

Review of the YA4-H! Youth Advocates for Health: Building Successful Youth-Adult Partnerships Training Curriculum

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Abstract: Youth-adult partnerships (Y-APs) are an important aspect of positive youth development programming. Creating effective Y-APs, however, requires training of both youth and adults. This article reviews the *YA4-H! Youth Advocates for Health: Building Successful Youth-Adult Partnerships* (Arnold, & Gifford, 2015) curriculum that is intended for use in trainings with youth and adults to assist in the formation of effective Y-APs. The 80 page curriculum covers five key areas for forming successful YA-Ps: Ice Breakers, an exploration of power, understanding youth-adult partnerships, personal traits, and reflection. The curriculum is laid out in a user-friendly manner, provides background information on youth development and Y-APs, and includes training options ranging from half-day to full weekend retreats. While it was developed for the 4-H program, it is suitable for use in any youth setting. The curriculum is comprehensive, easy to use, and a valuable addition to other published Y-AP training materials.

Resource Review

Relationships with non-parental adults that can be developed through Youth-Adult Partnerships (Y-AP's) are essential to positive youth development (PYD) (Libby, Rosen, & Sedonaen, 2005; Zeldin, 2014). In fact, research shows that Y-AP's strengthen a community's capacity to serve youth while also increasing the abilities of adult staff and volunteers (Zeldin, 2014). To make Y-AP's successful, however, it is important to ensure that adult staff, volunteers, and youth are able to understand each other so that PYD can be fostered. Training and support can help to create and sustain these partnerships. The *YA4-H! Youth Advocates for Health: Building Successful Youth-Adult Partnerships* training curriculum contains five key areas to help in the development of Y-APs:

- 1) Ice-Breaker Activities,
- 2) An Honest Exploration of Power Balances,
- 3) Understanding Youth-Adult Partnerships,
- 4) Personal Traits in Groups, and
- 5) Reflection, Application, and Evaluation.

Ice-Breaker Activities

Ice-breaker activities reveal some of the potential road blocks that prevent Y-AP's from being successful. To help relieve some of these potential road blocks the ice-breaker activities help youth and adults to get to know each other, establish trust, build a shared experience, begin working as a team, and practice effective listening and communication skills (Arnold, & Gifford, 2014). Creating a foundation from which youth and adults can draw upon by working and learning together fosters a developmental context that prioritizes Y-AP's, which can help create a more successful program.

An Honest Exploration of Power Balances

Age, experience, and social roles are all factors that create an unequal distribution of power between youth and adults. As such, honesty about the way power functions between adult staff, volunteers, and teens is essential to creating a program context that works to distribute power in more equitable ways. The goal of the activities in this section is to help youth and adults talk openly about the ways in which power differences affect their collaboration, understand how much influence each side has in the partnership, reveal ways in which traditional power balances might be shifted, and set the stage for shared decision making (Arnold, & Gifford, 2014). The activities provide youth and adults the opportunity to explore how power operates in different situations, preparing them to work together more effectively in the future.

Understanding Youth-Adult Partnerships

Creating lasting and successful Y-APs requires attention to several key components, such as learning about the strengths, challenges, and benefits of working together, identifying common stereotypes about youth and adults, and discovering what it takes to create and maintain equitable partnerships (Arnold, & Gifford, 2014). Each of these activities is tailored to center discussions around exactly what it takes to create sustainable Y-AP's. For example, one activity has the youth and adults brainstorm about their ideas of what components are necessary for

Y-AP's. Through these activities youth and adults give voice to their individual expertise by working through the various stages and components of a Y-AP.

Personal Traits in Group

Group work requires understanding the strengths of the other team members. Every person brings a unique strength to a team, thus this section contains activities geared toward discovering some of the roles individuals assume when they work in teams, appreciating the importance of all of these roles, and learning how best to work with others (Arnold, & Gifford, 2014). By working through activities together, youth and adults receive first-hand insight on what each person brings to the group and how each of their individual strengths fit into the team dynamic.

Reflection, Application, and Evaluation

Providing time for youth and adults to reflect on their learning experiences is very important (Lee, & Murdock, 2001). Determining what went well during the training activities and identifying areas for improvement is crucial for youth and adults to grow through the training program. By gearing the reflection time towards an emphasis on the application of real-life settings, the goal is to help teams observe changes to the balance of power, identify and share what they have learned so far about Y-APs, and reflect on what they plan to put into practice as they move ahead with their Y-AP project (Arnold, & Gifford, 2014). Providing the opportunity for youth and adults to reflect and apply their knowledge about Y-AP's creates space for the development of positive adaptation for future interactions.

Conclusion

Successful Y-AP's are integral to a high quality program contexts. Training is critical in order to foster these partnerships. *YA4-H! Youth Advocates for Health: Building Successful Youth-Adult Relationships* is a quality curriculum that provides for engaging and informative activities to help youth and adults build successful Y-AP's together. The curriculum is readily available, easy to use, fun and engaging, and highly portable.

Ordering Information

YA4-H! Youth Advocates for Health: Building Successful Youth-Adult Relationships. Please contact Mary Arnold at Mary.Arnold@oregonstate.edu for more information.

References

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