



The Youth Partnership for Health

Why Involve Youth? What's at Stake?

Ideas and input from youth are vital to the success of any program targeting youth. When programs targeting youth do not involve them in the development and decision-making process, they risk developing strategies that don't work and waste valuable resources.¹ Youth play important roles in all aspects of program development and implementation from program design to evaluation of effectiveness. In fact, the roles that young people play are as varied as the roles of adults. They are limited only by the willingness of participants to engage young voices in important issues. Research supports the value of youth involvement, not just for the youth, but for adults and organizations too.² The success of youth involvement efforts is widely recognized, so widely that there are worldwide efforts to engage youth as leaders in policy and program design and delivery.³

Colorado's Youth Partnership for Health Program Description

The Youth Partnership for Health (YPH) is a diverse group of 14-18 year olds from across Colorado, recruited from a variety of schools, local health agencies and community programs such as Rainbow Alley and Project PAVE. They are selected to participate based on their age, geographic location and unique experiences. The youth work directly with adults to help make decisions affecting all youth in Colorado. Every month, the YPH convenes to discuss such issues as teen driving safety and substance use prevention. They then provide open and honest feedback to programs, agencies and organizations developing programs and policies for youth.

Since 2000, the YPH has provided feedback and recommendations to many programs and initiatives that have resulted in policy and practice changes, written articles for Colorado prevention newsletters, presented and served as workshop assistants at statewide conferences, provided technical assistance to various public and private partners and developed an original DVD and guidebook on effective youth-adult partnerships to be distributed nationally.

Evidenced-Base for Involving Youth

Involving young people in program development and implementation can increase the potential for success. Research indicates that programs utilizing youth-adult partnerships often demonstrate greater effectiveness, and offer potential benefits to not only youth, but to the adults and organizations that serve them.² Adults who participate in these partnerships have said that they see youth as more competent and critical to program success. They have also reported feeling stronger and more competent themselves in relating to youth, and feeling a deeper connection to their communities.² Organizations that utilize youth-adult partnerships have realized



greater mission clarity, increased connection and responsiveness to youth and the general community, and greater appeal to funders.

Research has also demonstrated that youth involved in program development experience decreased shyness and hopelessness and greater self-esteem, academic achievement, sense of personal safety, communication skills, and life skills (e.g. conflict resolution and problem solving).² Many of these characteristics have been linked to improvements in physical activity and nutrition, and declines in sexual activity and drug use (all of which are *Healthy People 2010* goals for adolescents).^{4,5}

Challenges and Future Opportunities

Involving young people in program development and implementation can present challenges (i.e. lack of resources, scheduling difficulties). However, the benefits reported by partnership participants are extensive, including greater understanding of the youth perspective, improvement in youth programming and increased sensitivity to diverse cultures. The YPH is available to provide input to any state program or initiative targeting youth. It also provides consultation and technical assistance in the development of youth-adult partnerships and youth advisory boards. For more details, please contact the Youth Partnership for Health Coordinator Anne-Marie Braga at (303) 692-2946 or anne-marie.braga@state.co.us.

State and Local Partnerships

The Youth Partnership for Health works with various state-level groups such as the Advisory Council on Adolescent Health, The Colorado Prevention Leadership Council, The Colorado Department of Transportation, The Colorado Department of Human Services, The Colorado Department of Education, Denver Health and Hospitals, the University of Colorado Denver Health Sciences Center and the University of Denver. In addition, the Youth Partnership for Health actively recruits and encourages participation from youth in urban, rural and frontier communities across Colorado.

Website (Currently Under Construction) www.healthyyouthcolorado.org

1 Olson, J.R., Goddard, H.W., Solheim, C.A., Sandt, L. (2004). Making a case for engaging adolescents in program decision-making. *Journal of Extension*, 42(6), 1-10.

2 Zeldin, S., McDaniel, A.K., Toptzes, D. & Calvert, M. (2000). *Youth in Decision- Making: A Study on the Impacts of Youth and Adults on Organizations*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin-Madison, Department of Human Development and Family Studies.

3 Kahn, R., Lynn, J., Braga, A., & Donovan, K. (2008). *Engage Youth: Colorado's Guide to Building Successful Youth-Adult Partnerships*. Denver, CO: Colorado Youth Partnership for Health, Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment..

4 Nystrom, R. J., Prata, A., and Ramowski, S. (2007). *Measuring Youth Development: Creation and Analysis of Oregon's Positive Youth Development Benchmark*. Portland, OR: Oregon Adolescent Health Section, Public Health Division, Department of Human Services.

5 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *The Prevention Marketing Initiative: Youth Involvement*. Washington, DC: U.S. Dept. of Health & Human Services, 1997.

