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

Sheridan Finnie

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Learning Advocacy & Empowerment Together (LEAT)

Sheridan Finnie, MPH
MSIII

LIC Student Hudson Headwaters Health Network,
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.
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

https://yes.sph.umich.edu/about-us/what-is-yes/
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.\(^2\)

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\(^1\) *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

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Session Structures

5 min icebreaker

5 min introduction to activity
- (ex. 60 second pitch)

10 min break out group
- Students paired

10 min full group reflection & activity debrief

5 min break out group
- New pairing

5 min closing
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.photovoice worldwide.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
“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


