

YOUTH SUCCESS MOVEMENT

Village Startup Guide

From one person to a working village, in three stages

Village Series · Document 3 of 10

The operational sequence. For Village Founders and Village Leaders, and for the Chapter Coordinator supporting them.

Read Documents 1 and 2 first.

Document 1 is the model. Document 2 is the orientation. This document assumes both and answers only one question: what do you do, in what order, and how do you know when a stage is done?

Youth Success Movement · Success4rkids · Gary S. Smith, Founder

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Six principles that govern everything here

These were learned the hard way and they override any schedule.

No launch until ready	There is no artificial deadline. A village that opens before it can answer the people who respond does more damage than one that opens three months late. Quality of follow-up beats speed of launch every time.
Start small, learn fast	Ten families. The cap is not modesty, it is design. You cannot learn what actually helps families while managing a hundred of them, and you will not get a second chance at a first impression in your community.
Personal follow-up is the product	In the first year, your personal response is the program. Nobody signs up and then hears nothing. If you cannot promise that, you are not ready to recruit.
Never outrun your capacity to respond	This is about response, not caseload. Most families will be self-guided and that is fine — but every family who reaches out must hear back from a person, promptly, and be shown how to get started. Ten responses you can handle. Two hundred you cannot, and the difference between those two outcomes is one social media post.
Two levels, both real	Ambassadors are scarce and always will be. Most families are self-guided, working through the courses and tools themselves; Ambassadors are the intensive option for families in crisis, families who have stalled, and families who ask. Present both without apology, and make sure the self-guided path actually works in your village.
Move ownership outward from day one	Start the councils before you feel ready. Give a new Ambassador a real caseload. A village that still runs through you after two years has failed, however good it looks.

The plumbing rule

Do not open the floodgates until the plumbing works. Before a single public post goes out, you must be able to answer this: when someone raises their hand, what happens in the next hour, the next day, and the next week? If you do not have an answer for all three, you are not ready to ask.

Before you start: four decisions

Make these deliberately. Founders who drift into them spend the first six months undoing the consequences.

1. Your boundary

Usually an elementary school attendance area. Alternatives are fine where an existing organization already holds a natural group of families — a community center service area, a housing development, a congregation, a rural township. Write it down. A village without a stated boundary becomes a mailing list.

2. Which hats you are wearing

Founder only, founder and Leader, or founder and first Family Ambassador. Any of the three is legitimate. What matters is deciding, because your first six months look completely different depending on the answer.

If you intend to run the village long term, you are the Leader and you need to be honest about the hours — 5 to 10 a week now, 10 to 20 later. If you do not want to run things long term, your first and most important recruit is the person who will.

3. Whether families are already there

Ask your Chapter Coordinator whether the Movement is already serving families remotely inside your boundary. If it is, your first ten may already exist and the work becomes a handoff rather than a cold start. This is the single most commonly skipped step and the cheapest one to take.

4. Who you already know

Before any public recruiting, list the people you could call tomorrow: parents, teachers, retired educators, faith leaders, coaches, service club members, the person who runs the local parents' group online. Most first villages are built almost entirely from this list. Public recruiting comes later and works better once you have something to point at.

STAGE ONE

Development

Everything in this stage happens before a single family is publicly recruited. It is the least visible part of building a village and the part most often rushed.

Typical duration: two to four months. Longer is fine. Shorter usually means something was skipped.

The work

☐	Complete Founder Orientation and talk it through with your trainer Document 2. You cannot recruit anyone into something you cannot explain in your own words.
☐	Define and write down the boundary Note roughly how many households and school-age children sit inside it. Your chapter can help you find this.
☐	Decide which roles you are holding And if you are not going to be the Village Leader, name the recruitment of one as your first priority.
☐	Check with the chapter for families already being served remotely in your boundary These become your first families and your first Ambassador candidates.
☐	Recruit the Village Leader, if that is not you The most consequential recruit you will make. Do not settle quickly on someone who cannot give the hours.
☐	Recruit and train the first Family Ambassador or Ambassadors One is enough to begin. Two or three is better. The founder or Leader may serve as the first, provided there is a plan to hand it off.
☐	Confirm every Ambassador has completed orientation, passed a background check, and signed the confidentiality agreement No exceptions, no matter how short-handed you are or how well you know the person.
☐	Start the Parent Council One or two parents is a council. Do not wait until you have six.
☐	Start the Youth Council Same rule. One or two young people who will tell you the truth.
☐	Get your village set up on the Hub Villages do not get their own platform. You are given a presence inside your chapter's space, or in the national space if your chapter does not exist yet. Seed it before anyone arrives — an introduction from you, two or three useful posts, and the first events on the calendar.
☐	Agree the intake path with your Ambassadors Who greets a new family, within how long, and what the first conversation covers. Write it down; do not carry it in your head.
☐	Make sure the self-guided path works before you recruit anyone Walk it yourself as though you were a parent with nobody to ask. Can you find the courses, start a tool, and know what to do first? If you cannot, neither can they.

☐	Recruit the first ten families From the people you know, from the chapter's virtual list, and through the councils' own networks.
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The finish line

Ten families are enrolled. Each is assigned to a trained Ambassador who has passed a check and signed an agreement. The village has a Leader, both councils begun, and a working communication channel.

You do not move to Launch because time has passed. You move because that sentence is true.

What to watch for in this stage

- Recruiting families before anyone can respond to them. A family without an Ambassador is fine; a family who reached out and heard nothing is not.
- Waiting for a perfect council. Two people who care is a council. Six people you had to persuade is a committee.
- A community space with nothing in it. An empty forum tells a new family that nothing is happening here.
- Taking a promising volunteer straight to a family because they seem obviously trustworthy. The check and the agreement come first, always.

STAGE TWO

Launch

Launch is not the beginning of the village. It is the public announcement that the village already works — which is why it comes after ten families are being served, not before.

Typical duration: three to six months from the celebration to the end of the stage.

The celebration

Hold a real event. Invite the families, the volunteers, the councils, the school, local organizations, and anyone who helped. Let a parent speak rather than only the founder. Take photographs, with permission. Put it on the village page and in local media.

This does more work than it appears to. It makes the village visible, it tells the first families that they belong to something real, and it gives everyone who has been quietly wondering about you a way to find out what this is.

The work

☐	Hold the launch celebration Publicly, locally, with the families present.
☐	Announce it where your community actually reads things Local news, local online groups, school newsletters, congregations, service clubs.

☐	Fill out the team If the Leader has been serving as the first Ambassador, this is when you recruit the Ambassadors who will carry the caseload and hand the families over.
☐	Grow the councils past their founding members Aim for three to six on each.
☐	Grow to 25–30 students actively training Add families only as fast as trained Ambassadors exist to take them.
☐	Recruit your next Ambassadors from the first ten families By now some of them have seen it work. These are your strongest candidates and the beginning of the village sustaining itself.
☐	Begin the volunteer ladder Not everyone can be an Ambassador. Create the ten-minute and thirty-minute roles so willing people have somewhere to stand.
☐	Start pairing Mother Mentors Identify the experienced mothers in your village and pair them with the new ones. Short orientation, background check, same as any volunteer working directly with a family.
☐	Hold your first quarterly Welcome Celebration Celebrate the babies born in the village. This is the gathering that reaches families before anything has gone wrong.
☐	Inform local funders that the village exists Not a pitch. A notification, so the people who fund things in your community know this is here and working.
☐	Begin fundraising in coordination with the chapter The target that matters most is moving the Village Leader from volunteer to paid.
☐	Establish a working relationship with the local school Introduce yourself as a collaborator on the half of the problem they cannot reach. Never as a critic.

The finish line

25 to 30 students are actively training. No single person is holding more than one role out of necessity. Both councils have members beyond their founders. The village has been publicly launched in its community.

What to watch for in this stage

- Treating self-guided families as parked. They are not on a waiting list — they are being served a different way, and someone still has to check that they found their footing.
- The founder still holding a caseload at the end of this stage. Plan the handoff now rather than discovering the need for it when you are underwater.
- Launching to a large audience before the intake path is tested. Ten responses you can handle; two hundred you cannot.

- Letting the first families go quiet while you attend to the new ones. The first ten are your evidence, your future Ambassadors, and the people who will tell your community whether this is real.

STAGE THREE

Steady state

This stage does not finish. It is measured instead — see Document 10, the Village Scorecard.

What changes here is the nature of the work. Building becomes running, and running becomes handing over.

The weekly rhythm

Who	How often	What
Family Ambassador	Weekly	Review each student's progress. Contact each family to encourage, congratulate, and troubleshoot. Escalate anything beyond the role.
Village Leader	Weekly	Post something real in the community space. Answer anything unanswered for more than a day. Check in with the Ambassadors.
Ambassador team	Every two weeks to monthly	Meet, in person or by call. Compare notes. Surface the families who have gone quiet.
Parent and Youth Councils	Monthly, then as needed	Steer. Recruit. Plan gatherings. Tell the Leader what is not working.
Village Leader → Chapter	Monthly	Report the numbers in Document 10 and flag anything the chapter needs to know.
Mother Mentors	Weekly, informally	Check in with the new mother they are paired with.
The village	Quarterly at minimum	The Welcome Celebration for new babies, plus any other excuse to gather. See Document 8.

A village that goes quiet for two weeks feels abandoned.

A village updated weekly feels like a living neighborhood. This is the Village Leader's most important habit and it takes about thirty minutes. If writing a post feels like work, you are overthinking it — a photograph from a gathering and two sentences is a perfect post.

The continuous work

- Recruit families until the village is serving everyone in the boundary who wants help
- Recruit Ambassadors from among the families already served — this is what makes the village self-sustaining
- Hold gatherings, trainings, and celebrations, including one annual celebration of student success
- Keep growing ownership outward — hand things to the councils faster than feels comfortable

- Hold a Welcome Celebration every quarter and pair a Mother Mentor with every new mother
- Recruit a Training Ambassador once you have graduates of the cognitive training program — they are the right people for it
- Keep the record for every family current, so nothing is lost when a person moves on

Where a village grows next

Once youth success is working, a village has standing in its neighborhood and a network of people who trust each other. That capacity can be pointed at other things. These are options, not requirements, and none of them should be attempted while the core work is still shaky.

Direction	What it looks like
Widen the ages	Serve families before birth and through high school graduation, then into training, apprenticeship, and career.
Youth enterprise	A youth-run business serving the village — landscaping, snow clearing, repair — with adult supervision and youth ownership. Keeps up the properties of neighbors who cannot manage it themselves, and teaches the young people running it more than any curriculum could.
Shared ground	Community gardens, shared childcare, a tool library, a meal rotation.
Experience	Field trips, and travel beyond the hometown for young people who have never had it.
Pathways	Entrepreneurship training, financial literacy, apprenticeship placements, introductions to local employers.
Looking after neighbors	A check-in service for residents living alone. A member sets the times they want to be contacted; if they do not respond, a volunteer goes to look. Cheap to run, and the clearest demonstration that a village serves everyone in it, not only households with children.
Coordination	Convene the other organizations working with families inside your boundary. Nobody else is doing this, and the village is the only body with standing to try.

Recruiting: what to say

Two audiences, three messages, one underlying shift.

Recruiting volunteers

Lead with community pride and legacy, not with anyone's personal pain. You are inviting people to build something in the place they live. Be specific about the commitment — the hours, the term, the check, the agreement — and let people say no. A volunteer who signs up under a vague description quits in eight weeks, and a family loses the person who was supposed to be walking with them.

Recruiting families of young children

Lead with protection. The message is that a problem can be prevented rather than repaired, and that the parent has more power over this than anyone has told them. Avoid alarm; a frightened parent does not act, they freeze.

Recruiting families of older struggling students

Lead with relief. These parents already know something is wrong and have usually been told a great deal without being told anything useful. The message is that there is a way to find out what is actually going on, specifically, for their child — not a label and not a guess. Be careful not to promise an answer you cannot deliver.

The shift you are actually trying to produce

Underneath all three messages is one movement in how a parent sees themselves. It has four steps and you can usually tell which one a person is standing on.

Step	What they believe now	What changes
Awareness	Something is wrong and the school is not doing enough. Frustration pointed at institutions.	This is where most parents arrive. Do not argue with it.
Reframe	This is not the school's fault. They were never designed to solve this.	Removes blame, which is what opens the door to doing something.
Identity	I am not a bystander in my child's education. I have power I did not know about.	The unlock. This is the moment a family becomes a participant rather than a recipient.
Action	Join. Do the work. Bring another family. Eventually, become the Ambassador.	The goal. This is how a village grows itself.

Where to find them

Local parent groups online, congregations, service clubs, retired educator networks, the school itself, pediatric and family practices, community centers, and the people your councils already know. Start with the smallest and warmest channel you have, learn what happens, and only then go to the largest one. A trusted local voice introducing you is worth more than any post you write yourself.

How villages fail

Five ways, all of them preventable, all of them common.

Failure	How to prevent it
The founder burns out	The village grew past what one person could hold because the founder kept doing everything themselves. Recruit help before you need it, and hand things over before you are ready to.
Families sign up and hear nothing	Do not recruit beyond your capacity to respond. One family left in silence tells more people about you than ten families served well.
It becomes a program with one employee	Ownership never moved outward. The councils were never really started, and the Ambassadors were never really trusted. Fix this early or not at all.
The village goes quiet	No gatherings, no posts, no contact. Families drift off without ever saying they left. The weekly rhythm exists to prevent exactly this.
It positions itself against the school	A village built on resentment attracts angry people, alienates the educators it needs, and does not survive its first disagreement. You are working the other half of the equation, not the same half better.

The whole thing on one page

Stage	What you do	Done when
Before	Complete orientation Set the boundary Decide which hats you wear Check for families already served remotely List everyone you could call tomorrow	You can explain the Movement in your own words and you know who your first calls are.
Development	Recruit the Village Leader, if not you Recruit and train the first Ambassadors Checks and agreements signed Start both councils Get your village set up on the Hub Agree the intake path Recruit the first ten families	Ten families enrolled, each assigned to a trained Ambassador. Leader in place, both councils begun, communication channel working.
Launch	Hold the celebration Fill out the Ambassador team Grow the councils Grow to 25–30 students Start the volunteer ladder and pair Mother Mentors Inform funders; begin fundraising Open the relationship with the school	25–30 students training. Nobody holding two roles out of necessity. Councils grown. Publicly launched.
Steady state	Weekly rhythm held Continuous family recruiting Ambassadors recruited from served families Quarterly Welcome Celebrations and an annual celebration Monthly report to the chapter	Never. This stage is measured, not finished — Document 10.

If you remember one thing from this document:

Ten families, served well, by people who were properly prepared, is a real village. A hundred families signed up and left waiting is nothing at all — and it costs you the one community you were going to prove this in.

Next: Document 4 — Family Ambassador Handbook