

Abstract: *This case example highlights Y-AP in a community coalition setting. The example from Buffalo County, Wisconsin, demonstrates foundational aspects of Y-AP, including best practices for decision making procedures, and making sure that young people have opportunities to work with a variety of adults. This case is especially useful for organizations looking to develop formalized partnerships.*

Case Example #2: Youth-Adult Partnership on Community Coalitions

Location: Buffalo County, Wisconsin

Project Title: Buffalo County Partnership Council

Background:

“I really value the young people on the coalition. I think of them as partners, leaders, and colleagues. I also value their opinion and their perspective. They are at the heart of what is happening in our community and they see things that we don’t as adults and I value that they are able to share that information.” – Adult Council Member

The mission of the Buffalo County Partnership Council is to find ways to enhance positive youth and family development in Buffalo County Communities. Created in 1992, the Council seeks to address community health issues related to alcohol and drug use, bullying, and domestic violence through prevention efforts, community education and outreach, and resource sharing. The council is comprised of 12 youth and 14 adults representing 15 community agencies. Youth serve for terms of 3 years. Youth serving on the council are nominated by their schools.

Adults don’t really have a clue about what happens outside of schools. We have different looks and interests and are able to share that with them. – Youth Council Member

“Teachers and parents don’t really see what’s going on, so we have youth input on those things”

The Council is deeply committed to Youth-Adult Partnership because the prevention issues they address are community issues that affect youth and adults. Council members consistently reported that the work would not be effective without young people at the table. Youth are able to provide a unique perspective on community issues that affect them.

“We’re pretty much involved in every aspect, we have equal voting rights as adults” – Youth Council Member

“I feel like I’m an equal member, because they actually have set aside time in the meeting for us to talk about issues happening at our school.” – Youth Council Member

All Council decisions are made democratically - the Sheriff’s vote, for example, counts as much as any youth’s vote. Youth often chair sub-committees and are represented in all aspects of the council’s work. Youth also have an active role in gathering and sharing community data, organizing community events, and working directly with schools and youth-serving community organizations. Adults work directly with these youth as equal partners on all projects.

“It teaches us how to work with kids your own age from different places, but also people of older generations with different opinions.” – Youth Council Member

“It is a true partnership from every perspective. Votes are equal and decision making is shared. There are not decisions that adults make on their own, or youth make on their own” – Adult Council Member

While the council has had a notable personal impact on the individual participants, the work also benefits the community in visible ways. Each year the council sponsors youth days to actively engage youth in conversations regarding risk issues. Council youth are particularly proud of organizing bullying prevention events for local youth. By working directly with younger people, the Council youth members feel they are giving a voice to all young people in the county.

Recently, the council has created new ways of reaching out to families using research-based self-evaluation tools, educational materials, and special events. The council continues to assess and improve on their 20 years of positive youth development in Buffalo County.

Keys to Success:

Genuine Dialogue: Youth and Adult members commented that they were able to have meaningful dialogue about any issue. Youth were not left out of important decisions, such as the budget. The experience of collaborating between generations was new and exciting for most members.

Authentic Voice in Decision Making: Youth participants frequently mentioned their role in voicing opinions and taking leadership on important council issues. They found this to be a strength that helped produce good outcomes for the community. Youth also said this was a factor that kept them motivated to do the work of the organization. In other words, youth felt empowered by their work on the council.

Addressing Real Issues with Real Consequences: The Council takes on serious community issues. Youth commented that they liked the fact that the work was “real”. Adults mentioned that this work could not be done successfully without youth participation and perspective.

Comprehensive Training and Orientation: The council orientation and training for new members was mentioned as a strength by all members. It taught participants the basics of working together

Matching talent and interest with committee assignments: Youth were especially impressed by the freedom they have in selecting the type and level of participation on the council. They are able to build on their existing talents, and challenged to take on important tasks that have benefited their school work and future plans.

Broad Impact: The council reaches the community in many highly visible ways. The work has aspects that have policy implications as well as direct (personal) impact on community members through special events.