the flip chart

It’s important that we create a specific and realistic statement of intended change because “a problem well stated is a problem half solved.” I would like for us to re-work what we have on our flip charts to create our Change Club’s Noble Purpose statement so that it contains these three specific elements:

Our ‘Noble Purpose’ should contain three elements:

1. The nature of change. Ask yourself, what is it that needs to be changed? (Knowledge, attitudes, behaviors, understanding, cooperation, skills, consumption, access, etc)
2. The direction of change (increase, decrease, expose, maintain, improve)
3. The target of change. Ask yourself, who will be changed? (coalition members, parents, teachers, food service workers, children, employees, members of the media, etc)

Here are two examples that show how a noble purpose statement can be worded to include the three elements:

1.) To increase children’s access to healthy food options in the after school environment
2.) Children will have increased access to healthy food in the after school environment

In each of the two statements above, the nature of change, the direction of change, and the target of change are provided.

Facilitate a process whereby your Change Club develops its own Noble Purpose statement that contains the three elements outlined above.

Once you have decided on your Change Club’s Noble Purpose. Have someone in the group write it in large font on a white board or flip chart so that everyone can see. Then invite all Change Club participants to sign their name around the noble purpose as a gesture of commitment.