



Creating Spaces for Young People to Collaborate

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In order to address the pressing issues facing communities today, such as substance misuse, we need diverse citizens to work



Figure 1 Photograph by Lori Yerdon Used under CC 2.0

“We found that the conveners of youth-led programs (i.e., the adult allies) needed ongoing support and guidance as they sought to establish basic facilitating structures and develop youth ownership and leadership. [...] This work is essential in order to create spaces for young people to lead community change efforts and highlights the importance of ongoing learning” (p.8)

together; this includes people of all ages, race, socio-economic status, and genders. Unfortunately, youth are often not included in these collective efforts. Youth are valuable resources capable of working with others to address issues facing communities today.

Highlights

Young people are valuable resources for communities and capable of leading community change.

Like adults, youth need support and guidance from skilled facilitators.

Facilitators need opportunities to engage in ongoing learning with their peers.

This work provides insights on how communities can create intentional spaces for youth to lead change efforts.

The goal of Ohio's youth-led initiative is to empower young people to create change in their local communities. We worked with adult allies (i.e. the facilitators of youth-led programs) to support the implementation of youth-led programs in accordance with this vision. For youth to be empowered to lead community change efforts, this research found it is necessary to provide ongoing guidance and support to the adults who facilitate these programs. By providing support and resources that are grounded in research, adult allies learn how to facilitate a program in an equitable and collaborative manner so young people can lead. As a result of this work, youth in Ohio are leading community change efforts to address substance misuse and mental health promotion.

Methods

We served as evaluators for Ohio's youth-led program, working with adult allies to define the purpose of youth-led programs. We supported them in implementing programs in accordance with this definition. We reviewed all the meeting and training materials and identified the core themes that lead to the successful implementation of youth-led programs.

Results

- It requires skilled guidance from a facilitator for youth to be empowered to lead community change efforts. In Ohio, these facilitators are called adult allies.
- Adult allies need opportunities to engage with each other in learning communities where they are supported through collective learning and regular interaction to bolster their skills in guiding young people to create change.
- This support should be based on contemporary research and needs to be ongoing, instead of a one-time training.

HOW DID A COMMUNITY PSYCHOLOGY PERSPECTIVE INFORM YOUR WORK?

The concept of empowerment is core to community psychology and informed the work of youth-led programs in Ohio, as well as the training of adult allies. Community Psychologists define empowerment as the ability to influence social and political systems that affect our lives. Many leadership programs for youth try to build the skills of individual participants. Youth-led programs in Ohio are distinct from these programs because they embrace an empowerment-based approach which collectively engages participants in creating community change.

- By participating in learning communities, adult allies can ultimately create spaces and prepare young people to lead community change efforts.

What Does This Mean For?

Practice- It is not enough to only invest in the work of the young people. Funding should also be provided to support the adults who convene, support and facilitate groups of young people to learn how to lead in a collaborative and equitable manner and provide an intentional space for them to discuss this work and the challenges.

Social Action- People interested in creating change in communities should be mindful that youth are not often provided authentic opportunities to participate equitably in these efforts. In order to engage all citizens, it is important to offer ongoing learning opportunities for individuals who want to guide and support youth in leading community change efforts. These opportunities should be based on contemporary research.

For more information, please see the [Ohio Adult Allies website](https://www.ohioadultallies.com/) <https://www.ohioadultallies.com/>

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