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Building Partnerships for Youth: An Online Youth Development Resource Center

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Building Partnerships for Youth: An Online Youth Development Resource Center

Abstract

Youth development practitioners have a great need for quality professional development resources. The Building Partnerships for Youth project is a partnership of National 4-H Council and The University of Arizona designed to provide research-based, practical, applied resources. To achieve the project goal, a Web site containing a menu of effective youth development programs, fact sheets, training opportunities, and other useful information has been developed. This collection of materials was designed to be useful to Extension educators, as well as health and education professionals.

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Introduction

Research has found that quality youth development programs are effective in promoting positive behaviors while reducing negative outcomes, for young people (National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, 2002). One key to building effective programs that provide the greatest benefit to young people is through increasing access to professional development opportunities through training and technical assistance (National Youth Development Information Center, 2005).

In support of this effort, the Building Partnerships for Youth project (BPY) developed an on-line youth development resource center for Extension educators and health professionals who work with young people ages nine to 13. Through a partnership between National 4-H Council and the University of Arizona, and with funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Division of Adolescent and School Health, BPY provides youth development resources and supports to Extension educators, health professionals, and those working in the field of youth development through an extensive and easy-to-use Web site.

Visitors to the BPY Web site <<http://bpy.n4h.org>> find an array of resources, including, an ever-expanding database of youth development programs. Users have access to multiple methods of searching the database, e.g., descriptive keywords, program characteristics, or elements of youth development. They also discover a youth development bibliography, informative fact sheets, timely e-bulletins, configurable PowerPoint presentations, and training opportunities.

History of Building Partnerships for Youth

In June 2000, National 4-H Council in collaboration with the University of Arizona and the University of California-Davis entered into a cooperative agreement with the CDC, to provide resources and support to national, state, and local organizations working with youth ages nine to 13 to help promote abstinence from sexual activity. Youth development was presented as an alternative strategy to traditional abstinence curricula and programs, as a means of preventing the spread of

HIV/AIDS, STDs, and unintended pregnancy, and promoting the healthy development of all young people.

When this project began, youth development was a relatively new construct for many within the public health community. The introduction and use of this approach has provided an opportunity for increased visibility within this context for youth development professionals within the Cooperative Extension System. The resulting project focuses on providing resources that emphasize a youth development approach not only as a means of encouraging the prevention of risky behaviors but also as a means of promoting positive developmental opportunities to enhance the well-being of young people.

This effort began with the belief that three strategies are important in the development of programs that encourage young people to make healthy choices: youth-adult partnerships, cross-age teaching, and stakeholder involvement. These three strategies, along with a belief that a focus on nine to 13-year-olds is essential, became the basis for the BPY project and the resulting Web site.

Using Research as a Guide

Developing a Web site rooted in research required an understanding of the current youth development literature. In early 2001, an extensive literature review was conducted to provide the framework for the BPY project and Web site. A team of six professionals reviewed more than 100 journal articles, foundation reports, Web sites, and publications by non-governmental and voluntary youth-serving organization, with the goal of examining the theory base, empirical support, language used, definitions of, and elements included in youth development. The Web site is based on a framework developed as a result of this literature review completed in June 2001.

Twenty-One Elements of Youth Development

On the basis of that review, we determined that existing youth development research and theory had identified 21 unique elements of youth development. The Web site includes in-depth information about these elements, including definitions, fact sheets, e-bulletins, and training archives.

The literature review also uncovered a number of characteristics of youth development programs deemed to be important for program administrators. The characteristics were related to either the project goal of promoting abstinence from sexual intercourse (i.e., does the program address sexuality/abstinence?) or the larger goal of positive youth development (i.e., does the program provide young people with the opportunity to volunteer in the larger community?). These characteristics along with the 21 elements of youth development became the guiding framework for the BPY Web site.

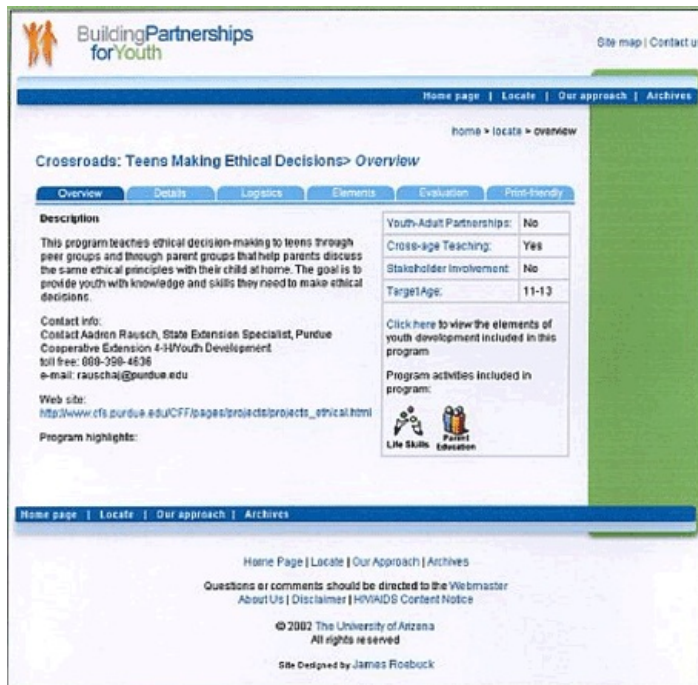
Program Database

This framework has been used to code youth development curricula and program options to be entered into the database and available on the Web site. The database currently includes 59 programs.

The Web site offers interactive ways to search the database. Users may search and locate programs by identifying program activities, by selecting among the 21 elements of youth development, or by entering descriptive keywords, or they may also browse all the programs. Each program in the database is coded using the framework described above. The screen below shows the main page for the Crossroads: Teens Making Ethical Decisions program. Information on each element and program characteristic is available by clicking on the tabs along the top of the screen.

Figure 1.

Building Partnerships for Youth Screen Shot



Summary

In February 2005, a new and improved version of the Web site was launched. The redesigned Web site offers visitors easier navigation, increased accessibility, and more user-friendly features. Currently the BPY team is completing two new products to be available in early 2006. The first product is a customizable tool to increase collaboration around youth development. It is comprised of a PowerPoint presentation template and a manual providing instructions for customizing the presentation to reflect your community. The second product is an online youth development program assessment tool designed to help those working with youth to determine a program's ability to address each of the 21 elements of youth development. Once a program is assessed, the tool then provides relevant resources to help integrate these elements into existing programs. We invite you to visit the BPY Web site <<http://bpy.n4h.org>>, sign up for our e-bulletin to receive updates, learn more about the project, and provide your input.

References

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