



Youth Program Manual



Statewide Family Networks
Technical Assistance Center
A Project of United Advocates
for Children of California



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Technical Assistance Center



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Youth Program Manual

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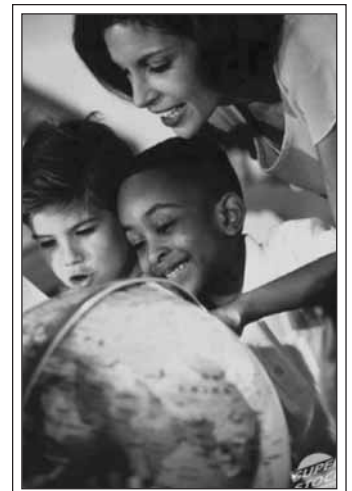
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Youth Program Manual

The central reason for the creation and distribution of a series of program manual publications is to facilitate peer-to-peer exchange between Statewide Family Network sites. The first publication of the series, the “Youth Program Manual,” discusses programs for youth with serious emotional disturbances. That overarching goal can be divided into a number of component parts:

- Presenting sites with a description of some programs’ objectives,
- Proposing ideas about how to set up and operate programs,
- Offering profiles of a number of individual sites’ programs,
- Providing a list of references to sources of information,
- Making the documents and products of individual sites available to all networks.

To introduce the topic of youth programs and to underscore their importance to networks, Kelly Jones, the Youth Coordinator of Powerful Youth Friends United, presents a description of the development of North Carolina’s program and its significance to her and other youth members.



Introduction

By

Kelly Jones, Youth Coordinator

“Powerful Youth Friends United”

I was a member of North Carolina’s youth organization, Powerful Youth Friends United, since the beginning. In March of this year I turned twenty-two and “aged-out.” So then I became the Youth Coordinator, and I continue to work very closely with the group. We are a youth initiative under North Carolina Families United.

Most of the youth in the group are drawn in because their parents are involved in one or more advocate or support groups for parents of children with mental, emotional, and/or behavioral disorders. We as youth realize that parent support is important, although the youth receiving the services need to be able to voice out their concerns and be heard as well.

In July of 2002 our group met for the first time. We got together to learn about several things: coping skills, leadership, organization, and team building. We spent a weekend together, fifteen youth between the ages of twelve and twenty-one. What we were looking for most were the skills to help us succeed and become leaders. But the most important thing we came away with was the feeling that we’re not the only ones—we can come together to stop the isolation we so often feel and to reach out to others. So we decided to form a statewide non-profit organization run by youth, for youth. So far we’ve been very successful.

We developed the following statement of our mission: **to assist, support, and advocate for youth with mental health concerns.**

Being in the group allowed me to deal with some feelings I’ve had in other places, feelings that may sometimes get in the way of making friends and advocating for myself. At first I was nervous and didn’t feel like I could be myself. I took up a stance I often take: I acted like I was better than everybody, even though I felt the opposite. As time passed I started talking to the other kids and I felt like I was a kid again—it was such a relief. I sort of “fell in love” with everybody. We could talk about anything, not like with other “normal” friends. I CAN be myself. I AM myself.

That weekend the group picked three youth to be leaders of Powerful Youth Friends United. I was one of those chosen to get the organization up and running. After the meeting the three of us got in touch with each other and the Statewide Family Network people to plan for the youth group’s future.

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“I sort of ‘fell in love’ with everybody. We could talk about anything, not like with other ‘normal’ friends.”

“We want these youth to understand that although they may be going through a very hard time, it’s not so bad that they can’t handle it.”

“Even though we don’t have enough money, we’re toughing it out.”

As the group continued to meet we found that our main emphasis was on supporting each other and reaching out to other youth who are not in the group. Some of the kids like us have been kicked out of school, put in placements, and have been in trouble with the law. These kids don’t have anybody except their families, and some don’t even have that. We want these youth to understand that although they may be going through a very hard time, it’s not so bad that they can’t handle it. There are other youth out there who have been through similar things and know what it feels like. We are all here to reach out and support each other.

Our group has a number of goals for the future. First, we need to find money to support the program. We’re working on doing grant proposals, and I took a grant writing class.

Second, we want to do more presentations. We did our first presentation at a conference on March 28th and 29th of this year. It was very successful, but we realize that before we can do any more we either need sponsors or we need to raise money from other sources. We were invited to do two presentations in Charlotte, June 4th and 5th, and to speak during lunch at a System of Care conference. We have accepted and we are very excited!

Third, we want to get more organized. For instance, we want to produce a document of our by-laws, written in language youth can understand.

Finally, we want to do more to advocate for youth with mental health concerns. Going to Washington, D.C., is one way we’ve thought about achieving this goal.

Even though we don’t have enough money, we’re toughing it out. We know that we’ve got plenty of time, and although it’s really difficult to maintain our group, it’s also a lot of fun!

Respectfully submitted,

Kelly Jones

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Objectives of Youth Programs

Programs for youth with serious emotional disorders, although widely diverse in design and practice, share similar objectives for the cognitive and behavioral growth of involved youth, as well as for the development of an environment in which they can thrive. Most youth groups are begun primarily to achieve objectives related to the well-being of the members, but there are also goals in relation to society as a whole, such as reducing the stigma of mental illness and educating the public. Because most of the larger social objectives are duplicated in the Statewide Family Networks themselves and discussed at length in grant applications and other documents, they are not included here.

The discussion of objectives is important for a number of reasons. The creation of mission statements, by-laws, and other statements of purpose is often a primary part of the development of youth programs. By understanding their objectives thoroughly, programs can be organized and developed with a clear focus.

Following is a list of some of the goals of Statewide Family Networks' youth programs, divided into three sections: cognitive, behavioral, and environmental objectives.

A. Cognitive Objectives

One of the central purposes of programs is to promote the cognitive development of involved youth, particularly in relation to improving their ability to achieve success in school and social settings. Following are a number of areas in which programs have directed their efforts.

1. Develop Strong Identity

A fundamental goal of many programs is to help youth develop a strong and healthy sense of self. For young people with serious emotional disorders, developing a positive identity can be a challenge. Programs often aim to help individuals develop positive beliefs and feelings about such things as their ethnic identity and their personal history, so that youth can incorporate them into a coherent sense of self. Debbie Carlson (Minnesota) remarks, "Our kids sometimes identify themselves by their illness and its symptoms. Sometimes psychiatrists and psychologists do that, too. We want them to realize that they are far more than just their diagnosis, and we also want to encourage them to see some of the positive things that come out of coping with mental illness."¹ When youth belong to a minority subculture, a strong identity can help to protect them from destructive acts of discrimination.

2. Develop Emotional Strength

Many programs want to help youth recognize and cope with their feelings, and to respond appropriately to others' feelings. In doing so, youth can better understand themselves and their motivations; they can also develop and maintain healthier relationships. Youth with serious emotional disorders often have particular difficulty in coping with and processing their feelings. According to Brenda Fletcher (Nebraska), "One of the most important coping skills is the ability to deal with frustration. It's also very important to be able to control impulses." Nebraska's youth program (Youth Encouraging Support) devotes a significant block of time during every meeting, at least a half an hour and often more, to allowing individuals to express and process their feelings.

¹Quotations in this section are from advisors to and coordinators of Statewide Family Network youth programs. Individuals are identified by their states.

The creation of mission statements, by-laws, and other statements of purpose is often a primary part of the development of youth programs.

"We want them to realize that they are far more than just their diagnosis, and we also want to encourage them to see some of the positive things that come out of coping with mental illness."

"One of the most important coping skills is the ability to deal with frustration. It's also very important to be able to control impulses."

“Because of some of the consequences of their illness, many of these kids have had to think carefully about questions of right and wrong...”

“They feel a sense of empowerment. Someone cares about what they think.”

“They talk directly about behavior issues and try to help each other by talking about how to do things differently.”

3. Improve Cognitive Skill

Another goal of youth programs is to help individuals succeed in school. Developing intellectual skills—logical thinking, analytical thinking, and abstract reasoning—is fundamental to improving school performance. Some programs have helped youth in this area by allowing them to tackle complex intellectual challenges. For example, the youth group from Kentucky Partnership for Families and Children developed a curriculum to teach elementary students, peers, teachers, and professionals about mental health issues, while Hawaii Youth Helping Youth wrote a screenplay and produced a short film to show at mental health conferences. As they work through intellectual challenges like these, youth have unique and powerful opportunities to improve their thinking skills.

4. Promote Ethical Development

Youth programs can engender a respect for rules and strengthen the capacity of individuals to feel empathy. Bill Richards (Oregon) contends that youth with emotional disorders often have a well developed understanding of ethical issues: “Because of some of the consequences of their illness, many of these kids have had to think carefully about questions of right and wrong, both on an individual level and a community level.” One of the central efforts of Oregon’s youth group is outreach, because helping others is a way to develop empathy and community awareness. For example, Oregon youth engage in efforts to preserve their area’s natural environment and involve themselves in activities to assist the elderly.

5. Develop Optimistic Attitudes

An important aim of youth programs can be to help youth form an optimistic attitude. Optimism about the future helps to give youth a reason to try and a reason to value their lives. An optimistic attitude can also help protect youth with serious emotional disorders from despair. Debbie Carlson (Minnesota) explains, “They feel a sense of empowerment. Someone cares about what they think. [The group] allows them to feel like they have some control.” In order to have an optimistic attitude, individuals need to believe that they have control over their own lives. Debbie continues, “They can step back and look at how far they’ve come.” This retrospective vision helps youth feel they are making progress, not only in relation to living with a serious emotional disorder, but in their journey toward maturity.

B. Behavioral Objectives

Programs often endeavor to help youth build patterns of behavior that will support social and academic success and lead to personal fulfillment. Following are a number of areas in which programs have directed their efforts.

1. Develop Positive Behavior Patterns

Youth programs can promote communication skills and provide reinforcement for effective behavior. Communication, an important aspect of behavior, is often emphasized. According to Debbie Carlson (Minnesota), “One of the big goals relates to how they interact with each other in meetings. Older kids mentor for younger kids. They talk directly about behavior issues and try to help each other by talking about how to do things differently.” By focusing the attention of individuals on productive activities, programs can steer them away from destructive associations and relationships.

2. Improve Ability To Achieve Personal Goals and To Be an Effective Self-advocate

It is clearly important in many groups that the youth take charge of setting their own goals, both individually and as a group. When individuals are self-directed they are less vulnerable to peer-pressure and anxiety about fitting in. Youth can better advocate for themselves when they feel capable of setting and achieving personal goals “It’s important to trust them to make decisions,” says Carol Cecil (Kentucky). Kentucky’s youth council specifically provides youth with training to be effective self-advocates, to protect their rights, and to prepare for the challenges of being an adult mental health consumer.

3. Develop Ability To Bond With Others

Bonding, a child’s attachment to family, friends, and/or community, is based on that child’s interactions with caregivers. In order to be able to adapt to life changes and cope with difficulties, an individual needs to feel a positive attachment to others. Youth groups offer the opportunity for bonding between young people with similar mental health challenges, and for bonding between children and adult advisors. According to Carol Cecil (Kentucky), bonding took place almost immediately in their youth organization. Yvonne Abang (Hawaii) reports the same phenomenon in their group. The initial connections made by the youth have turned into supportive friendships in both cases. This kind of bonding can reduce individuals’ feelings of insecurity and isolation.

4. Build Social Skills

In order for youth with serious emotional disorders to integrate themselves into social groups, they need to be able to accurately assess their environment, particularly in relation to the effect of their actions on others. Communication is central to understanding interpersonal relationships and to resolving conflicts. Bill Richards (Oregon) explains, “When you look at our kids in the classroom, they are alone, isolated. All the other kids are together and interact with each other. But in the [youth] group they don’t isolate themselves and they aren’t left out.” Although in many cases youth with serious emotional disorders are encouraged to become part of social groups outside the youth group, often they are not. As a result they have fewer opportunities to develop social skills. Youth groups can help develop communication and other social skills by giving individuals a safe place to practice such things as assertiveness, resistance, conflict resolution, and negotiation strategies.

5. Improve Adaptive Behavior

Adaptive behavior involves coping with change and dealing with stress. Changes and stresses are characteristic of the lives of all youth, but those with serious emotional disorders are under even more pressure. Minnesota’s youth group has chosen to address this objective by designing a website that will help teenagers like themselves cope successfully with serious emotional disorders. As Debbie Carlson explains, “They’ve gotten great help themselves and they really want to be a resource to other kids.” When the website is fully operational, the youth hope that it will be a resource for other youth with mental health disorders as they deal with the stresses and changes in their lives.

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“We ... reward them in [small ways] We try to recognize them all the time.”

“A major goal of many groups is to provide opportunities for youth to develop leadership skills.”

“Besides helping youth to build friendships and develop social skills, various group functions can bring out the unique strengths and challenges of individuals.”

C. Environmental Objectives

The third set of objectives for youth programs involves promoting an environment in which youth with serious emotional disorders can flourish. Such an environment provides support as well as opportunities for growth.

1. Promote Multiculturalism

Youth programs often aim to inform others about differences in relation to mental health. Youth with serious emotional disorders are generally quite aware that they belong to a distinct culture, the “culture of mental illness,” as it is often called. Programs can also promote awareness of social advantages and disadvantages arising from differences in gender, race, ethnic orientation, economic class, and sexual orientation. Multicultural awareness is a first step toward reducing the stigma and discrimination that are frequently related to difference.

2. Present Recognition for Achievements

Reinforcing positive behavior may be the most effective means of creating a supportive environment. Youth groups have discovered a wide variety of ways to improve motivation to behave in ways that achieve success. Reinforcement can come from peers, the community, or adult leaders. Nebraska’s youth group has made a particular effort to create a system for recognizing positive behavior and achievement. Brenda Fletcher explains, “Three Nebraska youth have won medals from the National Mental Health Association, and a couple of other kids have been selected to represent the youth in adult organizations. Some have been asked to go to national conferences and speak. We also reward them in a small way by sending thank you notes to every kid who facilitates [a youth group meeting], and we give coupons from fast food restaurants. We try to recognize them all the time.” Outside recognition reinforces positive behavior and feelings not only in the youth who receive it, but also in others who observe the process.

3. Develop Leadership Opportunities

A major goal of many groups is to provide opportunities for youth to develop leadership skills. While some groups are given training specific to the topic of leadership, others promote learning by involving youth in presentations, dramatic productions, art exhibits, and other activities. For example, Hawaii holds a Youth Leadership Conference. Hawaii’s youth council members contribute to the planning of the conference; they are also presenters and performers. By extending the opportunity to be leaders to individuals who might not otherwise get the chance, youth programs develop an environment in which individuals with serious emotional disorders can appreciate the learning and satisfaction that are part of leadership.

4. Provide Opportunities for Positive Social Interactions

Programs can add to a positive environment by exposing youth to a variety of social settings and encouraging them to participate. Bill Richards (Oregon) tells of a shy adolescent male who was afraid of heights: “While attending a swimming party with other members of the group, [the young man] made friends with a more outgoing boy who encouraged him to climb to the top of a water slide. Both boys had a wonderful time.” Besides helping youth to build friendships and develop social skills, various group functions can bring

out the unique strengths and challenges of individuals. Brenda Fletcher (Nebraska) provides another example in her description of a young man who is overwhelmed by noise and a young woman with artistic talent who were able to enjoy the quiet pleasures of an art exhibit in a way they could not appreciate some of the group's rowdier functions.

5. Help to Reduce the Stigma Associated With Serious Emotional Disorders

Youth programs have emphasized, in their mission statements, mottoes, presentations, and elsewhere, that reducing the stigma associated with serious emotional disorders is one of their principal goals. Educating the general public about the problem of stigma can be an effective means of reducing its impact on individual youth. Kentucky's youth group created a publication called "Mental Health: Sensitivity Curriculum" to address the issue of stigma at a fundamental level: the education of young children. Instruction in elementary schools about mental health problems, their sources, and their manifestation in the lives of youth will help prevent the ignorance that leads to stigma.

Because stigma reduction is such an important part of virtually every program for youth with serious emotional disorders, that goal is emphasized in the following article, which concludes the section on program objectives. Brandon Fletcher's essay, "Riding the Roller Coaster," first published in the National Mental Health Center's newsletter, *The Bell*, presents a youth perspective on the stigma associated with mental illness.

Educating the general public about the problem of stigma can be an effective means of reducing its impact on individual youth.





Brandon Fletcher (far right) pictured at the 2001 NMHA Annual Meeting with NMHA staffer Lindy Garnette and other Medal of Excellence Recipient Kaily Boyle.

“I had to endure the constant teasing and bullying of my classmates.”

“We shouldn’t be labeled as bad kids, or told that we CHOOSE to act this way.”

Riding the Rollercoaster

by Brandon Fletcher

Most of us at one time or another have ridden on a roller coaster. We have enjoyed the thrill of the ride. It may be the anticipation during the ascent or the excitement when the coaster soars downward. Living with bipolar disorder for me has been much like that experience. In the beginning, however, it was not an enjoyable feeling. My roller coaster was going much faster than normal. Sometimes I felt invincible; other times I lived in constant fear of it crashing as it sped downward. My life was out of control.

My ride began shortly after kindergarten when I was diagnosed with ADHD and was placed on Ritalin. By the time I was in third grade, I had been diagnosed with learning disabilities. I had to endure the constant teasing and bullying of my classmates. All the while the teachers discarded or ignored my feelings about the treatment I received from them. Teachers felt it was justified since “I CHOSE to act this way.”

When I entered the sixth grade, the roller coaster was speeding out of control. The teasing not only continued, it got worse. Kids were using me as their personal punching bag. Some days I was so angry that I would destroy things, hurt my little sister or myself. Some days I just cried. That was the first time that I tried to kill myself.

After changing schools, and finding the proper medications and support, I have been able to better get my life on track. I became a “roller coaster engineer.” I can control the roller coaster so it doesn’t go so fast. I still have my good and bad days, but not as bad anymore because I’m better able to manage my illness. I don’t want to kill myself anymore. Instead, I want to help others to become “roller coaster engineers.”

I am working to start a group for youth called Y.E.S. (Youth Encouraging Support) to help others learn to help themselves and support each other. We shouldn’t be labeled as bad kids or told that we CHOOSE to act this way. People also need to see us as individuals and not as a group or disorder. We have the power to educate others and help reduce the stigma associated with mental illness. We can make people understand about our mental illness and our struggle to get better. Most importantly, we want them to understand that we want to be treated and accepted like everyone else.

(c) 2003 National Mental Health Association. *Brandon Fletcher is 16 years old and lives in Kearny, Nebraska. Brandon received an NMHA Medal of Excellence at the association’s annual meeting for his work raising awareness about mental illness among young people. He served as a youth representative at the U.S. Surgeon General’s conference on mental health, and has contributed to articles and shared his story at conferences across the nation. This story was first published in the July 2001 issue of NMHA’s newsletter, The Bell.* Copyrighted and published by the National Mental Health Association. No part of this document may be reproduced without written consent.

Setting Up and Operating Youth Programs

Initiating a Program

The purpose of this chapter is to share ideas about youth programs between sites.¹ Rather than promoting any one method of operation, this document seeks to describe a wide variety of ideas and strategies. While several of the sites have received grants from SAMHSA in support of their youth programs, other sites have developed their programs independently or with other means of support. In some cases, the programs were begun with only good intentions and a very small budget. Regardless of how much money a program has to operate, the central objective is the same: to provide youth with a voice and to encourage their involvement in both their own care and in the welfare of other youth with serious emotional disorders.

Although each of the Statewide Family Networks' youth programs is unique, they have all evolved over time. A few youth programs have been around for nearly a decade, while others were only initiated at the beginning of this year. In some cases groups were originated by dedicated youth themselves.

The goals and values of the Statewide Family Networks are mirrored in their youth programs. Coordinators, advisors, and the youth who manage the programs are "attempting to achieve sound infrastructure, leadership and evaluation strategies within their agencies for sustainability and equitable partnerships in their states and territories. They strive for caregiver representation at all levels within their organization. They also advocate for caregiver representation in provision of services, at the program development level and at the policy level of local, state, and national child-serving agencies."² Networks also endeavor to encourage a youth voice in their organization. They promote strength-based, family-focused, and youth-directed efforts.

Building a Sound Infrastructure

Programs with a sound infrastructure have a strong foundation for success. A youth program might best be envisioned by distinguishing its central purpose (whether it is advocacy, support, or some other overarching goal) and seeing how it fits within the larger organization. After identifying the individuals, both adults and youth, who will be responsible for program development, the organization may want to clarify the existing sources of funds, as well as other potential sources. The youth program coordinators and leaders may also want to connect with the larger organization's board of directors for their input and support. The board can advise and assist program leaders as they develop their initial policies and procedures.

Administrative Activities to Facilitate Youth Program Development

Before convening their youth groups, some agencies have found it advantageous to create or use existing informational forms to operate in a safe and effective manner.³ Some of the documents include:

¹ Much of the information presented here comes from interviews with youth and youth program leaders from the following sites: Oregon, Tennessee, North Carolina, Minnesota, Nebraska, Kentucky, and Hawaii.

² This quotation is from the Statewide Family Networks Technical Assistance Center strategic plan (2003).

³ Examples of the forms from some agencies are available on request.

Lessons Learned:

Some Keys to Start-Up Success

- ✓ The enthusiastic interest and sincere commitment among youth to develop their own program
- ✓ The delegation of one or more youth group advisors and/or coordinators
- ✓ The identification of staff and volunteers who will potentially be involved
- ✓ The clarification of skills that staff and volunteers already have, as well as those they will want to develop
- ✓ The development of a current budget, as well as an idea of how funds would be used if more resources became available
- ✓ The creation of an action plan that identifies and prioritizes the things that need to be done
- ✓ The interest of involved, supportive parents
- ✓ The strong support and dedication of agency staff, as well as of the agency's board of directors

RECRUITMENT STRATEGIES

- Inquiring to behavioral service agencies, professional partnership programs, family guidance centers, mental health clinics, interagency groups, family and community organizations, and advocacy programs
- Making announcements at family partnership meetings
- Recruiting by the youth themselves (by putting up posters, making announcements at other meetings, speaking to classes in schools, making presentations, participating in panels, doing volunteer work, etc.)
- Distributing informational flyers
- Putting notices in local newsletters
- Preparing press releases, and submitting public service announcements
- Giving television interviews
- Acquiring the names of youth from earlier (dissolved) groups
- Spreading word of mouth between family partners
- Putting notices in special education newsletters
- Distributing information directly in schools, particularly those serving children with serious emotional disturbances
- Using system of care grant participant mailing lists, and other mailing lists

- Health forms that list and explain various conditions, medications, and other factors that might influence the individual youth's physical and mental health;
- Release forms to indicate parental permission for involvement in activities, and to specify the liability of the agency;
- Emergency contact forms with the names and phone numbers of parents, other caregivers, doctors, mental health facilities, and/or other emergency services;
- Surveys intended to discover the interests and goals of the youth.

Youth program leaders have sometimes developed an application and interview process; the purpose of this process is to make mutual introductions, rather than to control membership.

In virtually every case youth programs are seeking funding support. They have used small-scale strategies (sale of calendars, car washes, bake sales, etc.) and have also made large-scale efforts, such as applying for substantial grants.

Requirements for Membership

In most cases the range of membership is between the ages of ten and twenty-four, with the largest number of programs involving youth between the ages of fourteen and twenty-one. Although a diagnosis involving a serious emotional disorder is a requirement for most programs, it is not universal.

Some programs began by including younger individuals (ten to fourteen or so), and then revised their age range to high school and college age individuals. Preteens and older adolescents, in these cases, held different interests and objectives than younger children. Another option of some programs has been to initiate separate programs for younger and older youth.

Recruitment

Youth programs involve widely varying numbers of members. Some large groups include more than thirty youth, while others operate with as few as four committed individuals. The number of members appears to be less important to a group's success than their commitment. Each youth group has depended on recruiting strategies to locate interested individuals. Some recruitment methods include the information in the box to the left.

In some cases recruiting has been problematic because students have very full schedules, and also because many are in residential treatment programs.

Some Major Objectives of Youth Programs⁴

As individual programs have been set up, youth and program leaders have identified the reasons for bringing youth together. Clarifying the objectives has helped to focus the organization and activities of the groups. Some major objectives comprise the following:

- Helping youth develop positive behavior patterns by encouraging interactions that promote social skill building;

⁴ A more elaborate and specific explanation of the goals of programs is presented in the chapter entitled "Youth Program Objectives."

- Encouraging support between youth members, and providing opportunities for bonding between members;
- Helping youth to feel empowered and more in control of their lives;
- Providing opportunities for and promoting the process of older youth becoming models for and mentors to younger individuals;
- Establishing opportunities to practice leadership;
- Giving youth the responsibility and necessary tools for developing and enforcing their own set of rules;
- Encouraging individuals to talk directly about behavior issues, and to help each other by brainstorming alternative approaches;
- Developing optimistic attitudes by demonstrating that individuals' opinions, thoughts, and feelings are valued by the group;
- Keeping youth focused on positive activities so they are less vulnerable to negative influences and less likely to get in trouble;
- Giving youth perspective about themselves and each other, so that they can look back and see how far they have come in dealing positively with issues related to their serious emotional disorders.

Meeting Places and Times

Most youth programs operate from a single location and facilitate the travel of individuals to the meeting site. A few others operate from two or more separate locations around the state. Groups meet as often as twice a month in some cases, while others convene four times a year. In some instances the leadership of the groups meets independently to plan group activities and to do other administrative chores. By using existing, convenient meeting places, like school buildings, churches, and non-profit buildings, the majority of organizations save rental expenses.

Meetings generally last between one and a half and three hours, but groups sometimes conduct overnight or two-day mini-conferences. At these longer meetings youth stay in accommodations near the meeting site, gathering together at times during both days, and spending time independently, as well. In such cases planning for travel and lodging is necessary before each meeting, and the logistics can be fairly complicated. In order for youth to be able to travel, reimbursement is provided for travel costs, or specific arrangements are made to allow youth from around the state to journey to the meeting site. This can be a particular challenge in larger states, where youth may need to travel two hundred miles or more.

Some Activities for the Group's First Meeting

Adult coordinators attend virtually all meetings, but their level of involvement varies from one site to another. While adult coordinators prefer to allow youth to direct and control the groups once they get started, it may be unavoidable for them to take charge of the first meeting. At the first meeting the group may conduct some of the following processes:

- Giving the group a name, usually by a democratic vote;

North Carolina's Powerful Youth Friends United Recruitment Rally

North Carolina's youth group, Powerful Youth Friends United, is conducting a unique recruitment rally, Summer 2003. Current members of the group have collected names of more than one hundred youth and/or mental health related organizations, as well as names of individuals.

The proposed rally will be a two-day mini-conference that will introduce youth to the program. A brochure about Powerful Youth Friends United, membership applications, and the mission statement of the program will be made available to all those who attend.

All youth will be involved in writing the group's by-laws. The agenda for the two-day event will include presentations, "trainings," and recreational activities. Powerful Youth Friends United is looking forward to a productive conference during which youth with serious emotional disturbances from all over the state of North Carolina will come together.

Lessons Learned: North Carolina's Powerful Youth Friends United Leadership Strategy

North Carolina's youth program initiated a unique and effective leadership strategy at their first meeting last summer. The group decided to install four leaders, each from a different area of the state. The group instituted "leadership meetings," during which the leaders would determine the general direction and activities of the group.

Rather than trying to set up actual gatherings, the leaders use a conference call format to conduct their meetings. In this way they are able to connect with each other more often, for less expense. The main focus of the conference calls is to establish an agenda for the group's next meeting.

- Setting up guidelines for behavior, which is important in making sure that the group feels safe and comfortable;
- Drafting a mission statement to give the group direction;
- Establishing a leader or a leadership team;
- Creating a motto⁵;
- Promoting bonding between members of the group, so that from the beginning the group members can connect to support one another in times of difficulty;
- Outlining the "next steps" for the group.

"Typical" Meetings

While one youth coordinator remarked that there is no "typical" meeting, each program has developed a pattern for their get-togethers. Most group meetings begin with some kind of introductory activity that allows the members to warm up to each other and get comfortable in the meeting space.

Some of the meeting's opening activities may include:

- Welcoming by program coordinators and youth leaders;
- Introductions, during which all attendees tell a little about themselves;
- Sharing time, during which individuals talk about issues they are currently dealing with; this time may or may not include feedback from other members of the group;
- Ice-breaker activities, such as:
 - Writing "poems" about their individual strengths, using the letters of their names to begin each line;
 - Interviewing each other in pairs about their recent activities, and having the interviewer tell about the person s/he interviewed;
 - Drawing pictures that represent themselves and how they are feeling.

After the introductory activities, groups often move on to a more formal agenda. Youth may engage in training of various types: leadership, self-advocacy, meeting facilitation, team building, and transitioning to become adult consumers. Many groups invite guest speakers to give topic-related presentations on such topics as peer mentoring and stigma prevention. The group might also be engaged in such activities as preparing for a presentation, making posters or flyers, or accomplishing some other specific task. Meetings tend to be activity-based, so that youth remain interested and engaged. One group leader recommends dividing the meeting time into separate sections lasting no more than thirty minutes, and taking breaks between sections.

In general, although meetings most often focus on a specific topic or a concrete goal-related activity, sometimes groups get together just to have fun. Recreational activities have included such things as going to a swimming pool, having a pizza party, or making a trip to a theme park. In these cases the emphasis is on relaxation and developing social connections. This is often the best time for youth to establish friendships and to build a support network.

⁵ For example, Tennessee's group, Youth In Action, adopted the motto "Erasing the Stigma" at their first meeting.

Activities Beyond Meetings

While meetings are the settings of many activities, other events go beyond meeting times and require a substantial commitment of time and effort by involved youth. Some of these activities include:

- Presentations at community, state, and national conferences and other events;
- Fund-raising activities—for example, the creation and sale of calendars;
- Educational projects, such as writing and presenting a curriculum about mental health issues to be presented to peers, teachers, and health care professionals;
- Panel discussions about mental health issues at community meetings;
- Structured outdoor physical activities, for the purpose of team-building;
- Participation on community, state, and national committees;
- Membership on advisory and other boards;
- Development of Internet websites, chat rooms, and other resources, such as links to youth mental health sites;
- Presentation of youth-written skits;
- Production of videotapes for training and education;
- Outreach efforts, particularly those targeting youth who are not receiving assistance;
- Creation and showing of an art exhibit;
- Doing advocacy work in the community and at the state level;
- Speaking at school functions, from elementary schools to universities, about the experience of living with a serious emotional disorder;
- Distributing surveys at schools, hospitals, and juvenile justice programs.

Some Important Principles Groups Have Learned

The point which is emphasized most often by youth program leaders and the individual youth themselves is that they should be in charge of the group, make decisions, run meetings, and plan and direct other activities. Youth may need some initial direction, but afterward they can take authority and hold themselves and each other accountable. Leaders may advise, inform, or guide youth, but they allow the groups to control their own process and experience (and thus, learn from) the resulting outcomes.

Perhaps the quality that is most responsible for the success of networks' youth groups is the dedication of all involved. Individuals sacrifice a great deal of time and put in an enormous amount of effort because they feel their work is important—they can make a difference for themselves and other youth with serious emotional disorders.

Lessons Learned: Meeting Strategies

One universal aspect of the groups' "typical" meetings is that they encourage youth to develop their leadership skills; in all the youth programs the adults take a back seat and let the youth control the group's direction. They are trusted to make their own decisions, and have demonstrated the ability to be capable and creative leaders.

Because many of the youth have been left out of activities in other arenas, these meetings provide a unique opportunity for them to discover their own strengths. In some cases, the youth choose to rotate leadership from one meeting to the next, with each person taking a turn as meeting facilitator. Other times leadership is established for a specific period of time, a calendar year, for example, and at the end of that time new leadership is chosen.

Youth Council Profile: Hawaii Youth Helping Youth

How did this youth council get started?

Hawaii Youth Helping Youth is a youth council developed by the Statewide Family Network Hawaii Families As Allies (HFAA). The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration, through the Statewide Family Network grant, provided funding in September 2000 to establish the youth council.

Letters inviting youth to join the council were sent to Family Guidance Centers (mental health clinics on every island), and to many family and community organizations. Notices were put in the Mental Health Association and special education newsletters, and HFAA parent partners talked one on one with individual families to recruit potential candidates. Application and interview processes were developed to make the selection of Youth Council members official. To date, no one who has applied has been rejected.

How was the membership recruited?

What are the demographics of the membership?

There are currently ten members, ranging in age from fifteen to twenty-six. The average age is nineteen. Some turnover in membership has occurred, but recruitment continues to broaden representation from five islands and different regions on all islands. All the youth have received mental health services in Hawaii, which is a requirement in order for them to be on the council.

The first meeting was held in April 2001. Regular meetings, one Saturday a month, are well attended, which is a considerable accomplishment since each meeting requires substantial travel costs and logistical planning.

When does the group have meetings?

What activities are planned for the future?

The youth council has a number of short and long-term goals for its future. Following are some activities they are planning:

- The youth council will be working on a mission statement and brochure to clarify their direction and to inform others of their activities.
- They will engage in fund-raising activities.
- They have been invited to join several state level committees.
- They are planning to personally distribute a youth satisfaction survey to programs and hospitals, and to talk with those in placements; they also plan to contact youth in the juvenile justice system.
- They propose to take their skit into the schools and work on an anti-stigma campaign.
- They want to improve the system of care in Hawaii by voicing their concerns through continued participation on panels, at meetings, through presentations, and in articles in the Mental Health Association of Hawaii newsletter.

What training has the council received?

The youth have had some training in leadership and meeting facilitation skills and are currently working on team building. The youth will also be facilitating focus groups on self-determination and will receive training on group facilitation. Training is ongoing as new members continually come on board, and much of what is taught is through modeling by the youth council coordinator.

At HFAA's first family conference in 2001, the council did a youth panel presentation. The emphasis was on their experience in the system—what helped and what didn't help them to move forward in their lives. The presentation was well received, and council members were asked by the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Division to do another panel presentation at the Care Coordinator's Conference that year.

Last year, HFAA held their first Youth Leadership Conference. The council members were involved in the planning of the conference and shared their concerns with a scriptwriter who wrote a skit to get their message about the mistreatment of youth across to the conference participants. The youth performed the skit called "More Than Words" for both youth and family conferences in 2001, and they were a huge success.

At this year's Youth Leadership Conference and the annual Statewide Family Conference they will be doing a video presentation. A professor from the University of Hawaii Special Education Department will be working with them on the planning and production of video clips, and they will soon be filming and editing their video presentation. The presentation will reflect their views about self-determination.

What are some of the accomplishments of the council?

What makes this youth council work?

There are three core reasons for the youth council's success. First, the youth are learning the skills that are necessary for them to run their meetings and have full decision-making authority. The staff may inform or guide them, but they leave the final decision up to the youth council members. The second reason it works so well is that the members are very dedicated. They get up early (many of them must fly in from other islands) and get to meetings one Saturday a month, giving up time they could be spending with friends or family, because they feel their work is important. Finally, the youth have a sincere desire and a strong determination to improve the system of care in Hawaii by voicing their concerns and making sure their voices are heard.

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Youth Council Profile: Kentucky Partnership for Families and Children, Inc.

How did this youth council get started?

In October of 1999 the Kentucky Partnership for Families and Children received a grant from the Center for Mental Health Services to initiate a family-governed advocacy organization that provided a voice to youth with severe emotional disabilities. One of the keys to the group's start-up success was the strong support and flexibility of agency staff, as well as the interest of involved, supportive parents.

Maintaining the budget is a continuing challenge. The program is constantly looking for means to sustain itself, and even further, for ways to fund growth.

What is the main challenge the youth group faces?

What are the demographics of the membership?

Youth between the ages of ten and twenty-one were initially targeted for membership, but as the program developed it became clear that the ten to fourteen year-olds were too young to take part in many of the group's activities. The age range was then changed to fourteen to twenty-four, focusing on high school and college students. There are fifteen youth group members, most of whom attend meetings several times a year.

First, board members and support group delegates were contacted and their children were invited. Then information was disseminated at community mental health centers and the Kentucky wraparound program (IMPACT).

How was the membership recruited?

When does the group have meetings and what are the meetings like?

At this time the Youth Council meets between five and six times a year. Planning for travel and lodging is necessary before each meeting, and the logistics can be fairly complicated. In order for youth to be able to travel, reimbursement is provided for travel costs.

At the first meeting the group set up guidelines for behavior. This step was important in making sure that the group felt safe and comfortable, and may have been partly responsible for the immediate bonding between members of the group. From the beginning the group members have connected to support one another in times of difficulty.

At each meeting two staff members are present with the youth to assist in whatever way they are needed. The Youth Council meets every summer to make plans for the upcoming year. Youth are trusted to make their own decisions, and they have proven themselves to be industrious, capable, and creative leaders.

The group has been involved in a wide variety of activities, from recreational outings to public service to education. The most recent recreational outing involved a day trip to a theme park; the parent of a youth member raised money independently to support the trip.

Other activities are focused on the expression of the young people's ideas and concerns. Members of the group attend seven or eight conferences a year, in which they give presentations they have developed on their own, from their own experiences. Group members have also expressed their unique voices in an activity involving the creation and showing of an art exhibit. A fund-raising activity for the group was the creation and selling of a 2003 calendar. The calendar includes pictures of the group, as well as artwork and poems created by group members.

A driving motivator for the youth is the desire to educate the public about mental health issues, especially in relation to children and youth. To that end the youth wrote a curriculum to be presented to their peers in schools throughout the state, as well as to teachers and health care professionals; it is called the "Mental Health Sensitivity Curriculum: Understanding Brain Disorders." The curriculum development was supported by a grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Center for Mental Health Services.

What are some of the youth group's current activities and accomplishments?

What activities are planned for the future?

Activities will include summer meetings, Internet chat room development, and training. This summer the group is looking forward to an overnight meeting to take place on a Friday and Saturday. On the Friday evening the focus will be on building teamwork and leadership skills. Saturday will be a time for planning for the coming year.

One of the most promising undertakings has been the development of the Internet chat room. The youth, with staff support, are hoping to have the chat room up and running in the near future. While the group has already received some training in the area of self-advocacy, more is planned to help individuals as they make the transition to becoming adult mental health consumers.

With the success of this statewide Youth Council, KPFC is partnering with two community mental health centers to begin regional youth program meetings. In addition, two more regional youth councils will be established during the next fiscal year.

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Youth Council Profile: Minnesota Youth Advisory Board

What is the name of Minnesota's youth program and when did it get started?

Minnesota's youth program is called the Youth Advisory Board. The Minnesota Statewide Family Network applied for and received a grant to develop and implement a youth program in the fall of 2001, and the program was initiated in January of 2002.

In the beginning youth were recruited from schools where children with serious emotional disorders were served. Recruiting was problematic because students had very full schedules, and also because many were in residential treatment programs. Currently information about the youth program is posted and disseminated in a number of places, such as schools, agencies, and family partnership meetings.

How was the membership recruited?

What are the demographics of the membership?

Members on the Youth Advisory Board range in age from fourteen to eighteen. There are five core youth members, with several others who attend whenever possible.

Transportation to meetings can be a problem because Minnesota is a large state, and youth with serious emotional disorders come from all over. Currently the youth program meets once a month for two and half hours. Meetings begin with a pizza dinner, which allows the youth to socialize and settle in. After an "icebreaker" activity, they move on to a more formal agenda. Youth are now facilitating their own meetings.

When does the group have meetings and what are the meetings like?

What goals is the program working to achieve?

The organization helps youth develop positive behavior patterns by encouraging interactions that promote social skill building. Initially, youth needed to be directed, but now they direct and redirect each other. Older youth mentor younger youth, and individuals are encouraged to talk directly about behavior issues and to help each other by brainstorming different approaches.

The program helps youth develop optimistic attitudes by demonstrating that individuals' opinions, thoughts, and feelings are valued by the group. As a result, youth feel empowered and more in control of their lives. The group also focuses on giving individuals a better perspective about themselves and each other; they can look back and see how far they have come in dealing positively with issues related to their serious emotional disorders.

The Minnesota Statewide Family Network's main focus is on helping parents and caregivers achieve their goals in relation to children and youth with serious emotional disorders, but the youth have a desire to engage in their own efforts. Specifically, the youth want to reach out to other teens who are not receiving assistance, both in schools and in the community. Because the youth feel that they have received excellent help themselves, they want to find ways to help others.

To this end, members of the youth program have developed their own website by meeting with a consultant who designs web pages. They also wrote short autobiographies to be posted on the site, and they did research to locate and present links to other helpful sites. They are currently working on ways to correspond with interested youth through e-mails. The website is a work in progress that represents the commitment of Minnesota youth to being a resource for other children and teenagers.

What activities have been particularly important to Minnesota's youth council?

What activities are planned for the future?

Two of the biggest activities the organization is planning are the development of a public service announcement and an anti-stigma campaign. Funding these ambitious projects is a challenge, particularly in relation to videotaping, and the group is working on strategies to raise funds. Less costly but equally important plans involve putting together presentations for conferences and for agency staff meetings. The program is particularly interested in making sure that all youth members are able to participate in developing and making presentations, since these experiences have contributed a great deal to the growth and self confidence of involved youth.

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Youth Council Profile: Nebraska Youth Encouraging Support

What is the name of Nebraska's youth program and when did it get started?

Nebraska's youth program, which operates from two separate locations, is called Youth Encouraging Support (YES). Nebraska YES was initiated three years ago by a youth in the Professional Partners Program. The young man was asked to attend a Surgeon General's conference in Washington, D.C. While at the conference he encountered youth from other groups, and he went back to Nebraska with the idea of creating a program in his home state. At that time the family organization decided to find a way to establish and support a youth council.

YES developed the following mission statement: to educate professionals, families, and peers on mental health issues; to reduce stigma within communities in Region Three; to support other youth with mental health disorders; and to provide a youth voice within local systems of care.

What is the mission of the youth program?

What are the demographics of the membership?

Youth between the ages of ten and twenty-one are eligible for membership. They come from a variety of family situations, from institutional placements to foster care to single parent homes to two-parent homes. Although there are currently more boys than girls in the program, the ratio changes from month to month.

The network contacted behavioral service agencies, the professional partnership program, and other agencies for referrals. In some cases the family care partner advocate let individual families know about the youth program. The youth themselves did some of their own recruiting, and they continue to put up posters, hand out flyers, prepare press releases, and give television interviews, all of which have resulted in other youth discovering the program.

How was the membership recruited?

When does the group have meetings and what are the meetings like?

Because of the amount of area and traveling distance, the group meets in two different rural communities. Each youth group meets once a month in each community, either in the Head Start building or the Alternative School. Members can attend either or both meetings. Each meeting begins with a welcoming, introductions, and an icebreaker activity. Then a half an hour or more is devoted to sharing, during which individuals are encouraged to talk about issues that are concerning them. Typically, a guest speaker then makes a presentation for forty-five minutes to an hour. Each meeting ends with a discussion about current and future activities.

One positive aspect of the meeting structure is that no one individual acts as group leader. Because many of these youth have been left out of activities in other arenas, the group decided to rotate leadership from one meeting to the next, with each person taking a turn as meeting facilitator.

What are some of the group's objectives?

Objectives involve keeping youth focused on positive activities so they are less vulnerable to negative influences and less likely to get in trouble. Older youth become models for and mentors to younger individuals. YES gives youth opportunities to practice leadership. The advisor doesn't provide answers, but helps youth in the process of developing and enforcing their own set of rules. They decide what's appropriate and what's not. The youth hold each other accountable.

During the meetings themselves the youth will continue to focus on developing leadership skills. Meetings will also bring in guest speakers for education on a number of topics, such as peer mentoring and stigma prevention.

The youth plan to do more advocacy work in the community in the hopes that their experiences can help other youth who are mental health consumers. Panel presentations will continue to be given at various community functions, and youth will also speak at school events, from elementary schools to colleges and universities, about what it's like to live with a mental health disorder from a youth perspective. The program is working to establish youth representation on boards and advisory committees for mental health programs of various kinds. Nebraska YES is also seeking youth representation at CASA—Court Appointed Support Advocacy.

On a national level presentations have also been planned for the Federation of Families conference and the Youth Leadership Conference for Juvenile Justice.

What activities are planned for the future?

In what ways have youth council members been recognized for their accomplishments?

Nebraska YES makes a particular effort to recognize individuals for contributions in meetings, at the community and state level, and at the national level. Thank you notes are sent to each person who facilitates a meeting, and coupons from fast food restaurants and other goodies are included with these notes.

Several of the youth have been selected for membership in adult community organizations. Some have been asked to go to national conferences and speak. Youth have been appointed to the Tobacco Free Nebraska Youth Council and Foster Youth Council. One individual was selected to be a member of the Youth Leadership Council for the National Youth Leadership Network, an organization that works with youth with various disabilities. Three youth have won medals from the National Mental Health Association.

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Youth Council Profile:

Oregon Family Support Network Youth Group

How did the Oregon Family Support Network Youth Group get started and what are its central objectives?

Oregon's Statewide Family Network received grant money to set up, operate, and maintain a youth program. The group was developed according to a process called the "12/24/36 Plan": the objectives in the first twelve months were to establish cohesiveness and to make sure group members had a good time together; the objectives for the first twenty-four months included forming an advisory council, establishing rules, writing by-laws, and developing a mission statement; and the objectives for the first thirty-six months involved establishing placement of youth group members on adult advisory councils, and making sure their voices were included in the decision-making processes that affect them.

Oregon's youth group has thirty-eight members. At first the group involved youth between the ages of eleven and seventeen, but the age gap was problematic. Different age groups had significantly different interests and goals. Because of the differences the group was divided into two smaller groups: one group of eleven to thirteen year olds, and another of teenagers between the ages of fourteen and seventeen. Currently, the youth council has plans to develop a group of eight to ten year olds and a sibling support group.

What are the demographics of the membership?

How was the membership recruited?

An earlier group had been dissolved, but a list of members was kept, and recruitment started there. Then a youth group flyer was distributed to the County Mental Health residential program. The advisor also spoke to students in the Alternative School. After that a public service announcement appeared in the newspaper, and letters were sent to families on the network's mailing list database.

As part of the organizational planning, the youth advisor re researched documents to support safe and effective meetings and activities. Membership forms were adapted from the Girl Scouts and other websites. Health forms, release forms, surveys, and emergency forms were also adapted. The survey form has been particularly helpful in getting to know the youth and in determining their interests.

What were some of your planning strategies?

When does the group have meetings and what are the meetings like?

Each group meets once a month, but the current goal is to have two monthly meetings. Because the budget is always a central consideration, the group tries to maximize the amount that can be accomplished in each meeting. The structure and content of meetings has evolved over time. At first the group met at a church next door to the agency, but the setting didn't seem to support a relaxed, productive environment. After that, the group met in more informal settings, such as pizza parlors and recreation/swimming facilities. Being in a comfortable, fun setting appears to promote optimistic, productive attitudes.

There are two levels of activities for the youth group. The main goal of the first level is to give the youth an opportunity to enjoy themselves in a social atmosphere. The youth understand that there are basic rules, but beyond that, they appreciate having a place where they can just be themselves. Some activities related to this goal are pizza dinners, swimming parties, and fishing trips. For example, one party took place at a local aquatic center with water slides and other attractions. During these activities youth are able to develop personal strengths in a supportive atmosphere. Parents are given the opportunity to attend some functions, and they are able to enjoy the company of other parents as they gain an understanding of the youth program itself.

A second level of activity is centered on the goal of community service and outreach. For example, the youth have teamed up with Project Solve, an environmental caretaking and advocacy organization. Specifically, the youth traveled to a local creek to remove non-native plants in order to help support the native fish population. Another example is a support/mentoring group in which older youth are involved.

What are some of the youth group's current activities and what are the goals of these activities?

What is the overall purpose of the youth program?

In conjunction with the mission of the Oregon Family Support Network, the purpose of the group is to help youth guide their own lives. The group does this through making outreach efforts in which they learn about themselves, others, and the world they live in, through honing social skills by giving youth opportunities to interact in a variety of social settings, and finally, through helping youth lead others by example.

Maintaining the budget is a continuing challenge. The program is constantly looking for means to sustain itself.

What is the biggest challenge facing the youth program?

What is the greatest strength of Oregon's youth program?

Already the individuals in the program, who have been together less than a year, have formed important bonds, both between individual youth and as a cohesive group. This bonding has contributed to a relaxed atmosphere in which the kids feel comfortable just being themselves.

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"Families throughout Oregon supporting other families who have children and adolescents with emotional, mental, behavioral or related disorders."

Program References and Internet Resources

Included in this list of references and resources are a number of Internet sites, links, and publications related to the topic of youth programs. Many of these references include extensive print and Internet bibliographies. The annotated citations are divided into two main categories relating to youth programs: a) general references and resources, and b) special topics. The section on special topics is subdivided into specific areas of particular concern to youth programs.

A. General References and Resources

Children, Youth, and Families Education and Research Network—This network promotes positive youth development and offers support for community-based educational programs for youth and families. It also offers program support, including funding, professional development opportunities, and evaluation resources. It contains a “just for kids” section with activities for youth ages 5-19. <http://www.cyfernet.org/>

Kids Peace and TeenCentral—This site provides young teens with a place to vent their frustrations, talk about their anxieties, and support one another without outside pressure. A search feature allows teens to type in thoughts and connect with stories from peers who have experienced similar problems. Kids as well as professionals respond to stories, questions, and statements. The “teen help line” provides state-by-state addresses and phone numbers of crisis centers. <http://www.teencentral.net/>

Mental Health InfoSource—The InfoSource is an excellent resource for youth dealing with serious emotional disorders of all kinds. Information on a number of topics important to youth programs is abundant, searching is easy, and there are numerous links to other sites. <http://www.mhsource.com>

National 4-H Youth Programs—The national 4-H web site provides a wide variety of resources that could be useful to youth programs at all stages of development. 4-H is the youth education branch of the Cooperative Extension Service, a program of the United States Department of Agriculture. One of the oldest youth programs in the country, 4-H is committed to serving the needs of America’s young people. Every county in every state has access to a County Extension Office for Youth Programs. <http://www.4-h.org/>

National American Red Cross Youth Services—The Red Cross Youth Services division provides models for youth programs in a number of areas: community service, advocacy, education, and training, for example. Since the founding of the Junior Red Cross in 1917, youth and the Red Cross have been partners. <http://www.redcross.org/services/youth/>

National Youth Development Information Center—This comprehensive website dealing with youth issues, sponsored by the National Collaboration for Youth, offers extensive coverage of youth development programs, with links to reports about the effectiveness of such programs, information on how to get funding for programs, and detailed guides showing how programs actually work. <http://www.nydic.org/nydic/>

B. Special Topics

Activities

School Age Notes—This site provides information and resources on issues concerning youth programs. It offers a print bibliography book on this subject and provides an on-line catalog. It also presents a free newsletter on topics such as activity suggestions, curriculum, self-esteem, volunteer and staff training, and enrichment activities. The site's purpose is to develop and provide information, technical assistance, and resources concerning children and youth. <http://www.afterschoolcatalog.com/about.html>

Advertising and Media

Working With the Media—This publication describes how youth can publicize their message by working with the media. It explains how to start up a partnership with the media to help educate the group's audience, build support in the community, help attract new individuals, and build partnerships with other community groups. The bulletin furnishes steps on how to start working with the media, describes how to continue the relationship, explains the challenges and rewards of using the media to get messages across, gives tips on evaluating whether the relationship is successful, and lists organizations and programs that youth may contact for additional information. http://www.ncjrs.org/html/ojjdp/youthbulletin/2000_02_1/contents.html

Raising Awareness and Educating the Public—This article describes how youth can use a public awareness or education project to bring an important issue to their community's attention. In addition to providing practical advice on how to select a topic, develop a message, organize a project, and gather resources, the article identifies specific challenges and rewards of instituting an education and awareness program. It also supplies tips on evaluating programs and lists organizations and programs that youth may contact for additional information. <http://www.ncjrs.org/html/ojjdp/youthbulletin/9912>

Community Service

Energize, Inc.—This site contains information regarding volunteerism and how to work with volunteers, as well as articles, book suggestions, and conference listings. <http://www.energizeinc.com/ener/ener.html>

Involving Youth in Civic Life—This fact sheet describes two activities that enhance civic involvement by youth: Youth Advisory Councils (YAC's) and Youth Town Hall Meetings (YTHM's). The fact sheet offers suggestions to help youth organize YAC's and YTHM's and provides contact information for organizations that can offer further assistance. <http://ojjdp.ncjrs.org/pubs/fact.html>

What Kids Can Do, Inc.—What Kids Can Do promotes the value of young people, and works with teachers and other adults on projects that combine powerful learning with public purpose. The organization collects and shares feature stories, student work and voices, research, and resources that expand current views of what constitutes challenging learning and achievement, particularly for adolescent students. Members of the organization believe deeply in the contributions of youth as citizens. <http://www.whatkidscando.org>

Counseling

About Anxiety Disorders in Children and Adolescents—This site provides descriptions of several disorders including Panic Disorder, Social Phobia, and Generalized Anxiety Disorder, and addresses the special concerns of children and adolescents. Also included is an adolescent's self-test, a parent's self-test, and a section about finding help. <http://www.keepkidshealthy.com/newsletters.html>

Change your Mind About Mental Health—This site, highly accessible to youth, discusses the kinds of mental health problems that young people experience and offers advice on ways to get help. Through a series of short stories, the site illustrates how those who suffer from problems, such as depression, panic, and eating disorders, can improve and recover. The information is also available in print and can be ordered through the web site. <http://helping.apa.org/changeyourmind/>

Have a Heart's Depression Resource—Have A Heart provides links to articles and other resources to help youth suffering from depression and thoughts of suicide. Articles can be downloaded on understanding thoughts of suicide, bipolar disorder, mood disorder, and finding help for depression. <http://www.have-a-heart.com/>

Institute for Youth Development—IYD delivers current information about unhealthy risk behaviors involving alcohol, drugs, tobacco, violence, sex, and sexually transmitted diseases. This site not only connects youth to a variety of IYD information sources, it also provides a list of government websites dealing with related issues. Youth can gain advice from teens who have “been there and done that.” <http://www.youthdevelopment.org/>

Conflict Resolution

Want To Resolve a Dispute? Try Mediation—This publication describes how youth can create a mediation program in their communities. It examines how mediation might help reduce violence in schools and neighborhoods; discusses peer mediation, in which students are recruited and trained to act as mediators for their classmates; provides step-by-step techniques of starting a program and the methods needed to keep one going; and lists both the challenges and rewards of conducting a conflict mediation program. It also supplies tips on evaluating the program's effectiveness, lists organizations that youth may contact for additional information, and outlines a sample mediation session. http://www.ncjrs.org/html/ojjdp/youthbulletin/2000_03_1/contents.html

Development of Youth Programs

Family Independence Agency—This site includes information on developing a youth program. It has maintained a commitment to the positive development of young people through collaborative, coordinated efforts by juvenile justice, foster care, protective services, county office staff, and community partners. <http://www.michigan.gov/fia>

National 4-H Council—The National 4-H Council is committed to helping youth live positive, productive lives. The council includes ten youth (ages 12-22) on their forty-five-member board of directors. In addition, youth serve as interns and staff. Youth are involved in program design and implementation, and they present at conferences, are project assistants, trainers, and tour guides. <http://www.fourhcouncil.edu/>

The Cherokee Nation Tribal Youth Council—This youth council is patterned after the Cherokee Nation Tribal Council. It is designed to recognize and encourage youth and to assist in their pursuit of higher education. <http://www.cherokee.org/services>

Evaluation of Youth Programs

Does Your Youth Program Work?—Helping youth get started in evaluating their programs, this resource describes why evaluation is important. It explains how findings can be used to check the program's impact and identify which parts need to be either modified or dropped to better achieve goals. Recommending that youth begin early by building evaluation into their programs from the start, it helps youth design evaluations based on specific questions, collect data consistently and accurately, and use the findings to improve their programs.

http://www.ncjrs.org/html/ojjdp/youthbulletin/2000_04_1/contents.html

Fundraising

Administration on Children, Youth and Families—ACYF funds state, local, and tribal organizations to provide programs relating to children and families. <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/grantreview/>

Carnegie Corporation of New York, The Young Adolescents Program—This site presents grant opportunities for youth organizations that place emphasis on improving the achievement of young adolescents and on encouraging more comprehensive approaches to the prevention of adolescent health problems, especially pregnancy, violent behavior, and drug abuse. <http://www.carnegie.org/sub/program/grantsearch.html>

Fundraising: Plan a Special Event!—This resource explains how youth can plan special events or activities to focus community attention on important issues. It discusses how special events such as 5K races, car washes, or other fundraisers may help. To help youth plan special events, it also includes a three-page checklist detailing what needs to be done during the 20 weeks before an event. A list of organizations that youth may contact for additional information is included. <http://www.reeusda.gov/1700/funding>

McKesson Foundation—The McKesson Foundation supports health-related, social, educational, civic, and cultural projects across the U.S., especially those for youth. The foundation provides funding for specific projects, programs, and operating support. Nonprofit organizations requesting funding should have projects or programs that focus on youth and health. Eligible projects or programs may include educational enrichment, health programs for families, and youth development activities. <http://www-domino4.hud.gov/NN/contacts.nsf/0/78C0DA654F7D255885256808005CA0EF?OpenDocument>

Mitsubishi Electric America Foundation—The mission of the Mitsubishi Electric America Foundation is to contribute to the greater good of society by assisting young Americans with disabilities, through education and other means, to lead fuller and more productive lives. Funding is available for both projects and general operating support. Multi-year funding will be considered, up to a maximum of three years. <http://www.meaf.org/whatfund.html>

North Central Regional Education Laboratory: Resources for After School Programming—Through this site NCREL provides many resources to help a youth program through every stage of development: from the "This sounds like a good idea" stage through to an established program. It helps youth programs look for creative ways to find new funding sources. It also presents links to resources for creating effective after-school programs, as well as information and grant-writing assistance for federal funding opportunities through the United States Department of Education's 21st Century Community Learning Centers, national resources, and NCREL regional resources. <http://www.ncrel.org/after>

Youth Resources Connections: U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Youth Services—The Office of Youth Services is looking to award several large grants to existing youth programs to collaborate with community organizations to identify a community need and work to fill that need. http://www.doleta.gov/youth_services/

Juvenile Justice

Arts and Performances for Prevention—This resource teaches youth how to use music, drama, dance, and visual arts programs to draw attention to problems in their communities, educate others on the benefits of crime prevention, and suggest ways to prevent crime. It identifies specific challenges and rewards of instituting this type of program, supplies tips on evaluating programs, and lists organizations and programs that youth may contact for additional information. http://www.ncjrs.org/html/ojjdp/youthbulletin/9912_1/contents.html

Creating Publications: Write To Fight Crime—This article describes how youth publications can help inform, persuade, and motivate an audience. It explains how their publications contribute to crime prevention, what it takes to start and how to keep the process moving forward, and the potential challenges and rewards of publishing the youth's message. Step-by-step techniques for creating a publication are outlined, including how to go about researching the subject, outlining, writing, editing, and designing the publication, going to press, and distributing the final piece. The Bulletin also gives tips on evaluating whether the publication is successful. http://www.ncjrs.org/html/ojjdp/youthbulletin/2000_04_2/contents.html

Meetings

Meetings: Make Them Work!—This article describes the characteristics of a good meeting and provides youth with straightforward advice on how to conduct productive meetings and keep meetings moving in a positive direction. For example, it encourages youth to listen to others' points of view and to learn how to disagree without being disagreeable. It also describes the challenges of conducting meetings, supplies tips on evaluating meetings, and lists sources of more information. <http://www.ncjrs.org/html/ojjdp/yb9909-1/contents.html>

Mentoring

Make a Friend—Be a Peer Mentor—This site discusses peer-mentoring programs for youth (those that match older youth with young students in one-on-one relationships). For instance, it explains how youth involved in mentoring programs have been shown to be less likely to experiment with drugs or drop out of school. It also supplies tips on how to evaluate peer-mentoring programs. <http://www.ncjrs.org/html/youthbulletin/9907-4/contents.html>

National Mentoring Partnership—The Mentoring Partnership provides an on-line "course" for becoming a better mentor, including effective methods, activities, and other suggestions. It also provides information on research. This site may be particularly helpful for volunteers. <http://www.mentoring.org/>

Multiculturalism

Cyfernet's National Network for Child Care—This site lists articles and other resources from the National Network for Child Care, and full text on programs that help children learn to live with a positive attitude about and approach to diversity. It features such titles as "Activities that Promote Racial and Cultural Awareness" and "Celebrating Diversity: Resisting Bias." <http://www.nncc.org/Diversity/divers.page.html>

Presentations

Making the Most of Your Presentation—This publication describes how youth can create a presentation that will get their message across effectively to those who need to hear it. This Youth in Action Bulletin provides step-by-step techniques, explores proven methods of planning and conducting presentations that help motivate an audience to action, and lists both the challenges and rewards of making a presentation. It also supplies tips on evaluating a presentation's effectiveness and lists organizations and programs that youth may contact for additional information. http://www.ncjrs.org/html/ojdp/youthbulletin/2000_02_2/3.html

Sexuality

Advocates for Youth—Established in 1980 as the Center for Population Options, Advocates for Youth champions efforts to help young people make informed and responsible decisions about their reproductive and sexual health. Advocates believes it can best serve the field by boldly advocating for a more positive and realistic approach to adolescent sexual health. <http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/>

Sexual Minority Youth Assistance League—As a youth service agency SMYAL's mission is to support and enhance the self-esteem of sexual minority youth—any youth (13-21) who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or who may be questioning their sexuality—and to increase public awareness and understanding of their issues. It includes five youth (ages 16-23) on a 15-member board of directors. Youth are also involved in community outreach and serve on a youth council that advises the youth board members. <http://www.smyal.org/>

Teenwire.com—A leading web site for teens needing information about sexual health, Teenwire is committed to giving the facts about sex so that teens can use this information to make intelligent choices. It aims to help reduce the risk of unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections. <http://www.teenwire.org/index.asp>

Stigma Reduction

Kids on the Block—This site references a number of educational programs which enlighten children and youth on the issues of serious emotional disorders, disability awareness, and other social concerns. <http://www.kotb.com/>

StigmaBusters—The National Alliance of the Mentally Ill has a program called StigmaBusters, which is a group of dedicated advocates across the country and around the world who seek to fight pervasive and often hurtful representations of mental illness. They speak out against stereotypical media portrayals of people with mental illnesses. Their goal is to break down barriers of discrimination by promoting education, understanding, and respect. <http://www.nami.org/campaign/stigmabust.html>

No Stigma—This site represents a nationwide public education campaign dedicated to combating the stigma associated with mental illness among youth, adults, and seniors. Its goal is to reduce the discrimination experienced by Americans living with mental illness and substantially increase the numbers of affected persons accessing mental health services. <http://www.nostigma.org>

Substance Abuse

Freevibe—This network helps youth understand the dangers of substance abuse and make responsible decisions. The site asks visitors to submit their own “Anti-Drugs,” provides an opportunity to discuss the effects of drugs and peer pressure, and offers an online community for learning about staying drug-free. A special section of the site provides information for young people who live with a parent who uses drugs or drinks too much. www.Freevibe.com

Join Together—Funded primarily by a Robert Wood Johnson Foundation grant, Join Together supports community-based efforts for youth to reduce, prevent, and treat substance abuse across the nation. It promotes comprehensive strategies that respond to the harms related to substance abuse, such as domestic violence, unemployment, crime, loss of workplace productivity, and gun violence. It produces a variety of informational products, including reports, newsletters, and community action toolkits. <http://www.jointogether.org/home/>

Suicide

Fact Sheet: Suicide in the United States—From the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, this fact sheet includes statistics on suicide among the young, prevention programs, and materials and resources available on suicide prevention, as well as an extensive bibliography. <http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/factsheets/suifacts.htm>

Teen Suicide—From the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP), this publication presents information on teen suicide and includes links to other teen mental health issues, including depression, alcohol and drugs, and firearms. <http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/factsheets/suifacts.htm>

Some Documents and Products of Statewide Family Networks

Hawaii—Hawaii Youth Helping Youth

1. Guide/Workbook: "Where Am I Going? How Will I Get There?"
(A copy can be requested from the SILCH Internet homepage at: www.silch.org)
2. Youth Program Description: Hawaii Youth Helping Youth
3. Biennial Report: Evidence Based Services Committee—"Summary of Effective Interventions for Youth With Behavioral and Emotional Needs"

Contact Information:

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 E-mail: HFAA.Ohana@verizon.net

Kentucky—Kentucky Partnership for Families and Children, Inc.

1. Mental Health Sensitivity Curriculum: Understanding Brain Disorders
2. 2003 Youth Council Calendar (Fundraising Project)

Contact Information:

Kentucky Partnership for Families and Children, Inc.
 Carol Cecil, Executive Director
 1410 Versailles Rd., #6
 Frankfort, KY 40601
 Phone: 502-695-5366
 E-mail: kpfc@kypartnership.org
 Website: www.kypartnership.org

Maine—Maine Parent Federation

1. Brochure: "Peer To Peer of Maine"

Contact Information:

Maine Parent Federation
 Jackie Stanley, Peer Mentor Coordinator
 Washington and Hancock Counties
 P.O. Box 2067
 Augusta, ME 04338
 Central Office
 Phone: 800-870-7746

Nebraska—Youth Encouraging Support (Y.E.S.)

1. Program Description/Brochure: Youth Encouraging Support

Contact Information:

Nebraska Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health
 Brenda Fletcher, Youth Program Coordinator
 4009 6th Ave., Suite 42
 Kearney, NE 68845
 Phone: 308-237-1102

North Carolina—Powerful Youth Friends United

1. Form: Application for Youth Membership
2. Brochure: "You Are Not Alone"

Contact Information:

Powerful Youth Friends United
 Kelly Jones, Rowan County
 907 Barra Row
 Suites 103 and 104
 Davidson, NC 28036
 Phone: 704-636-5512
 Phone: 800-962-6817

Oregon—Oregon Family Support Network Youth Program

1. Youth Group Information Sheet/Survey
2. "Boundaries": A List of Volunteer Guidelines
3. Youth Group Forms
 - a. Injury Report Form
 - b. Field Trip Permission Form
 - c. Consent Form—Publication, Etc.
 - d. Child Care Emergency Contact Information and Consent Form
 - e. Confidentiality Statement
 - f. Health Form—Accidents/Emergencies
4. News Stories and Press Releases
5. Safety Manual
6. Newsletters and Flyers

Contact Information:

Oregon Family Support Network
 15544 S. Clackamas River Drive
 Oregon City, OR 97045
 Phone: 541-912-4009 office
 Website: www.ofsn.org

