

Youth Advisory Council

An Innovation Station Emerging Practice

Purpose: This document is intended to support MCH professionals to implement a practice found in Innovation Station. This resource provides the information needed to replicate the practice and is divided into two sections: the first section provides a high-level overview of the practice while the second section describes how to implement the practice. For additional information on any of the content provided below, please reach out to the practice contact located at the bottom of this document.

Section I: Practice Overview

Location:	Rhode Island Department of Health	Title V/MCH Block Grant Measures Addressed
Category:	Emerging	NPM 12- Percent of adolescents with and without special health care needs who receive services necessary to make transitions to adult health care.
Date Submitted:	Fall 2018	

Practice Description

The Youth Advisory Council (YAC) pursued improved health outcomes for the target MCH population of Children and Youth with Special Health Care Needs (ages 14-24) through leadership development delivered through participation in the YAC.

The YAC brought together youth and young adults who advised and collaborated with the RI Department of Health (RIDOH), Health Equity Institute (HEI), on activities and resources which affected the health, wellness and transition of youth in our state. The transition age members benefited by learning advocacy skills, health equity concepts, and prevention topics. The members also experienced the sense of belonging that comes from being part of a prosocial group. The council welcomed youth of all abilities and was truly a diverse and inclusive council.

Purpose

National and statewide data shows that youth and young adults with special healthcare needs experience significant challenges on the road to adulthood which constitute disparities as compared to typical youths. The 2016 National Survey of Children’s Health (NSCH) showed that nationally only 14.8 of youth received necessary services for transition to adult health care and Rhode Island had a slightly higher rate of 16.3.

(<http://www.childhealthdata.org/browse/survey/results?q=4739&r=1&r2=41>)

In 2015, the Rhode Island Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) reported that **22.5%** of students who identify themselves as having a disability are more likely to smoke, drink, and use marijuana. These students, according to survey responses are also more likely to be in physical danger, be forced to have sex and feel threatened/unsafe. Students with disabilities in Rhode Island are more likely to be overweight and get insufficient exercise compared to their non-disabled peers. In addition, they are more likely to have been bullied at school, receive poor grades, feel sad or hopeless and to have considered or attempted suicide than those who do not identify as having a disability (see the [Rhode Island Data Brief Disability and Health Among High School Students in 2015](#)).

The YAC was established in 2012 as a vehicle to provide positive leadership development and health information to youth and young adults with special needs. There was an absence of adolescent leadership development groups that focused on wellness and health equity topics, open to membership regardless of ability, zip code, or diagnoses. The RIDOH, HEI implemented the Youth Advisory Council which employs the principals of positive youth development (PYD) and gives an active voice to the participants. It is truly a youth driven and youth led council whose members can participate for several years from high school to adulthood and become involved in multiple levels of leadership opportunities.

The benefits for youth that participate in the YAC include: learning about health topics that address the dangers of high-risk behaviors, connecting with peers of all abilities from around the state, and applying prevention/wellness activities into their lives. The Council members work together as a group and professional meeting norms are demonstrated and practiced. Information about disability rights and accommodations are also incorporated into the meetings. Members are very proud of the work they do within the Council and enjoy giving back to the community.

Practice Foundation

The Positive Youth Development (PYD) guidelines (<https://youth.gov/youth-topics/positive-youth-development>) were applied to the facilitation of the Youth Advisory Council initiative. The definition of PYD is as follows: “an intentional, prosocial approach that engages youth within their communities, schools, organizations, peer groups, and families in a manner that is productive and constructive; recognizes, utilizes, and enhances young people’s strengths; and promotes positive outcomes for young people by providing opportunities, fostering positive relationships, and furnishing the support needed to build on their leadership strengths.”

The Social Cognitive/Social Learning Theory is applied to the Youth Advisory Council Practice through membership exposure to a professional business environment and member expectations for Council participation (RSVP for meetings, time management, indoor voices, being an engaged participant). The students are provided numerous opportunities to practice skills (leading an icebreaker activity, mentoring new members, participating in discussions, reading meeting notes, reporting out on events). The Co-chairs, veteran members, and adult mentors model suitable soft skills and respond in a positive encouraging manner to all participants. Members are motivated to work with their peers, engage in the community and provide youth viewpoint to impact health programs. The structure of the meeting allows for growth in participation and opportunities for members that extend beyond the Youth Advisory

Council meetings. Examples of these opportunities taking part in a youth focus group on oral health and working with a local theater company regarding public speaking/audience engagement and area middle schools to provide self- determination and advocacy skill training for younger students.

The successful incorporation of PYD guidelines within the Youth Advisory Council is supported by the length of time members are involved with the Council and the leading referral source for new members is their peers ([2017-18 Membership Chart](#)). The application of the PYD guidelines is further evidenced by the extensive opportunities available to members of the Youth Advisory Council. Participation in the Council has led to conference opportunities, scholarships, internships, and job offers for the young people who have invested their time in this initiative.

Core Components

The core components of this practice include providing a forum where health topics are taught and leadership skills are cultivated amongst the members. The group also serves an important role as consumer feedback for health programs that impact youth and young adults in our state. The Youth Advisory Council is used as evidence for the Department of Health accreditation process that the Rhode Island Department of Health is engaging with the community and identifying and addressing health problems through the collaborative process. Standard 4.1 (*Public Health Accreditation Standards: An Overview*) “Youth Driven and Youth Led” are mottos for this advisory council. The Council is led by a paid youth resource specialist and topics are determined by member feedback. The strength of the program is that the members can stay involved for several years and experience multiple levels of leadership development.

Practice Activities

Core Component	Activities	Operational Details
Youth Leadership Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Surveys and Focus Groups to determine future topics, trainings and leadership opportunities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Yearly pre and post survey to gauge future trainings and skill acquisition. Polling of membership to determine interest in health topics. Peer Co-Chairperson and Chairperson are paid.
Connecting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Outreach to target populations of youth with special needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage in outreach plan that encourages youth (14-24) with special needs to join (membership includes gift card incentives) Marketing to students through Dare to Dream Conference and Resource fairs/events. Recruitment correspondence to Special Education Directors, Special Education Local Advisory Committees, Parent Information Centers, Transition Programs and local youth serving organizations.
Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitated through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meetings Orientation Leadership opportunities Survey 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Document and analyze attendance at meetings, conferences, forums, trainings and other leadership activities. Evaluation of survey responses and engagement of participants.

Evidence of Effectiveness (e.g. Evaluation Data)

Each year, since 2015, every youth member filled out a pre and post survey. The survey questions include: year in school or program, membership length, referral source, goals, barriers to goals, skills to improve, and training/topics of interest. There is also a section regarding leadership experience, reasons they are interested in being a leader, and an additional comments section that informs the planning process for that year. The post survey is given at the end of the year and asks similar questions to the pre-survey but also includes questions about their Youth Council experience. The completed surveys are collected, reviewed and manually entered in Survey Monkey. Since 2017, a separate scored survey is provided at the first meeting for baseline data and repeated annually to measure leadership growth. Other evaluation components include attendance tracking for all events (meetings, focus groups, community forums, conferences). It should be noted that the attendance tracking can be misleading due to member's securing job/educational opportunities-resulting in missed meetings. The reading comprehension level is taken into consideration regarding survey length and detail.

Replication

There is no replication at this time though the Youth Advisory Council does plan on hosting several youth leadership focus groups in 2019 to see if similar programs can be initiated in the state.

Section II: Practice Implementation

Internal Capacity

Personnel needed to implement a successful Youth Advisory Council include: youth peer specialist(s) as the chairperson, adult mentor to support growth of practice and youth chairperson and organizational program manager.

- **Youth Peer Specialist:** Year-round, part-time paid chairperson to ensure continuity in planning, training, outreach, and marketing. The staff member should be trained in Positive Youth Development, Americans with Disabilities (ADA) guidelines, components of a successful youth advisory council and knowledge of area supports needed for a successful transition into adulthood.
- **Adult Mentor:** Provided year-round to ensure support to Youth Peer Specialist Chairperson and for planning and training purposes. The staff member should be trained on Positive Youth Development, Americans with Disabilities (ADA) guidelines, tenets of Youth Voice and Advocacy, Healthcare Transition, Employment Supports and other transition topics.
- **Leadership:** Organizational Project Manager helps with logistics, budget, funding opportunities and provide support to staff.

Supports include: Organizational structure for meeting space, topics and speakers, budget, payment, professional development training, leadership opportunities.

Collaboration/Partners

The Youth Advisory Council could not be successful without the support and partnership of RIDOH organizational structure to oversee logistics, support personnel, establish funding and encourage health/wellness program collaboration with the Youth Advisory Council. The youth perspective is invaluable in preparing for events, creating marketing materials and planning statewide initiatives and interventions.

The Rhode Island Parent Information Network (RIPIN) is a community advocacy organization under contract for peer specialist staff (chairperson and adult mentor). RIPIN provides leadership opportunities for YAC members to speak at statewide events such as the Special Education Advisory Network and the Transition 101 Conference.

The Youth Advisory Council has also benefitted from close relationships with several supporters within the community who help promote the Council. The Providence Transition Academy invites the chairperson to outreach personally to each new class. Both Blackstone Academy and Rhode Island Northern Collaborative had staff bring groups of students to the meetings for the first few years of the program.

The strategies used to sustain involvement include: membership outreach to schools and community groups during the month of September prior to the first meeting. This is facilitated through E-mails/flyers sent to Special Education Directors, Youth Centers, Transition Programs, Special Education Local Advisory Council groups, and family advocacy groups (i.e. Family Voices of Rhode Island, Parent Support Network, Sherlock Center and Ocean State Independent Living Center). The Rhode Island Department of Health promotes the YAC through informational venues throughout communities statewide. Outreach is ongoing with a push in the late spring at the annual Dare to Dream Conference with over 1500 flyers placed in the conference backpacks. The Council has a very visible presence at the conference in various roles such as announcers, room monitors and student ambassadors.

Practice Cost

Budget			
Activity/Item	Brief Description	Quantity	Total
Staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Peer Specialist Chairperson (Part-time) Adult Mentor (30% time) Organizational Program Manager 	1 person in each position	Per staff salary
Supplies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Transportation (bus passes, ride share) Gift Card (Incentives) Program materials/ Supplies (laptop, projector, camera) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Approximately 20 members 13 meetings 	\$10,500.00

Events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus groups Leadership development activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4 focus groups 11 leadership development activities 	\$2,000.00
Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Presentations from RIDOH Program Staff Outside Presentations/Trainings at YAC meetings Conferences/Events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4 presentations from DOH staff 2 outside presentations Approx. 4 conferences/events 	\$1,475.00
Marketing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Materials for Resource Fairs and transition events 		\$700.00
Total Amount:			\$ 15,000.00

Practice Timeline

Practice Timeline				
Phase	Description of Activity	Date/Timeframe	# of hours needed to complete/oversee activity	Person(s) Responsible
Planning/ Pre-implementation	Youth Leadership Development: PYD and Engaging Youth Voice Training	6 months prior and ongoing	50	Chair and Mentor
	Connecting/Focus Groups (4)	4 months prior	40	Chair and Mentor
	Topics/speakers/meeting scheduled agendas	2 months	20	Chair, Program Manager, Mentor
	Connecting/Marketing development	3 months	12	Communication Department, Chair, Mentor and Program Manager

Implementation	Connecting/Outreach	2 months prior and ongoing	20 plus ongoing hours	Chair and Mentor
	Youth Leadership Development/Meetings (each meeting takes 4 hours to plan, 4 to host including set up/cleanup and 2 to follow up)	Ongoing 1 per month	130 (10 hours x13 meetings)	Chair, Co- Chair, Mentor
	Youth Leadership Development/ Connecting/Assessment through Focus Groups (each focus group takes 6 hours to plan, outreach, and prepare and 4 hours to host including set up/cleanup) and 3 hours evaluate and follow up.	4 starting in Spring 2019	52 (13 hoursx4)	Chair/Mentor/Program Manager
	Youth Leadership Development Opportunities-multiple members (includes presentations, public forums, strategic planning sessions that are available for members to attend and report back to YAC) Each opportunity takes 6 hours for outreach, logistics, attending and follow up.	11 per year September-July	66 (6 hours x 11)	Chair/ Mentor
Sustainability	Connecting/Reporting to Internal Programs through Program Manager	2 per month	5	Program Manager
	Funding Opportunities	On Going	10	Program Manager
	Assessment-attendance, survey monkey, leadership survey, member folders	Pre and Post surveys	50	Chair, Mentor, Program Manager
			455 hours	

Resources Provided

- [Rhode Island Data Brief Health and Disability Among High School Students in 2015](#)
- [Attendance Chart 2012-2017](#)
- [Membership Longevity 2017-18](#)
- Meeting Planning:
 - [Sample Flyer](#)
 - [Sample Agenda](#)
 - Sample [Pre](#) and [Post](#) Surveys

Lessons Learned

An important component of the Youth Advisory Council is to incorporate “Youth Led” and “Youth Driven” throughout the practice. The Chairperson of Council is a trained Youth Peer Resource Specialist and works part-time within the RIDOH, HEI and has been involved since the Council’s beginning. The consistent leadership that is available even when the council is on hiatus is important to ensure outreach and planning continuity. The Council encourages training and leadership growth for members through an elected co-chair role, summer internships, and special projects. Training and ongoing professional development was very important in enhancing the Council’s leadership and in turn improving the quality of the meetings. The chairperson, peer youth leader and an adult mentor embraced the extensive training on advocacy and transition from the 2-year national YouthACT program sponsored by the National Collaboration on Workforce Development for Youth. <http://www.ncwd-youth.info/youth-action-council-on-transition-youthact/>

Each member is compensated in the form of a gift card incentive for each meeting after they officially become a member. This is a relatively new addition based on feedback of the youth leaders and instituted in 2015. Once the gift card incentives were introduced, membership increased and became more consistent ([see attendance chart](#)). The evaluation process has been helpful in guiding the Youth Advisory Council. In reviewing the responses to the post surveys in 2016, several members asked for more leadership opportunities. Considering the feedback, each meeting agenda includes “leadership opportunities” announcements and a sign-up sheet. The Council leadership looks for a range of community involvement activities to expand the YAC’s reach. In 2017-18, such community events included “*Supporting LGBTQ Youth in the Community*” and the Rhode Island premier of a film entitled “*Independent Lives*”, (concerning post-secondary education and employment training for young adults with disabilities). Additionally, youth were provided with the opportunity to participate in the Oral Health Focus Group and give testimony at the annual Americans with Disabilities Public Hearings.

The review of attendance data also revealed that the Council membership is maturing as there are very few younger members that are joining the council. This year’s outreach, highlighted youth in grades 9-11 and were encouraged to attend a meeting with a friend. Once a new person attends a meeting, a personal outreach (phone call and email) provides a follow-up to encourage attendance at the next meeting.

Challenges:

Transportation: The YAC is a statewide program but one of the challenges is transportation for both meetings and for leadership opportunities. This challenge is mitigated by ensuring that

each meeting is close to a bus line and the provision of bus tickets for meeting attendance. Participation in additional leadership opportunities such as presenting at a conference or other events is supported by facilitation of transportation through rideshare companies such as Uber or Lyft.

Evaluation: It should be noted that the attendance tracking can be misleading as job or educational opportunities are attained resulting in missed meeting. Due to the reading/comprehension levels of the youth, the surveys are kept short.

Next Steps

The RIDOH Youth Advisory Council would like to encourage other groups to initiate their own youth councils and would be happy to provide technical assistance. The YAC plans on hosting several focus groups around the state to see if other organizations would like to start their own councils.

Practice Contact Information
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