

Introduction

Youth Partnership for Change (YPC) is an alcohol prevention education program with the goal of raising awareness about: (1) the effects of alcohol on the developing brain and overall mental and physical effects to the body; and (2) the Texas Zero Tolerance underage alcohol drinking laws. The program utilizes youth leaders and community educators to organize and plan activities and give presentations to youth in schools and community members that increase awareness of alcohol related issues.

The YPC program influenced over 4,100 individuals in the Austin area during spring of 2007 (see Table 1). This included 152 leaders, who organized the service learning projects or that attended the Youth Summit, and 4,040 participants in service learning projects.

Table 1. Youth Partnership for Change Participants, 2006-2007.

	Adult Educators	Youth in schools	Community members*
Leaders	35	117	--
Participants**	--	2,960	1,080
Total	35	3,077	1,080

Source: Youth Partnership for Change program data 2006-07. *Community members are both youth and adults, **Estimates for number of potential participants were made by adult educators.

This brief is intended to serve as a general overview of the primary YPC activities for 2006-07. We focus on three components of the 2006-07 YPC program: (1) an assessment of the community educator training – *Making Connections*; (2) the type and number of various youth-led *service learning projects*; and (3) a description and evaluation of the *YouthLaunch Youth Summit 2007*. Data sources utilized in this brief include communications with YPC staff and various surveys. Surveys were conducted at the Making Connections training, with educators following implementation of a service learning project, and with participants of the Youth Summit.

We find that YPC was successful in achieving the goals of raising awareness of alcohol related issues and Texas' underage drinking laws. YPC had a successful training seminar with adult educators, was reasonably successful in promoting service learning projects, and educated a large number of youth at the Youth Summit 2007. We provide recommendations with a focus on the future, noting that YPC programming efforts may entail a greater youth leadership component and a more specific curriculum (per conversations with YPC staff). Our recommendations follow:

- Evidence supports that adult educators benefited from attending the Making Connections training. If the adult educator trainings occur in the future, consider carefully how to maximize the rate of trained educators performing service learning projects with youth. Evidence from current and past YPC programs indicate that a high level of support for adult educators may be necessary for them to become more active in planning service learning projects.
- Future assessment of YPC should be more consistent and thorough. Examine whether service learning projects are delivering key program elements. In turn, specifically examine how these elements influence student learning of alcohol related issues.
- Looking forward, examine what training and/or activities will most likely meet program goals and also be cost effective. Establishing a more specified curriculum will enable evaluation staff to better monitor, with greater cost effectiveness, if program goals are addressed and assist in consistent program implementation by program participant/leaders.

Making Connections

Approximately 20 community educators were recruited by YPC staff to participate in the training seminar “Making Connections: Empower Your Students” on February 26-27. The seminar was held at the Commons Conference center on the Pickle Research campus in North Austin. The goal of the seminar was to inform community educators on how they might organize alcohol related service learning projects for the youth with whom they worked. Attendees included educators from Communities in Schools, Girl Scouts, Bacchus, and other organizations. Participants received information and training on: the latest alcohol/brain science research; the social and legal issues of underage drinking; and how to better perform service learning.

A survey was conducted immediately following the conference to examine what participants’ learned and what aspects of the training they thought were effective. Nine participants completed the survey. Participants unanimously agreed that because of the training they were more knowledgeable about drinking laws; consequences of youth using alcohol; and the effect of alcohol on the brain. They had an increased understanding of service learning and the goals of YPC but they were not sure what was expected of them as an adult sponsor participating in YPC.

Participants pointed to three key aspects of the training that helped them learn: the use of scientific explanations; personal stories; and visual aids such as pictures and videos. The fact that different individuals found varied approaches useful points to the idea that training and YPC curriculum for adults or adolescents should include a variety of approaches for presenting information. An additional important component was the availability and access to quality literature, flyers, experts (YPC staff, MADD) and other “technical” documents that could be used for educational purposes.

In June 2007 a survey was administered to educators to examine how they had used information that they learned at the February conference with their students during the spring and summer. Four completed surveys were gathered from individuals who attended the February training. Key findings centered on information learned at training, support received from YPC, and effect of the program on participating youth.

Educators related that the training gave them new knowledge of the effect of alcohol on the brain and how to use this knowledge effectively in service learning projects with youth. In particular, they found useful the contacts with YPC staff and other presenters and the resources they received at training. As one educator stated: “we literally used most of the information from the articles and slideshows in the packet [received at training], which was the MOST helpful (esp. the websites).” Educators appreciated the information that they received as well as general support for implementing the service learning projects. As one educator noted that: “they [YPC staff] are so accessible and open, they made it incredibly easy to execute, I would do it every year.”

The educators detailed that the youth leaders with whom they worked gained both knowledge about alcohol and an ability to act on that knowledge. Although not a primary program goal – the teaching process for the youth leaders appeared to lead to a greater likelihood of future involvement. “The kids really seemed to learn a lot about the dangers of underage drinking and I believe that it will definitely impact their thought process in the future when alcohol is offered to them or to friends” said one educator – this educator saw students learning new *knowledge* that would also be *acted* upon. Educators described that the process of learning and teaching led to a greater knowledge for the youth leaders; “they [youth] were more informed about the subject and I felt they seemed more empowered about the subject through the education of their peers.”

Evidence supports that adult educators benefited from attending the Making Connections training. However, a less than optimal rate of educators who received training went on to perform a service learning project with youth. Some of this may have resulted from the fact that after the training many educators were “unclear” what was expected of them as a participant in YPC. Additionally, in our experience, programs should effectively coincide with the school years “regular” activities. One factor leading to a less than optimal rate of educators actually performing a service learning project may have stemmed from the training occurring in the spring semester when testing and end of school year functions are more likely to occur.

Service Learning Projects

Educators who participated in the February 2007 Making Connections training (and subsequent follow-ups) recruited and trained students from local elementary, middle and high schools on the subject of underage

alcohol use. Students were educated on national, state and local statistics, and they also participated in extensive discussions about the risks and consequences that can occur as a result of underage alcohol use. Students led several service projects in their schools and communities that informed their peers and fellow citizens about the risks and consequences that accompany the choice of underage alcohol use.

In total, nearly 70 student leaders participated and led the activities that potentially reached over 4000 students and community members. Projects included the following: developing a public service announcement that was played at school and on web radio; creating artwork themed around underage drinking; planting of a garden in memory of individuals lost in alcohol related incidents; organizing an information booth at a school wide event; developing and delivering a information skit to classes of younger students; and organizing and implementing an assembly just prior to prom for juniors and seniors that focused on alcohol and drinking issues.

YPC staff and the evaluator sought information on projects by providing educators with a “service learning project log” that requested detailed information about participants and activities. The “log” also asked educators to postulate what they felt students had learned by participating in the service learning project. These logs were not returned and therefore data on the projects were collected informally via phone and email by YPC staff. Future assessment of the YPC program should be more consistent so that the scope of the projects can be adequately examined. Additionally, if a more “standard” curriculum is instituted it will be important to develop assessment tools that specifically measure how components of the curriculum are being implemented and if those specific components influence student learning.

Youth Summit 2007

The Youth Summit 2007 occurred on June 19, 2007 at the Ragsdale Center of St. Edward's University in Austin. The training was advertised in a wide variety of places including television, the web, and through numerous community youth organizations. Attendees included 10 adult sponsors and 50 youth who received information on the latest brain research and had opportunities to network with one another and share strategies and successes in preparation for future activities. Participants developed action plans for sharing this new information with community members and key decision-makers in their communities.

Thirty-one youth participants completed a survey administered at the close of the summit. The survey served as an evaluation of the quality (per students) of the summit and also examined what students gained from attending the summit. The research staff attended in order to observe and assist in documenting findings.

Students were generally pleased with the sessions as they were “presented in a youth-friendly way.” Their “favorites” varied but most students particularly appreciated the presentations that included the personal stories of the presenters because it showed “real life.” They appreciated the multimedia aspects of the MADD video as well presentations that gave “factual information” on youth and alcohol.

We observed that students were active participants during sessions, but students said they had hoped to “move around more” and meet more of the attendees. As one student noted that more activities would have been “helpful for all the kids and staff to connect and get to know each other.” This was observed by the evaluation team as we noted that most students spoke only with the individuals with whom they had arrived.

Students were unanimous in their opinion that they learned new information on: how alcohol affects the body; the consequences of underage drinking; laws regarding alcohol use; and the opportunities for youth service to the community. Participants were nearly unanimous in the opinion that the summit was well presented, organized, and that presenters had a good knowledge of their content.

Generally, the Youth Summit met YPC program goals to educate youth on alcohol issues and underage drinking laws. The combination of factual information and “real life” stories appears to be particularly effective. It is unclear, however, if the participants utilized information learned at the summit to influence other youth in their school and communities. Hence the relative cost effectiveness of the program is difficult to measure. At the same time, the method of combining factual knowledge with real life experiences appears to have influenced the attendees and could be useful in planning future curriculum/training.