Healthy Missoula Youth
Coalition

TAKING IT FROM CONCEPT TO CLASSROOM: DEVELOPING YOUTH LED PROGRAMS

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CONCEPT TO CLASSROOM

Purpose of the Section

- Explain the development of youth-led programs, their needs, and educational standards
- Direct educators towards facilitators guides and ideas for recruitment and funding
- Key tips for group cohesion and development, as well as planning guides

What Educators Can Do

- Provide a safe space for youth to practice leadership skills
- Assist in developing or finding funding for the program
- Encourage youth to become actively engaged in the school community

Why is this important?

After school programs provide a wide variety of benefits for youth, such as leadership skills and teamwork.

While there are a plethora of opportunities and after-school programs available in the heart of Missoula, some of the more rural communities within the County may not have access to these. As such, the Healthy Missoula Youth Coalition would like to provide some guidance on how to bring this concept to life in the classroom when there are no pre-existing programs for the school.

CONCEPT TO CLASROOM

What is a Youth-Led Program?

A brief description of a what a youth-led program is, it's needs, and how to incorporate education.

Program Facilitator's Guide

Key mindfulness aspects that encourage youth participation, how to find funding, youth recruitment, and sustainability.

Group Cohesion & Development

The theory of 5 stages of group development.

Planning Guides

Various resources that provide a more in-depth look at event and budget planning.

INTRODUCTION

Youth-led programs prioritize authentic youth engagement, giving young people a voice and an active role in decision-making processes. By actively involving youth in all stages of planning, from setting goals to developing activities, these programs create a sense of ownership and investment among participants. This approach recognizes that young individuals have unique insights and lived experiences, which can contribute to the program's design and implementation. The engagement fosters a sense of belonging, self-esteem, and motivation to actively participate.

YOUTH-LED PROGRAMS

WHAT IS A YOUTH-LED PROGRAM?

After-school programs serve as vital spaces for students to continue their learning, explore new interests, and develop essential life skills. An emerging focus in this field is the establishment of prevention-oriented after-school programs that aim to address various challenges faced by students. These programs can play a crucial role in promoting mental health, preventing substance abuse, and fostering positive relationships.

To this effect, the development of a youth-led program or coalition has become increasingly recognized as a best practice in after-school programming. They empower young individuals to take charge, make decisions, and create positive change in their communities. By placing youth at the forefront, these initiatives foster a sense of ownership, promote leadership skills, and ensure that the program's objectives are tailored to meet the specific needs and interests of the participants.

Youth-led programs are designed to address the specific needs and interests of the participants. By empowering youth to shape the program's content, activities, and objectives, the resulting programming becomes more relevant, engaging, and responsive. Young people have firsthand knowledge of the challenges they face, making them best suited to identify areas where support and intervention are required. This approach ensures that the program aligns with the participants' aspirations, promotes personal growth, and fosters a sense of accomplishment.

One of the key benefits of youth-led programs is the opportunity for leadership development. By entrusting young individuals with decision-making responsibilities, these programs cultivate essential skills such as communication, problem-solving, teamwork, and critical thinking. Participants learn to articulate their ideas, negotiate with peers, and navigate challenges, which strengthens their ability to become effective leaders. Through experiential learning, youth-led programs promote self-confidence, resilience, and a sense of agency, preparing young individuals for future leadership roles in their communities.

YOUTH-LED PROGRAMS

WHAT IS A YOUTH-LED PROGRAM?

Youth-led programs foster a supportive peer network where participants can learn from and inspire one another. By working collaboratively, young people build connections, develop empathy, and enhance their social skills. The program serves as a platform for peer-to-peer influence, allowing participants to share knowledge, exchange perspectives, and develop a sense of camaraderie. Older participants in the program can also serve as mentors to younger participants, providing guidance, support, and positive role modeling.

Youth-led programs extend their influence beyond the program itself by engaging with the wider community. Participants are encouraged to identify community issues, initiate service projects, and advocate for positive change. Through their active involvement, young individuals develop a sense of civic responsibility and become agents of community development. This community engagement not only benefits the program participants but also contributes to the well-being and growth of the broader community.

Youth-led programs represent a best practice in after-school programming due to their focus on authentic youth engagement, relevant programming, leadership development, peer-to-peer influence, and community impact. By empowering young individuals to take the lead, these programs foster a sense of ownership, promote personal growth, and cultivate future leaders. As we strive to create supportive and empowering environments for young people, it is crucial to recognize and implement the power of youth leadership in after-school programs.

YOUTH-LED PROGRAMS

YOUTH-LED PROGRAM NEEDS

Successful after-school programming goes beyond providing a safe and supervised environment for students. It encompasses elements that enhance engagement, empowerment, and personal growth. There are four key elements of successful after-school programming: consistent facilitators, food, autonomy/choices, and leadership. These elements contribute to creating a positive and impactful experience for program participants.

CONSISTENT FACILITATORS

Consistency in facilitators is crucial for successful after-school programming. When participants have consistent and familiar faces leading the program, it builds trust, rapport, and a sense of belonging. Consistent facilitators understand the needs and strengths of the participants, enabling them to tailor activities and support accordingly. The presence of consistent facilitators allows for meaningful relationships to develop, providing a supportive and nurturing environment for students to thrive.

FOOD PROVISION

The provision of food plays a significant role in successful after-school programming. A nutritious snack or meal not only meets the basic needs of students but also enhances their overall well-being. Proper nourishment improves focus, concentration, and cognitive abilities, enabling participants to fully engage in activities and learning experiences. Moreover, shared meals foster a sense of community and promote social interaction among participants, creating a positive and inclusive atmosphere.

YOUTH-LED PROGRAMS

YOUTH-LED PROGRAM NEEDS

Successful after-school programming incorporates key elements that go beyond the traditional notions of supervision and academic support. Consistent facilitators establish trusting relationships, while the provision of food nourishes and enhances overall well-being. Empowering students with autonomy and choices promotes engagement and personal growth, and leadership opportunities contribute to the development of essential life skills. By integrating these elements into after-school programs, we create environments that foster empowerment, growth, and meaningful experiences for participants.

AUTONOMY & CHOICES

Empowering students with autonomy and choices is essential in successful after-school programming. Allowing participants to have a say in activity selection, project design, and goal setting fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility. When students have a voice in decision-making processes, they become more invested in the program, leading to increased engagement and enthusiasm. Autonomy and choices also promote the development of critical thinking skills, problem-solving abilities, and self-confidence among participants.

Leadership opportunities within after-school programs contribute to the overall success and growth of participants. Offering leadership roles and responsibilities allows students to develop and refine their leadership skills. Whether through mentoring younger participants, organizing events, or leading group projects, students gain valuable experiences that enhance their communication, collaboration, and decision-making abilities. Leadership opportunities also promote self-esteem, foster a sense of purpose, and prepare participants for future leadership roles in various aspects of life.

YOUTH LEADERSHIP

YOUTH-LED EDUCATION

HOW CAN WE MAKE THIS EDUCATIONAL?

After-school programs have the potential to play a significant role in educating students about substance use and problem behaviors. These programs can provide a safe and supportive environment for open discussions and educational activities on these important topics. By incorporating evidence-based curricula and interactive workshops, after-school programs can educate students about the risks and consequences of substance abuse, as well as the development of healthy coping strategies and decision-making skills. Moreover, these programs can invite guest speakers, such as counselors, prevention specialists, or recovered individuals, to share their experiences and provide real-life perspectives on the impact of substance use. By addressing these issues proactively and equipping students with knowledge and skills, after-school programs can help prevent substance abuse and problem behaviors, promoting a healthier and more informed youth population.

An adult can facilitate a program while still allowing youth to lead the group by using Hart's Ladder** to empower them. This is achieved by allowing the students to participate in decision-making and then moving up the "ladder" towards the desired goal. This would reflect in the youth's ability to move from manipulation to tokenism, to informed and consulted, to shared decision-making, and finally to delegated power.
**See "Schools of Thought" Section for more.

PROGRAM FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

WHEN LEADING A STUDENT GROUP, BE MINDFUL OF:

ACCESSIBILITY

Accessibility is considered for location/placement of programming which helps ensure that all youth have the opportunity to participate and benefit from the program regardless of their abilities, socioeconomic status, and other factors. This could be reflected as on-site programming afterschool, gas vouchers and/or transportation to programming off campus.

Inclusivity is important because it allows all youth to feel welcome, valued, and included. This can help to build a sense of community, promote understanding and acceptance of diversity, and create a positive and supportive environment for all youth. This can be achieved via the same goals of accessibility and using inclusive language and imagery that represents all youth, regardless of race, gender, etc. in advertisement of youth programming.

INCLUSIVITY

CONSTRUCTIVE CHAOS

Constructive Chaos is important as it stimulates creative thinking and meet the needs of students by allowing them to engage in hands-on, collaborative learning experiences that encourage experimentation, exploration, and problem-solving. It can also help students develop important social and emotional skills, such as communication, teamwork, and self-regulation. This can be achieved by breaking into small groups for the same or different activities or tasks.

PROGRAM FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

LEARNING STYLES

Familiarity with Learning Styles is important to help facilitators increase engagement and allow for better retention of information for students. Three main learning styles are:

- Visual: graphs, PowerPoints, videos, and pictures.
- Auditory: podcasts, group discussions, and videos.
- Kinesthetic: Hands-on activities, role-playing, and note-taking.

Tailoring activities and material to meet visual, auditory, and kinesthetic needs helps ensure that all students can learn effectively, regardless of their individual learning style. It's also important to avoid jargon as using simple, clear language helps ensure that all students can access and engage with content. Using accessible language styles also helps build trust and rapport with students by making facilitators more approachable and relatable.

CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING

Cultural understanding is important to youth programming as Missoula schools have diverse students with diverse needs. Culturally sensitive and responsive youth programming helps to create a safe and inclusive environment for all youth, regardless of their cultural background. By promoting cultural understanding, youth can learn to appreciate and respect different cultures, which can help to build empathy, reduce prejudice, and promote social justice.

Additionally, by incorporating diverse cultural perspectives into youth programming, youth can gain a broader understanding of the world around them, which can help to prepare them for life in an increasingly diverse society.

PROGRAM FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

TRANSITION TIME

Transition Time is a great opportunity for peer connection. Facilitators may want to entertain longer break times for the sake of student networking because it gives students more opportunities to socialize and build relationships with their peers.

Creating realistic goals, expectations, and rules for youth programming is important because it can help to create a clear and structured environment that promotes positive youth development. With these safeguards, youth can gain a sense of direction and purpose, which can help promote engagement and investment in the program. Additionally, by following best practices, youth programming can be designed in a way that is evidence-based, effective, and safe which promotes positive outcomes.

Realistic goals may include: improving academic performance, increasing students engagement and motivation, developing social and emotional skills, promoting physical health and wellness, and fostering a sense of community and belonging among students. These goals can be achieved through a variety of activities and interventions such as homework help, tutoring, mentoring, sports, recreation, arts and crafts, and community service projects.

REALISTIC GOALS

REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

Realistic expectations may include: actively participating in activities and projects, respecting the rights and feelings of others, following directions and rules, completing homework and assignments, demonstrating positive behavior and attitudes, and showing improvement in academic and personal skills over time. These expectations can be communicated clearly to students and parents with official policy material and/or an introduction day. Expectations are reinforced through positive feedback, recognition, and rewards/incentives.

PROGRAM FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

FUNDING

Good news! There are several ways to fund an afterschool program, including seeking grants, partnering with local businesses and community organizations, hosting fundraising events such as auctions or bake sales, applying for government funding or subsidies, and collaborating with local stakeholders such as parents, alumni, and community supporters for donations. It can be helpful to develop a clear and compelling mission statement to demonstrate the impact and value of the program through data and testimonials from students, parents, and other stakeholders. Other ways to obtain additional funding is by hosting fundraising events and applying for grants aligned with the program initiatives.

One great resource is Montana ReACT Mini-Grants: (mtreact.com)
ReACT mini-grants are funds offered to Montana students 12-18 years old to promote tobacco advocacy, education, and prevention at the community level.

RECRUITMENT

How do we gain interest and keep engagement? Partnering with local schools and community organizations to advertise programming, creating flyers or brochures to distribute to students and families, hosting an open house or information session to showcase the program and answer questions, using social media or other online platforms to promote the program and engage with potential participants, and offering incentives (ex: shirts) for referrals or early sign-ups.

Important considerations for advertising the program is the development of a clear and compelling message that highlights the benefits and unique opportunities such as academic support, field trips, social and emotional learning, letters of recommendation, resume building skills, and enrichment activities.

One example is putting up a booth which is flexible and doubles as outreach. A booth can happen during lunch, school clubs, school games, freshman orientation, etc.

PROGRAM FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

RETENTION

Keeping youth engaged can be challenging at the best of times, but it is still possible! Creating an interactive environment that fosters learning through hands-on activities and games can be helpful in this endeavor. Ensure participants feel that it is a safe and inclusive environment where youth are valued and respected by providing activities that are tailored to the interests and needs of youth/age group. It's also important to establish positive relationships with the youth and their families, keeping in mind to communicate regularly about the program goals and outcomes.

To help create a sustainable afterschool program, it's important to establish clear goals and objectives, and to regularly assess and evaluate the program's effectiveness. It's also crucial to secure adequate funding and resources to support the program and to build strong partnerships with community organizations and stakeholders. Lastly, it's important to cultivate a culture of continuous improvement, and to encourage ongoing learning and professional development among program staff and volunteers.

SUSTAINABILITY

Consider Hampton's Youth Engagement Model

PROJECT LEVEL
Stakeholders are informed about the project and its goals. Stakeholders include program staff, parents, community leaders, local businesses, and of course, the youth themselves.

INPUT LEVEL
Stakeholders are consulted and given the opportunity to provide feedback and suggestions.

LEADER LEVEL
Stakeholders are actively involved in the decision-making process and share responsibility for the projects' success. They have become a part of the shared leadership.

GROUP COHESION & DEVELOPMENT

To create a safe and welcoming environment that is culturally understanding, it's important to establish clear expectations and guidelines for behavior, and to encourage open communication and mutual respect among participants. This can be achieved through team-building activities and icebreakers, which can help build trust and foster positive relationships among group members. To incorporate healthy life skills into the activities, you can incorporate things like healthy activities that promote healthy habits and behaviors, such as exercise, healthy eating, and stress reduction techniques.

FORMING
In the Forming stage, team members are getting to know one another, and understand the team's purpose and their roles.

STORMING
In the Storming stage, politeness begins to wear off and dissension occurs over the basic mission and operating procedures.

NORMING
When team members recognize their differences and have dealt with them, they move to Norming, the stage when they ask, "How are we going to accomplish our work?"

PERFORMING
When team members recognize their differences and have dealt with them, they move to Norming, the stage when they ask, "How are we going to accomplish our work?"

ADJOURNING
As a project ends or a team member leaves, the team moves into the Adjourning stage. This is not a developmental stage. It is the stage of closure.

The **Five Stages of Group Development Theory**[1] suggests that groups progress through five stages: forming, storming, norming, performing, and adjourning. Knowing these stages can help in creating a supportive and inclusive environment, thus empowering youth to make positive choices and achieve their goals.

PLANNING GUIDES

MODEL PROGRAMS GUIDE 🔗

The Model Programs Guide (MPG) comes from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention and is designed to assist practitioners and communities in implementing evidence-based prevention and intervention programs that can make a difference in the lives of children and communities. The MPG database of evidence-based programs covers the entire continuum of youth services from prevention through sanctions to reentry. The MPG is a tool that offers a database of scientifically-proven programs that address a range of issues, including substance abuse, mental health, and education programs.

SAMHSA BUDGET PLANNING USER GUIDE 🔗

SAMHSA EVENT PLANNING TOOLKIT 🔗

STRATEGIC PREVENTION FRAMEWORK PLANNING MODEL 🔗

This is meant to serve as a reference to several other in-depth planning guide resources. For additional questions or assistance please contact info@healthymissoulayouth.org

CONCEPT TO CLASSROOM

Conclusion

Some communities may not have access to pre-existing after-school programs. The Healthy Missoula Youth Coalition recommends building a youth-led program to supplement this need, and has provided a variety of resources regarding funding, sustainability, and planning guides within this section. After-school programs serve as vital spaces for students to continue their learning, explore new interests, and develop essential life skills.

Action Items

- **ASSESS** whether your school has a need for a youth-led program. What student interests are not yet being met?
- **GAUGE CAPACITY**: Does your school have the appropriate resources and/or time to build one?
- **INVOLVE** students and administration in the development of the program.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- NHS Facilitators Guide Toolkit
- Summer Learning Toolkit
- ReACT Coalition Development Guide

1: Mendonca & Thorman, 2019