



It's time ... to talk about it! Your voice. Our future. Prevent sexual violence.

Best practices for engaging youth as partners in sexual violence prevention

In youth-led programs, young people take the lead in designing and carrying out projects to prevent sexual violence in their communities, and adult allies provide training, resources, community contacts, and encouragement. Young people and adults are equal partners – teaching each other, learning from each other, and sharing power, decision-making, and responsibility for the program's outcomes.

There are benefits to young people taking ownership of sexual violence prevention efforts. Youth leaders gain skills, experience, confidence, and community recognition. They also serve as role models for other young people, and help to ensure that programs are relevant to their peers. Organizations that facilitate youth leadership benefit from young people's energy, expertise, innovation, and diverse skills, especially when youth are engaged as partners in decision-making at all levels of the organization. Communities benefit from young people's commitment and contributions to social change.

Youth as leaders

Youth leadership takes many forms. Whether as volunteers or paid staff, young people can engage in sexual violence prevention as peer educators, community activists, advisory council members, program coordinators, and more. They can create social marketing campaigns, advocate for policy change, and develop programs for their peers and communities.

Whatever shape youth leadership takes, six core principles of youth development (Pagliaro

ROLE MODELS IN PREVENTION

• **STAND & SERVE** is a primary prevention initiative of Peer Solutions in Phoenix, AZ. Young people develop, implement, and evaluate strategies to cultivate healthy norms to prevent the root causes of violence. Young people are peer educators and board members, participate in ongoing service projects across their community, and host the STAND & SERVE Coalition, a group of school, family, business, and community members of all ages committed to cultivating safe, healthy, and respectful communities. <http://www.peersolutions.org/stand-and-serve/>

& Klindera, 2001) provide a helpful guide for successful youth-adult partnerships for sexual violence prevention:

1. Focus on assets, not problems. Young people's knowledge, experiences, ideas, and abilities are extraordinary resources for innovation in sexual violence prevention. Youth leadership programs support each young person in



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developing and applying their individual strengths, rather than focusing on perceived limitations or “problem behaviors” of youth.

2. Address the real needs of young people.

It is important to engage issues of concern as young people define them. These might be different from the issues adults want to address. Young people are unlikely to stay involved with programs that do not reflect their priorities. The best way to identify young people's needs is to ask them.

3. Engage young people in developing programs. Youth engagement must be meaningful, not just symbolic. Leadership training is an important first step, and must be accompanied by real opportunities for young people to lead within the organization. Including young people as key decision makers about program planning, implementation, and evaluation fosters youth ownership of sexual violence prevention and helps to create programs that are relevant to young people.

4. Involve knowledgeable and committed adults. In addition to knowledge and resources, adult allies need to bring open minds, positive attitudes, and strong commitment to this work. They must also be ready to learn, recognizing that young people have a lot to teach adults. Youth leadership programs work to foster respect and trust among youth and adults.

5. Recognize the influences of young people's environments. It is critically important to understand the roles of young people's family, school, social, and cultural environments, and to tailor programs to young people's realities. It also is important to understand the characteristics

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• **Camp PeaceWorks**, a project of Berks Women in Crisis in Reading, PA, is a five-day summer camp designed to build youth-adult partnership to address social justice issues. Campers explore the root causes of violence in society and develop skills to intervene in oppression. After camp, youth activists develop anti-oppression and violence prevention initiatives in their schools and communities. <http://www.berkswomenincrisis.org/peaceworks.html>

• **Youth 360** is the Cleveland Rape Crisis Center's youth leadership program. Young people develop knowledge and skills about sexual violence prevention, and create and lead their own projects to engage their communities in prevention. <http://www.clevelandrapecrisis.org/services/education-prevention/youth-360>

of the community, and the level of community readiness for sexual violence prevention.

6. Build community partnerships. Youth leadership in sexual violence prevention is not just about mobilizing young people. It is about young people mobilizing their communities for social change. This requires that young people get connected with community leaders, institutions, and resources. Building community partnerships also helps spread a consistent message throughout the community.

These principles highlight the potential for youth leadership approaches to prevent sexual



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violence on multiple levels. On an individual level, young people and their adult allies build skills for violence prevention and social change. Youth-adult partnerships also promote healthy and respectful relationships among youth and adults. Ultimately, youth leaders work to prevent sexual violence by changing social norms at the community level, and promote social change at the societal level by influencing policies at their schools, in their communities and states, and across the country. Addressing all of these levels is key to ending sexual violence.

Adults as allies

Adults play an important role in ensuring that everyone involved in a program – young people and adults – have the preparation, resources, and support needed to work in partnership for sexual violence prevention. Adults also create opportunities for young people to build skills, make decisions, and lead prevention projects.

Adulthood can be a significant barrier to successful youth-adult partnership. Adulthood refers to “behaviors and attitudes based on the assumption that adults are better than young people, and entitled to act upon young people without their agreement” (Bell, 1995, p. 1). In youth-adult partnerships, adult allies must evaluate their programs’ practices and policies through the lens of adulthood, and address any barriers to young people’s full and equal participation.

For more information and recommendations about addressing adulthood in youth-adult partnerships for sexual violence prevention, view the resource *Strategies for Becoming an Adult Ally*.

ROLE MODELS IN PREVENTION

- **LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer) Youth Partner Abuse Prevention Program**, a project of the Boston Alliance of Gay Lesbian Bisexual Transgender Youth (BAGLY) and the Network/La Red, is a peer-led prevention program promoting healthy sexuality and relationships among LGBTQ youth. <http://www.bagly.org/>

- **Youth Over Violence**, a division of Peace Over Violence in Los Angeles, encompasses several youth leadership programs. The Youth Over Violence Summer Training, a leadership development program, prepares youth to organize prevention activities on their campuses. Students Together Organizing Peace (STOP) is a school-based club in which students are trained and encouraged to plan prevention activities for their communities. <http://youthoverviolence.org/>

Additional Resources

Ready to take the next step? There are excellent resources available as you move forward on your journey in building successful youth-adult partnerships for sexual violence prevention. Here are a few to help you get started:

John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities. (2007). *Youth Engaged in Leadership and Learning (YELL): A handbook for program staff, teachers, and community leaders* (2nd ed.). Retrieved from http://jgc.stanford.edu/our_work/yell/YELL.0712.Intro.final.pdf



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Michigan Youth Violence Prevention Center. (2008). *YES curriculum*. Available from the University of Michigan, School of Public Health: <http://yvpc.sph.umich.edu/programs/yes-youth-empowerment-solutions/curriculum/>

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Whitman, J. L. (2007). *Teen action toolkit: Building a youth-led response to teen victimization*. Retrieved from the U.S. Department of Justice, Community Oriented Policing Services: <http://www.cops.usdoj.gov/Publications/teen%20action%20toolkit.pdf>

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Pagliaro, S., & Klindera, K. (2001). *Youth development: Strengthening prevention strategies*. Retrieved from Advocates for Youth: <http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/index.php/publications/550?task=view>

