



Podcast Transcript Creating and Sustaining Youth Leadership Councils

Youth Leadership Councils are critical for ensuring that programs and strategies for implementation of teen pregnancy prevention programs are relevant and a good fit for the needs of the community. In this podcast series, project implementers and youth talk about strategies for creating and sustaining Youth Leadership Councils.

Kristine Andrews: Okay, my name is Kristine Andrews and I'm here today with a recent graduate of the Youth Leadership Council from the Family Services of Merrimack Valley in Massachusetts. I'd like to get started today by asking our guest a little bit about her participation in the Youth Leadership Council.

So first I'd just like to ask you how were you recruited to join the Youth Leadership Council?

Youth: I was recruited for the Youth Leadership Council by a member who thought I was a good fit for the opportunity and they ended up giving me an application. I participated in the leadership seminar - the meetings prior to becoming a member and I knew I had to step up because it was my time to be a leader. I was serving a purpose by helping others and I really liked it.

Kristine Andrews: Was there an application process?

Youth: Yes, there was. They - the members of the staff from the Youth Leadership Council actually gave me an application. She had us do an interview and I was

well-prepared for that beforehand. It was definitely a step by step process in order to be part of the Youth Leadership Council.

Kristine Andrews: Got it and how long were you a member?

Youth: I was in the program for about eight or nine years. I started the program between fifth and sixth grade but the summer before seventh and eighth grade I was actually recruited to be part of the leadership position and I remained in the leadership position until graduation of my high school.

Kristine Andrews: Okay. Were you given opportunities while on the council to engage with organizational leadership?

Youth: Yes, family services would visit local fairs. We had our own table there so we could interact with the children or whoever showed up to the table. We were able to display materials from the programs or in these sessions. We met with people in family services - the staff, the community - to share information about safe sex practices to help prevent teen pregnancy and we also passed out free condoms at local health centers to the teens but still that's not even half of what we do in the community.

We also participate in a lot of local health fairs to spread the word about teen pregnancy.

Kristine Andrews: Were you given the opportunity to also engage with policy makers or leaders?

Youth: Yes, we actually were able to go to the senator's house in Boston - the youth leaders - so we could actually secure some more funding for the program. They spoke on what the program does. We spoke about what we did and how

we helped prevent teen pregnancy and safe sex and discussed teen pregnancy prevention.

Kristine Andrews: So would you encourage other organizations to develop a youth leadership council?

Youth: Yes, I would recruit at a young age for the leadership council. I mean, it helps create a sense of family. It meant that I had to do something - I had something to do and it helped me grow up and be a better person and be more responsible.

I think organizations should develop a leadership council so that kids are able to, you know, become leaders and know that sense of responsibility at a young age and it's, like, a way to increase and grow in knowledge for these kids and it's just a great opportunity for them.

Kristine Andrews: And so what are some of the challenges of being part of a council?

Youth: I think some of the challenges are when youth leaders are kind of the same age as the people who they are leading, it's hard to separate, like, friends from your leadership responsibilities. Family services definitely did a good job helping us know when, you know, when it was time to be with friends and when it was time to, you know, lead.

They also let us be kids because they knew that we were still kids even though we were leaders and we still had a lot to learn and still had a lot to grow up with and they kind of helped us and guided us to become better leaders like that.

Kristine Andrews: Okay. Any other words of advice that may be helpful to someone that's considering doing a youth leadership council for their organization or to a youth that's considering being a part of it?

Youth: It's definitely a great idea to do. Some people do not have the opportunity to be leaders within their own communities or schools. Personally, I wasn't able to be part of the executive board and being part of a leadership board within family services helped me find the leadership and made me grow.

It is actually very satisfying. You have a purpose and you're able to help other people and it just makes you feel very good about yourself. So it's a great way to have kids and teenagers involved with as a group.

Kristine Andrews: Well that's wonderful. Thank you so much for your time this afternoon and sharing about your experience as part of a youth leadership council. So we hope this information will be helpful to someone who's considering being on the council or an organization that's considering youth in the youth leadership council. Thanks for your time.

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