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Learning Empowerment & Advocacy Together: A School-Based Youth Empowerment Program

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**HUDSON
HEADWATERS**
HEALTH NETWORK

Learning Advocacy & Empowerment Together (LEAT)

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Network,



The University of Vermont
LARNER COLLEGE OF MEDICINE

Community project why?

2020 nationally representative survey of 3,300 high school youth by Center for Promise finds:

“Students are experiencing a collective trauma, and they and their families would benefit from immediate and ongoing support.”

30% of young people say they have been feeling significantly unhappy or depressed

40% feel significantly more concerned than usual about family financial situation; 30% feel significantly more concerned about their education



What is LEAT?

What: Leadership skill building.

Who: Female identifying students grades 9-12.

How: Students will participate in activities aimed at developing personal leadership skills.

participation **peer**
community
being skill
active project
action loneliness part take
group
focused building
connection
mentorship
isolation

Content Development

- ▶ 2 community member interviews
 - ▶ 9th grade student
 - ▶ Guidance counselor
- ▶ Informal needs assessment

▶ Key Takeaways

Students are craving community and opportunities to build positive peer relationships

Objectives

To develop young people's sense of **self-esteem** and **identity**, which includes their ability to implement learned skills that aid their ability to make decisions.

Empower *youth* to change their community

Help youth be leaders in their community and *develop leadership skills*

Create a **positive setting** for youth to develop

What is empowerment?



“Empowerment is a process that involves *individuals, organizations, and communities* exerting control. For a program to be empowering it has to include **opportunities** for participants to: **increase abilities and confidence, learn & practice new skills, exert control, influence decisions.**”

“The three elements of empowerment are reflected in a person who believes that he or she is **capable of influencing** a given context (*intrapersonal empowerment*), **understands** how the system works in that context (*interactional empowerment*), and **engages in behaviors designed to exert control in that context** (*behavioral empowerment*).”

Why girls only?

- ▶ The majority of girls' school grads report higher self confidence over their coed (trained) peers (54%)¹
- ▶ Academic studies and countless anecdotes make it clear that being interrupted, talked over, shut down or penalized for speaking out is nearly a universal experience for women when they are outnumbered by men.²

¹ *Women Graduates of Single-Sex and Coeducational High Schools: Differences in their Characteristics and the Transition to College*

² *The New York Times*, "The Universal Phenomenon of Men Interrupting"

Overview of the curriculum

Session	Title	Core Topics
1	Welcome/Getting to know you	Self esteem
2	Values	Leadership efficacy, self-esteem
3	Team building/Group Agreements	Leadership efficacy, team building
4	Introduction to Photovoice	Leadership efficacy/civic efficacy
5	Photovoice Reflections	Leadership efficacy, civic efficacy, communication strategies
6	Communication 1	Communication strategies, community engagement
7	Communication 2	Communication strategies, community engagement
8	Public speaking	Leadership behavior, decision making
9	Reflection 1	Self esteem
10	Evaluation & wrap up	Resource mobilization, civic efficacy, leadership behavior, decision making

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Session Structures



Photovoice

► What is photo voice?

“Photovoice puts cameras in the hands of people with valuable lived experience so they can explore and share their perspectives on a variety of issues.”

<http://www.photovoiceworldwide.com/wpsite/what-is-photovoice/>



How will we measure success?



PRE VS POST-TEST
OUTCOME COMPARISON



MID AND END PROGRAM
FEEDBACK FORMS



FINAL REFLECTION
SESSIONS

Assessment methodology

- Assessment of youth upon entry into program and again at final session (one group, pretest-post-test design, outcome measures)
- Assessing outcomes via validated surveys:
 - ▶ Civic Efficacy
 - ▶ Leadership Efficacy
 - ▶ Resource mobilization
 - ▶ Leadership Behavior
 - ▶ Community Engagement
 - ▶ Self Esteem
 - ▶ Prosocial behaviors
 - ▶ Responsible decision making



What we actually did:

8 week program for 16 high school women
grades 9-11

Activity based programming, highly interactive

Content included goal setting, communication,
public speaking, defining values, and other
activities centered on empowerment and skill
building

Reactions



“I really enjoyed the focused goal setting and value setting activities, they helped me think about what I want to achieve.”



“The photovoice was great! It was interesting to see what others thought of and people’s different reactions to the images.”



“It was really nice being in a girls only group and getting to talk about some of these topics with classmates.”



“I didn’t realize other people thought the same way I did and cared about things I care about”

Future Directions



Presenting project in poster at FMEC



Re-running LEAT programming in Vermont



More focused and comprehensive pre and post test surveys



1-2 post program interviews for in-depth summative feedback

Citations

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