



## **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 Miss Amelia Teodosio, Health Educator for the University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio's UT Teen Health Program.

Thank you for joining us today as we hear firsthand how you formalized youth involvement through the use of a Teen Advisory Board. Can you start us off by sharing a brief description of your program?

Amelia Teodosio: Sure. The UT Health Science Center at San Antonio - or UT Teen Health Program - promotes adolescent health and wellness by providing medically accurate sexual health information to the community and encourages positive youth development and healthy life choices.

Since 2003, UT Teen Health has offered sex education enriched with positive youth development for teens in San Antonio, Texas and surrounding areas.

In 2010, UT Teen Health was awarded a grant by the Office of Adolescent Health to rigorously evaluate a high school sex education curriculum model to prevent teen pregnancy.

UT Teen Health has incorporated a Youth Leadership Council in their projects since 2003 - each with their own distinct identity or name, and the Teen Advisory Board has provided UT Teen Health valuable feedback regarding teen sexual health education, clinical champions, and receptiveness of strategies for reaching teens in schools, clinics, and youth-serving organizations in Bexar County, Texas.

Kristine Andrews: Great. Thank you for that background. Can you share the steps involved in creating your Teen Advisory Board, and describe a bit about how it functions?

Amelia Teodosio: Well, I ran a school-based Teen Leadership Group in two high schools, and health educators who taught in the classes gave announcements and handed out flyers about the Teen Leadership Group in the classes that they taught.

Then the Teen Advisory Board - or TAB - was established and opened only to the grade that we taught the curriculum to. So, students who were interested in joining the TAB would fill out an application. Then, educators would look over the application and accepted those who showed a commitment, and then we would invite them to come to our first meeting, which was the orientation kick-off, and that occurred in the fall.

And the students - along with their parents - would also have to sign a membership agreement and a media release form. The TAB would meet monthly after school - the first Thursday of every month for one hour - and there would also be at least one half-day service event per semester.

Kristine Andrews: What resources in your community did you leverage to develop your Teen Advisory Board?

Amelia Teodosio: Well, since we weren't employees of the school, we needed a school champion to be the liaison of the TAB. And this champion served as our required school sponsor, and he or she could be any school representative who showed an interest in supporting the group.

Their role was mainly to attend each meeting and facilitate any logistics, such as opening and closing the school or securing a classroom. We used the school library and a teacher's classroom as meeting locations.

Kristine Andrews: And how do you determine membership in the TAB?

Amelia Teodosio: Well, we started teaching freshmen the first year, and we moved along with the class until they were juniors. So, eligible members were those students who were in the grade level that we were currently teaching and who were receiving the curriculum.

They had to have passing grades, and they had to show an interest and commitment to participate in the TAB. Members had to fill out an application form and also turn it in on time, and they had to sign an agreement to be committed to the meetings. They were only allowed two unexcused absences per year, or they would be dismissed from their service.

Kristine Andrews: And how long do your members serve?

Amelia Teodosio: Our members serve for one school year at a time. We had approximately 40 active members of the 1,550 students taking the class. Applications were

reviewed every year, and existing members had to reapply to serve another year. Some students served all three years - their freshman year through their junior year.

Kristine Andrews: Can you say a bit about some of the specific roles and responsibilities of the Teen Advisory Board?

Amelia Teodosio: Sure. Most of the TAB roles and responsibilities revolved around prepping and planning for our service activities, such as our Teen Dating Violence Awareness campaign, health fairs, and many others.

Kristine Andrews: And how would you - what would you say is the time commitment?

Amelia Teodosio: So, the time commitment would be one after-school meeting per month and one additional service event per semester, and other volunteer opportunities as they came up. Some volunteer examples included Habitat for Humanity; collecting food and goods for an animal shelter. We donated books to a children's hospital and served food at a Thanksgiving feast.

Kristine Andrews: Does the TAB have opportunities to interact with other steering committees or advisory boards?

Amelia Teodosio: The TAB serves on our program's media focus group to give us feedback on our social media initiative. Also, we did have one TAB at each of our two schools, and we would combine them during larger service events.

We also met with UT Teen Health other Youth Leadership Teams from a different project once for our Team-Building Leadership Retreat the final year. This retreat was held in December for two days. The two schools' TABs and

the other Teen Leadership groups spent a weekend together working on team building, leadership, and communication skills with one another.

Kristine Andrews: What are some of the successful strategies you used for recruiting youth for your TAB?

Amelia Teodosio: Recruiting for the TAB was mainly spread through word of mouth and simple enthusiasm. Our group was known to have a lot of fun. By the third year, we actually had to turn away applicants due to size. Our size limitation was 30 members per school. Having incentives like t-shirts and sunglasses also helped increase visibility and showed unity at our events.

Kristine Andrews: Sometimes it's challenging to keep youth actively engaged. What are some of the successful strategies you used to keep youth actively engaged in the Teen Advisory Board?

Amelia Teodosio: Well, I had a very solid group of officers from our Teen Advisory Board who would help me plan, and eventually they took over running the meetings. The officers were elected by their peers, and they included a Chair, Co-chair, Publicity Coordinator that marketed the TAB meetings, Secretary, and a Special Events Coordinator, who was in charge of service events and health fairs.

Also, during the meetings, I would make sure to delegate so that each participant had an active and important role. I also used the Remind101 app to keep in touch with my students via text. And this is an app that is commonly used by teachers to create a class where one text message can be sent to all members with reminders of upcoming events.

Kristine Andrews: Great. What did your organization do to support the TAB on an ongoing basis?

Amelia Teodosio: We were very fortunate to be the health educators in their classroom for three years. So we would see them eight times in the fall and eight times in the spring on a weekly basis.

During TAB meetings, we would have time dedicated to sharpening the TAB's leadership, communication and team-building skills through activities. There was no specific formal curriculum used, but the activities were thoroughly planned and researched with stated objectives and learning goals for each meeting.

For example, we had a swamp activity where TAB members would get a limited number of resources as their lily pad to cross a pretend swamp. This activity helped them with critical thinking and communication.

Kristine Andrews: Thinking about other Teen Pregnancy Prevention grantees or other program providers, what would you say are some of the benefits and some of the challenges of a Teen Advisory Board?

Amelia Teodosio: So, benefits would include greater campus visibility of the program and feedback from the end user, which are the teens. And because the program was part of a federal rigorous evaluation, the TAB allowed us to collect qualitative feedback on the program as it was being developed.

Challenges included time constraints of the health educators to plan for and attend all the meetings and the TAB weekend service activities.

Kristine Andrews: What are some of the challenges that program providers face as they really are striving to ensure that youth stay involved and are being authentically engaged and participating? How do they overcome those challenges?

Amelia Teodosio: I would say a challenge would be communication. With approximately 40 members, sometimes it is hard to keep everyone in the loop. But the Remind101 app helps overcome that challenge.

Another challenge is commitment and attendance. We overcame this by outlining clear expectations from the beginning, doing a roll call at the beginning of meetings, posting the attendance log clearly at each meeting and following up immediately - and individually - if a member missed a meeting.

Kristine Andrews: Great. So, last question. If our listeners want to learn more about Teen Advisory Boards, what are some resources that could be helpful to them?

Amelia Teodosio: The school of hard knocks. Live and learn, I say.

But all joking aside, I did use all my resources, such as Google, Google searching “Team Building for Youth Groups” or “Teen Icebreakers.” And I also consulted my colleagues for their input.

The Search Institute also had helpful resources. Some of their research has included The 40 Developmental Assets, SPARK, and other books in their store, which has Great Group Games, Great Group Skits, Conversations on the Go, Activities on the Go, and such.

I would refer to those books when I would plan my meetings and events. And of course, you can always ask the teens themselves. They have great ideas.

Kristine Andrews: Thank you so much for your time today and for sharing with our audience the ways that you formalized youth engagement through the use of a Teen Advisory Board. Thank you so much.

Amelia Teodosio: You're welcome. Thank you.

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