Youth Empowerment as a Framework for Creating Community Change

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Session Objectives

Attendees will be able to:
1. Identify the research surrounding effective strategies for youth-led programming.
2. Summarize two evidence-based frameworks that support youth-led programming.
3. Conceptualize a youth-led program utilizing the Youth Empowerment Conceptual Framework (Holden et al., 2004) and the Strategic Prevention Framework (SAMHSA).

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Why Youth-Led Programming?

- YLP represents a sound investment through meaningful youth involvement in community prevention efforts.
- YLP has been viewed as a substance abuse prevention program.
- YLP is a comprehensive approach to addressing the emotional and behavioral health of youth and young adults.

Communicating the Value of YLP

- How do we communicate the value of our work to the people we need to support us?
- How can we garner legitimacy and support for YLP?
- How can we purposefully and intentionally structure YLP so that they get to outcomes?
Ohio’s Current Youth-Led Initiatives

We implemented the SPF and found:
- (Capacity): Workforce development needed
- (Evaluation): Lack of outcomes tracking
- (Planning): YLP not operationalized
- (Sustainability): Disconnect among YLP
- (Capacity): Science of YLP

SFY15 Goal

To create an evidence-informed framework for youth-led programming in Ohio that is evaluable and sustainable.

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Establish a Common Definition of YLP

Young people will collectively engage in a planning process to create and implement a strategic plan that uses evidence-based strategies to create community-level change.

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Change on Three Levels

ADULT GUIDED:
1. Individual
2. Group

YOUTH LED:
3. Community


Community Change

In our process, we identified:

- Parallels to community coalition work
- Capacity among Ohio’s prevention workforce to do this type of work
- Use of a planning process specific to substance abuse prevention (Strategic Prevention Framework)

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Community Change

1. Is the SPF the answer?
2. What is the goal?
Young people will collectively engage in a planning process to create and implement a strategic plan that uses evidence-based strategies to create community-level change.

Pilot Project: OYLPN Youth Council

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1. How were the young people able to create their own plan for community-level change?
2. How can we empower young people to become agents of change in their communities?
3. How can we develop capacity within young people to engage in this work?
4. Is the SPF “alone” enough?

Youth Organizing

“Innovative youth development and social justice strategy that trains young people in community organizing and advocacy, and assists them in employing those skills to alter power relations and create meaningful institutional change in their communities.”

(Funder’s Collaborative on Youth Organizing, 2009)

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Individual Goals

Youth members:

- have knowledge of effective prevention strategies (e.g. CSAP strategies)
- believe in their own ability to create community change
- demonstrate leadership skills
- demonstrate an ability to work with others to create change

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Group Goals

Group members:
- Develop close relationships with each other
- Remain committed to the youth council
- Engage in collective decision making
- Believe they can work together to create change
- Feel proud to be a part of the youth council

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Empowerment

The process by which individuals gain influence of events and outcomes of importance to them.
(Rappaport, 1984)

Youth Empowerment

“Prevention has begun moving away from preventing something negative from happening to a new paradigm, which emphasizes the need to promote positive youth development via youth empowerment.”
(Kim et al., 1998, p. 5)
Youth Empowerment

- Views youth as a resource rather than a collection of problems
- Focuses on fostering support via developmentally appropriate experiences and resources
- Provides a means for youth to develop a stable, positive identity by providing them an opportunity to participate in a variety of roles that allow them to experiment and better define their identity.

Cahill & Pitts (1997); Chinman & Linney (1998); Rappaport et al. (1984); Zimmerman (1990, 1995, 2000)

Youth Empowerment

- Building young people’s skills so they can participate in social and political affairs that are important to them.
  - **Key:** Allowing authentic opportunities for youth to participate in decision-making
- As a result, youth feel like they are able to influence the social and political systems that affect their lives.

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Key Points

- The Youth Empowerment Conceptual Framework (Holden et al., 2004) is NOT a “model for YLP.”
- The Holden Model IS a framework to conceptualize YLP so that it can be evaluated.
- The Holden Model gives us a mechanism to show what YLP looks like in practice.

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Begin with the End in Mind...

If the overarching goal for your YLP is that young people will engage in a planning process to create and implement a strategic plan that uses evidence-based strategies to create community-level change ... ... what evidence-informed frameworks can we use to get to that goal?

Identify the Evidence that Informs the Work

1. Strategic Prevention Framework (SAMHSA)
2. Youth Empowerment Conceptual Framework (YECF; Holden et al., 2004)

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Two Underpinning Frameworks

From YECF:
- Structure and group processes by which adult allies promote and assist YP in developing the necessary 21st Century Learning Skills to carry out community change

From the SPF:
- Structure for which adult allies support and assist YP in planning and implementing an evidence-based strategy to create community change

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Reflecting on SFY15

The goal of the SFY15 work was to create an evidence-informed framework for youth-led programming in Ohio (√) that is evaluable (√) and sustainable (time will tell).

Identifying and Developing Champions

- Is it worth it?
- Will it work?
- Can I do it?

Adult Allies as Champions

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For more information on OYLPN...

Ohio Youth-Led Prevention Network
https://www.drugfreeactionalliance.org/oylpn
Twitter: @BeTheMajority
Pinterest: InTheMajority
Instagram: bethemajority

References

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) of the United States Department of Health and Human Services funds the Strategic Prevention Framework State Incentive Grant (SPF SIG).

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