

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Civilian

A Comparison of Youth-Driven and Adult-Driven Youth Programs: Balancing Inputs From Youth and Adults

Larson, R., Walker, K., & Pearce, N. (2005). A comparison of youth-driven and adult-driven youth programs: Balancing inputs from youth and adults. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 33(1), 57-74. doi:10.1002.jcop.20035

SUMMARY: In-depth qualitative data of both youth and adult experiences in two youth-driven and two adult-driven programs for high school-aged youth were examined. Specifically, the authors explored how the degree of youth and adult influence over program activities in youth programs impacted both youth and adult experiences.

KEY FINDINGS:

- In the youth-driven programs, youth reported greater empathy with other peer groups and feeling more empowered.
- Youth in the adult-driven programs reported developing self-confidence, interpersonal skills, and a sense of responsibility.
- Adults in the youth-driven programs used the techniques of guiding questions, providing intermediate structures, and monitoring to keep youth on track. Adults cultivated a culture of fairness and opportunity to encourage the youth to strongly identify with the program.

IMPLICATIONS FOR MILITARY PROFESSIONALS:

Military professionals could:

- Encourage youth to more actively participate in youth programs possibly through leadership roles and community service projects
- Collaborate with youth to develop the goals and curricula of youth programs

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Create youth-led support groups so that youth gain experience with supporting and governing each other
- Offer trainings to youth workers of youth programs about how to integrate adult-driven and youth-driven goals and objectives

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Recommend training for professionals in adult-driven and youth-driven programs to offer a holistic approach to youth programs
- Promote youth development programs that encourage youth to participate in leadership positions

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METHODS

- Data were gathered from four programs for high school-aged youth. Programs were selected based on recommendations from youth development professionals and the authors' assessments that the programs were youth-centered and that youth participants were enthusiastic.
- Biweekly interviews with youth participants and adult observers were conducted over a four month period.
- For each program, 10-13 youth and one or two adult advisors were interviewed. There were 279 total youth interviews, 50 adult interviews, and 38 program observations.

PARTICIPANTS

- In the youth-driven programs, participants were from a chapter of the National FFA Organization, a rural youth program, or from Youth Action, a program dedicated to youth development in an urban area.
- For the adult driven programs, participants were either from a "small city" high school production of Les Miserable, or Art First, an organization providing urban underserved youth opportunities to develop and improve art skills in a variety of mediums.
- There were no data on the number of participants from sites, their ages, or their racial/ethnic composition.

LIMITATIONS

- Limited information was presented about the characteristics of the four programs, limiting the generalizability of the results of this study to other programs.
- While the authors described the programs and some of the participants' experiences of the programs, they did not effectively discuss the themes and patterns of the coded responses from the interviews, which made the presentation of the data appear incomplete.
- There were no data on the demographic characteristics of the participants for each group, which does not allow for exploration of additional factors (e.g., age, race, gender) that may impact results.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Examine relationships between youth- and adult-driven programs and youth outcomes
- Explore what kinds of personality traits of leaders are associated with successful youth- and adult-driven programs
- Examine differences between outcomes of youth in youth- and adult-driven programs for youth in military families

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