

Abstract

Youth in action for health project: Peer health promoters making a difference

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APHA's 2020 VIRTUAL Annual Meeting and Expo (Oct. 24 - 28)

Background: Low-income, ethnically diverse youth are at risk for poor school success and poor health outcomes. Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) projects have demonstrated increased student social/cognitive development, agency/leadership, and academic/career goals. The Youth in Action for Health Project is a collaboration of Touro University Public Health Program and the BioMedical Academy of an ethnically diverse high school in Vallejo, California. The goal of the project is to integrate Public Health Inquiry with the BioMedical Academy program using a YPAR approach.

Study Aim: Assess the strategies and benefits of including Peer Health Promoters (PHP) as key project team members.

Methods: Participant observation methods include a qualitative assessment of the role of Peer Health Promoters (n=12), student focus groups, and written responses to open-ended questions.

Results: PHPs participated in weekly afterschool YPAR sessions and assisted with planning and implementation of 12 classroom sessions reaching 115 students. Classroom sessions focused on Public Health Equity, student prioritized adolescent health topics (mental health, ATOD, violence prevention, nutrition/food security, sexual health), student survey data, and Health Promotion/Advocacy strategies. Interactive learning strategies included group challenges, role plays and problem solving activities. PHPs gained public health knowledge and skills and improved leadership, collaboration and public speaking skills and were able to pass this knowledge on to their peers in a way that was relatable and informational.

Conclusion: Future efforts can build on the experience of this project by including Peer Health Promoters as key team members in efforts to integrate Public Health Inquiry with BioMedical Academy Programs.

Advocacy for health and health education Implementation of health education strategies, interventions and programs Planning of health education strategies, interventions, and programs Public health or related education

