

COMMUNITY-BASED PROCESS

INTRODUCTION

Have you ever heard the saying “it takes a village?” While mostly relating to raising a child, this proverb also relates to prevention work. Allowing a child to interact with the community gives them more opportunities to grow. Similarly, collaborating with others to solve a problem in the community provides more support and resources than attempting to solve a problem alone. This is why community-based process is such an important strategy in the prevention field.

DEFINING COMMUNITY-BASED PROCESS

Community-based process is one of six Center for Substance Abuse Prevention (CSAP) strategies. Community-based process (CBP) focuses on “enhancing the ability of the community to provide prevention services through organizing, training, planning, interagency collaboration, coalition building and/or networking” (OhioMHAS, 2016, p. 4).

Community-based processes are essential to comprehensive prevention efforts. CBP acts as the foundation for the other five strategies (environmental, prevention education, information dissemination, alternative activities and problem identification and referral). Before that vaping presentation, tobacco store audit, or social norms campaign can happen, organizing, collaboration and planning are necessary. Without a CBP, none of the other CSAP strategies can be implemented, and if they are, they certainly will not be as effective. Strategies should be selected through a community-based process (e.g. a community coalition or a youth-led program), and not merely by one prevention professional or prevention agency. All other strategies are organized, planned, and implemented as a result of the collaboration during a community-based process.

For more information on youth-led programs, please see the following white papers:

Media Campaigns: Media campaigns are one strategy young people may choose to implement as a result of their strategic planning process. This paper provides an overview of types of media campaigns and messages.

Policy and Advocacy: Young people have a right to be heard on matters affecting their lives. This white paper provides an overview of how young people can engage in policy and advocacy.

Prevention Education: This paper provides an expanded definition of prevention education and explains how this strategy may be utilized by youth-led programs.

Social Norms: Social norms influence behavioral health. This paper explains how social norm campaigns can be developed and implemented by youth-led programs to create community change.

Data-driven organizing, planning, implementation, and collaboration are all necessary activities within CBP. Organizing includes developing a group structure and operating mechanisms, which help the group establish clear ways to work together and achieve goals. Once the structure is established, groups can work together to develop a strategic plan using an established framework or model of change. The group can then implement effective strategies through collaboration with other agencies, community members, and key stakeholders.

YOUTH-LED PROGRAMS AS A COMMUNITY-BASED PROCESS

Youth-led programs in Ohio are unique because they are defined as a CBP “in which young people determine a problem of practice, identify the root causes of the problem, and select and implement evidence-based strategies to address those root causes” (Talbert, 2017, p. 1). Youth-led programs (YLP) seek to enhance the ability of the community to more effectively provide prevention services for a variety of behavioral health issues. Although individual groups may operate differently, data-driven organizing, planning, collaboration, and implementation are core to the work of YLP.

STRATEGIC PLANNING FRAMEWORK (SPF) AND THE YOUTH EMPOWERMENT CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK (YECF)

The Strategic Prevention Framework (SPF) is one of two key frameworks that inform YLP in Ohio. The SPF is used by coalitions to assess, plan, implement, and evaluate prevention strategies to create community-level change. In YLP, the guiding theory on how to implement the SPF is derived from the second key framework that informs YLP in Ohio: the Youth Empowerment Conceptual Framework (YECF; Holden et al., 2004). The YECF outlines the “structure and group processes by which adult allies promote and assist young people in developing the necessary skills to carry out community change” (Raffle & Leach, 2015).

As previously noted, data-driven organizing, planning, implementation, and collaboration are core elements of a CBP. The two evidence-based frameworks that inform YLP ensure they are functioning as a CBP. The YECF informs the organization (structure and processes) and collaboration of the YLP. The SPF informs the planning and implementation. Together, these frameworks drive the overarching vision of youth-led programs in Ohio, which is for young people to collectively engage in a planning process to create and implement a strategic plan that uses evidence-based strategies to create community-level change.

By engaging in youth-led programs as a CBP, young people move from mere participants in youth-led activities to empowered change agents in their YLP and communities. Youth empowerment develops socio-political awareness in young people, enhancing their skills to enact community-level change (Zimmerman, 2000). This community-level change is sought

through the development of an overarching strategic plan and implementation of evidence-based strategies. In order to develop the strategic plan, young people participate in decision-making and learn how to influence the social and political systems that affect their lives. This, most importantly, fosters their buy-in as it pertains to youth-led programs, prevention as a whole, and their ability to not only have a voice, but also create a change in their communities.

The adult role in CBP is to support young people in leading community change efforts that utilize effective, evidence-based prevention strategies (Prevention Action Alliance, 2018). This includes creating a safe space for young people, supporting their skill development, and advocating for, and partnering with, young people.

YOUTH-LED PROGRAMS ACROSS OHIO

Even though YLP in Ohio are all defined as CBP, they can look different. Some of these differences may include the frequency of meetings, the meeting location, the duration in which young people have been involved in the group or similar groups, and the number of youth involved. Some groups may meet monthly while others meet weekly. Some may meet in a school while others meet at a community center. Some may have ten students while others have forty.

The individual roles played by young people may also vary to fit the needs of those involved in the group. Some of these roles may include scheduling meetings, keeping the meeting minutes, preparing meeting agendas, leading icebreakers and team-building activities. In other cases, young people can also take on more specialized roles such as managing social media accounts, designing graphics and posters, taking event photos and/or videos, and developing program promotions to community members, stakeholders, and other young people.

CASE STUDY: FULTON COUNTY YOUTH ADVISORY COUNCIL (YAC)

Fulton County Youth Advisory Council (YAC) is led by a multi-member Youth Leadership Board and supported by a multi-member Youth Leadership Team, which allows for multiple levels of youth leadership and participation. The development of group goals is a collaborative effort between the Leadership Board, Leadership Team, and general YAC Membership. The Leadership Board meets monthly for an hour to review minutes, set the agenda, and select opportunities to present to general membership. The Leadership Team communicates electronically and meets monthly as needed to develop plans relevant to their individual committee purpose. General YAC membership focuses on conducting the work of YAC (business and committee work) along with engaging in family group time and curriculum presented by adult coalition members on topics relevant to group goals and chosen by the Youth Leadership Board. Collective participation is enhanced by using the Strategic

Prevention Framework to teach YAC youth how to assess, plan, execute and evaluate their work. On average, 30 to 35 youth attend each meeting and seventy percent of the group participates in the organization for 2-3 years.

The YAC program is supported by a parent organization, Healthy Choices Caring Communities and its fiscal agent, The Fulton County Health Department, in a variety of ways including financial resources, in-kind donations, and mentorship. YAC is supported by three adult allies who have a wide depth of experience working with youth and strive to provide youth with multiple opportunities to build skillsets, practice their leadership skills, and provide support for youth. YAC coordinators serve as resources for the group; the YAC members choose agendas, strategies and activities. Because YAC is a subcommittee of the larger HC3 coalition, the three YAC adult coordinators work to keep the two groups (adult and youth) working together with complementary strategies and activities.

CASE STUDY: YOUTH TO YOUTH INTERNATIONAL'S YOUTH ADVISORY BOARD (YAB)

Youth to Youth International's Youth Advisory Board (YAB) is built to create intrinsic incentives to encourage ongoing youth participation. It is critical that a young person feels necessary and valued as a part of the group. Group decisions are made primarily through committees based on the size of the group. YAB does not have officers or specified leaders; this allows for different types of leadership, growth, and collaboration. All pledge-signers have equal part in the decision making process. Occasionally, a majority vote is needed when a consensus cannot be reached and a decision needs to be made.

YAB meets every Wednesday for two hours throughout the calendar year. The average number of students who attend YAB is about thirty.

Through work in committees YAB teens utilize the SPF to assess, plan, and evaluate their work. YAB teens discuss issues they are facing, review data about these issues, then plan how to address them. Veteran teens help to lead younger teens through the SPF process, along with guidance from YAB staff.

An Ohio Certified Prevention Specialist coordinates YAB with multiple other Certified Prevention Specialists/Assistants and one Supervisor assisting most weeks. Most YAB meetings have four to six staff members, with occasional volunteers. The YAB Coordinator's primary responsibilities include providing the opportunities for youth to become engaged and involved. This may include but is not limited to making a calendar, working with schools and other community partners, conducting trainings, facilitating groups, and working with committees.

CONCLUSION

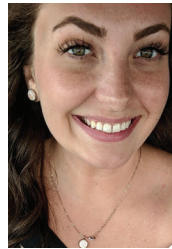
In Ohio, youth-led programs are defined as community-based processes in which “young people determine a problem of practice, identify root causes of the problem, and select and implement evidence-based strategies to address those root causes” (Talbert, 2017, p.1). Two evidence-based frameworks inform youth-led programs: the SPF and the YECF. It is important for adult allies to understand these frameworks in order to guide an effective YLP grounded in evidence. Operating a YLP in this manner allows young people to choose strategies that ultimately affect community-level change.

Community-based processes are essential in comprehensive prevention programming. This is the core of not only YLP, but also of prevention as a whole. CBP is the foundation through which all other CSAP strategies are selected and implemented effectively. We cannot do it alone. We must work together in order to have the biggest impact on our communities. It really does take a village.

AUTHORS



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Ohio University's Voinovich School and Leadership and Public Affairs and Prevention Action Alliance collaborated with the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addition Services (OhioMHAS) to host a series of training and technical assistance (T/TA) activities for adult allies of youth-led programs. This series of white papers was developed by adult allies to support their peers who work with young people to use local data and evidence-based prevention strategies to create meaningful change within Ohio's communities. Dr. Jessica Collura, Ms. Aimee Collins, Dr. Holly Raffle and Mr. Zach Gheen of the Voinovich School of Leadership and Public Affairs supported Ohio's adult allies as they developed the white paper series. Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services Grant# 1900157 provided funding for the Youth-Led Training and Technical Assistance Project.