Teaching Packet

"TAKING CHARGE"
Central District Youth Forum

Submitted by

Jean Erickson, Associate Professor
Deborah Moellendorf, Associate Professor
Dan Renzoni, Associate Professor
Karen Sipple, Assistant Professor

Department of Youth Development
University of Wisconsin-Extension

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Abstract: “Taking Charge” the Central District Youth Forum
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Central District Youth Forum was designed to bring teams of youth and adult volunteers from multiple counties together to identify issues of concern to youth. Through this program they identified concerns, developed action plans to address the concerns, and evaluated their effectiveness.

This program also provided youth input into the UW-Extension 4-year strategic planning process for the 1995-1999 planning cycle.

This teaching packet will provide an overview of the program and the results of the forum. It has been written for easy adaptation and use in other localities.
Situation

In 1990, when UW-Extension implemented a strategic planning process, youth issues and/or youth at risk issues were ranked very high on most county agendas. 4-H Youth Development agents of Central District identified the necessity to involve youth in a process of identifying the current needs of youth. In order to gain a broad youth perspective, it was determined a district approach was advantageous to the process.

ATaking Charge=, the Central District Youth Forum , (CDYF), was designed to bring teams of youth and an adult volunteer from each county together to identify those concerns, develop action plans to address the concerns, and evaluate their effectiveness. Collective information gleaned from this program provides a base of information that can be utilized to identify issues of concern to youth which can be addressed by district sponsored youth programming.

4-H Youth Development faculty members from Juneau, Lincoln, Marathon, and Taylor counties designed and implemented this program in an informal setting at Central Wisconsin Environmental Station in Amherst, Wisconsin, on the weekend of November 5 & 6, 1994. A mid-year follow-up session was held Saturday, March 4, 1995, to allow the participants to re-group, report progress, and to re-commit to meeting goals established at the forum.

The youth forum received financial support from a University of Wisconsin-Extension Faculty and Academic Staff Professional Development Grant, a Wisconsin 4-H Foundation Grant, and from individual County 4-H Leaders' Association/Federation/Councils.

Objectives

1. Youth participants will identify concerns of youth in Central District.

2. Youth and adult participants will gain better understanding of group processes and have confidence to use these skills in other situations.

3. Youth representatives will work with an adult facilitator to develop and implement action plans to address identified concerns.

4. Participants will experience effective leadership skills and apply them to other situations.

Methods

All twelve Central District counties publicized the program by including flyers in their 4-H newsletters. In addition, CDYF was promoted at other appropriate opportunities such as board meetings, club meetings, teen leader organizations, instructional programs, etc.
Utilizing a "lock-in" atmosphere encouraged teams to focus on the program without distraction. A lock-in physically confines participants to a particular facility, (such as a building, campground, or gymnasium), where they are secluded from outside influence. The purpose was to enhance concentration and optimize progress toward the desired outcome.

The following methods of instruction were used in the CDYF program:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Rationale</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Group Games</td>
<td>To relax and get to know each other, and to develop trust within the small groups.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Large Group Discussion</td>
<td>To establish ground rules and goals. To help participants determine what concerns of teens are, and how &quot;Taking Charge&quot; can empower them to make a difference in their communities.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Nominal Group Process</td>
<td>To identify concerns of teens and to prioritize the concerns.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Team Building Exercises</td>
<td>To develop an atmosphere of appreciation for individual characteristics and to encourage cooperation within the group.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Force Field Analysis</td>
<td>To assist participants in developing action plans.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Small Group Planning</td>
<td>To allow teams of participants time to develop strategies for effective action plans.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Small Group Presentations</td>
<td>To clarify county team plans and to establish commitment for carrying out the plans.</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Counseling</td>
<td>To assist participants and adult facilitators on an individual basis.</td>
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</table>

Instructional innovations that also contributed to the success of the program include:

The approach of developing multi-county groups to identify teen concerns, and then utilizing county teams to prioritize concerns as they perceived them to exist within their county allowed participants to assess the similarities and differences which exist among teens in central Wisconsin. This also encouraged them to explore a variety of possible plans to achieve similar goals depending on the community or population they were targeting.
County teams participated in a follow-up program to share accomplishments, assess progress, and encourage continued commitment to the process.

Structuring a component where teams verbalized their plans in front of the whole group, in both the initial program and the mid-year follow-up program, developed a public commitment to the project that assisted in adherence to their plans.

The following materials were used to provide a research base for this program:


The teaching team collaborated to generate the following materials (unless otherwise noted).

Appendix

A. Promotional materials - Developed to promote the program through county newsletters.

B. Teaching Outline - Sequential guide to implementation of this program.

C. Full Value Contract - A contract adapted from Merrill Youth for Tomorrow Conference materials, for group cooperation, emphasizing the value of all members to the group. This formal contract allows for group assertion of additional guidelines.

D. We're More Alike Than You Think - An inclusion exercise designed to allow members of groups to appreciate the similarities between people.

E. Nominal Group Process - Based on 1992 strategic planning materials, adapted for use with youth groups.

F. Force Field Analysis - Based on Kurt Lewin's research. Utilized to evaluate the feasibility of the team's goal and further development of the action plan.

G. Tower Building Exercise - Activity designed to demonstrate to participants the importance of planning and teamwork in developing an action plan. From "Friends Helping Friends" materials.
H. *Action Plan Worksheet* - A tool for teams to develop action plans that will meet their goals.


J. *Central District Youth Forum Evaluation* - A post training evaluation to assess the effectiveness of the training session.

K. *Certificate* - To recognize the contribution of each member.

L. *Action Plan Update* - A follow-up evaluation form to determine progress made toward identified goals.

M. *Feedback Form* - (Adult and Youth versions.) Developed as a two-part carbon form where the participants could document their progress and plans for the future. This gave them an opportunity to keep the journal as a reference in the future, as well as providing the teaching team with feedback and progress for each group.

**Results/Evidence**

*Objective 1: Youth participants will identify concerns of youth in Central District.*

The entire group identified the following concerns of youth as a result of participating in nominal group process. To achieve the list, the large group was randomly divided into six small groups containing members from multiple counties. The small groups presented their concerns to the whole, and the participants gave weighted votes to their top three concerns. The concerns are listed in rank order:

1. Substance abuse [84 points]
2. Sex/STD's (Aids, etc.)/Pregnancy (abortion) [63 points]
3. Violence [22 points]
4. Peer pressure [20 points]
5. Gangs [19 points]
6. Little or no parental guidance/support [8 points]
6. Sexual assault/misconduct [8 points]
7. Lack of morals [6 points]
8. Stress [5 points]
9. Changing School logo [5 points]
10. Abduction [4 points]
11. Everyone is bored/nothing to do [4 points]
12. Worried about not having the money to get what you want and need [2 points]

**Objective 2.** Youth and adult participants will gain better understanding of group processes and have confidence to use these skills in other situations.

Forty-two youth and nine adults participated in the two day team training. They represented teams from eight (Green Lake, Juneau, Langlade, Lincoln, Marathon, Taylor, Waupaca, and Wood) University of Wisconsin-Extension Central District counties. One hundred percent completed a post training evaluation.

Each participant was asked to identify their level of agreement with several statements related to the "Taking Charge" program experience on a 5-point rating scale where number 1 represented "disagree" and number 5 represented "agree".
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation Item</th>
<th>Number of Responses*</th>
<th>Avg.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I have gained a better understanding of group processes designed to reach</td>
<td>35 1 5 1</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>agreement, set goals, and develop plans of action.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I have learned the skills necessary to encourage teamwork and cooperation</td>
<td>32 1 8 1</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>within a group.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I have the confidence to use these skills in other situations.</td>
<td>34 1 3 4</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I feel better able to help groups of different background and opinions</td>
<td>31 1 3 7</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>work together toward common goals and objectives.</td>
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</table>

* n = 51

Responses to the question: "How can you use the skills learned at this workshop in your everyday life?", included:

"How to talk with others about their ideas and thoughts."

"To better communicate with my family."

"I can use these skills by getting to know people better."

"It will help with 4-H and school."

"To make group work easier and make decisions as a group."

"It is a problem solving process, not only for teen issues but everyone."

Twenty-one youth and four adults attended the follow-up session in March, 1995. Youth participants were asked to complete the Central District Youth Forum Feedback Form. The evaluation yielded the following responses:
What did you learn?  How much more do you know now about the following areas as compared to before the forum.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Number of Responses</th>
<th>Average</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>None (1)</td>
<td>Some (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to deal with peer pressure</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to plan</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to make decisions</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where to go for help</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to communicate more effectively</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to handle tough situations</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to help others as a volunteer</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to use leadership and group process skills</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Four adults completed the Central District 4-H Youth Forum Adult Feedback Form at the March 4, 1995 follow-up program. Adult participants indicated that youth had transferred what they learned to other situations through the following responses:

How does this forum benefit the 4-H program?

"Teach them to give workshops on issues in the county and help kids look at other community issues."

"Gives youth a chance to take charge, first in small groups, then in a comfortable setting like their 4-H club, and finally to know they can make a difference in the larger world."

Objective 3.  Youth representatives will work with an adult facilitator to develop and implement action plans to address identified concerns.

Evaluation results from "Taking Charge" indicated the following:
As a part of the program, each county team (10 teams) successfully developed and presented a plan of action to address concerns that were of importance within their community.

Teams reported the progress they made at the March 4, 1995 follow-up meeting. They documented progress on Action Plan Update forms at this meeting. While a few teams appeared to have made significant progress on their plans, others were encouraged to re-affirm or re-evaluate plans and to commit to implementation in the future. Strategies that had been implemented as of March 4, 1995 included:

**County** | **Accomplishments**
---|---
Green Lake | Team reported results of participation in Youth Forum to all county clubs, as well as newspaper and radio. Three hundred youth attended a dance with an alcohol free message sponsored by the team.
Lincoln | Team developed a survey regarding parental involvement for youth and parents in the Merrill and Tomahawk areas. Surveys were tabulated and programs for families were developed.
Marathon | Team reported ordering promotional balloons and pencils promoting positive peer pressure and avoidance of cheating. They planned to present short skits encouraging young 4-H'ers to avoid cheating and other negative forms of peer pressure. A presentation was to be delivered at the April music festival.
Taylor | Team developed a skit to be presented to 5th graders in Stetsonville, Medford, Gilman, and Westboro schools. The skit focused on dangers of substance abuse. A presentation providing information about positive alternatives to gangs was introduced in the Tomahawk schools. A similar presentation was planned for Medford.
Since the Follow-up program, counties have continued to report progress on their action plans. These include:

"Green Lake County youth who attended the 4-H Youth Forum in 1994 have been actively pursuing the goals they set at the event...(the team) has sponsored 4 dances/bowling parties for youth in Green Lake County. At the social dances, an educational component is integrated, teaching youth about the dangers of alcohol and drug usage.

Attendance at the dances/bowling parties has been very high, with an average of 300 or more youth attending each dance...

Additional youth in the county have expressed an interest in attending a 4-H Youth Forum."

Steve Patterson, Green Lake County 4-H Youth Development Agent

"The Lucky Hills 4-H Club included some topics like drugs and gangs when we would teach young children at area schools. Over the course of several months the team reached over 900 children. We had a great time achieving our goal."

Taylor County Youth Forum Participant

Objective 4. Participants will experience effective leadership skills and apply them to other situations.

When asked to respond using the 5-point rating scale to respond to the following statement: "I feel that youth forum was an effective leadership process.", the mean score was 4.8 in agreement with the statement. Responses to the question "How can you use the skills learned at this workshop in your everyday life?" included:

"You can be a leader every day and this program helps to make you a better one."

"I can use the leadership skills a lot with 4-H youngsters."

"To show leadership and take charge, make a difference."

"I can use these skills in everyday life by being a better leader..."

"Leadership skills are used everyday because everyone has to be a leader at some point."

Appreciation for the development of leadership skills has continued after the November Youth Forum. This is indicated in the youth Feedback Form, completed at the March 4, 1995 follow-up program which included the following responses:
Item 3. Please describe an example of how this forum has helped you personally.

"It motivated me to get out there and do something about these problems. It made me more aware of the problems in our county and community."

"I can relate with others better."

"It's helped me to see the "Big Picture" in our world. It's shown me that making a difference starts with us - the youth. I've also become a better leader in my club.

Item 6. As a result of your participation in this forum, have you increased the amount of time you volunteer to help others?

(YES - 17 responses   NO - 4 responses) If yes, how have you increased your time you volunteer (please specify):

"It has helped me remember how important it is for me to use my time to help others."

"By working with our teen group helping with activities they do."

"Helping out with the drug awareness program."

"I have the chance to help others with things I learned about at the forum like tough situations, and peer pressure."

The Adult Feedback Form responses supported the finding that youth had developed leadership skills as a result of participation in the Youth Forum.

Item 3. What do you think are the benefits youth get from participating in this forum?

"1. Understanding other issues; 2. Working together; 3. Problem solving."

"Learning to work and share ideas together."

"They get self-confident, build self esteem and become independent building leadership skills."

"It's a chance for them to see that there are others concerned about the same things they are, and that there are things they can do together to help change the things they're not happy with."
Additional Results

1. Participants in the follow-up session completed a statewide teen survey which addressed teen concerns related to violence. As a result of this participation, two members of the youth forum were asked to take part in the taping of the "Act Against Violence" broadcast on Wisconsin Public Television.

2. When asked, "Would you see benefits in Central District sponsoring another Youth Forum?", 100 percent (21) of youth and 100 percent (4) of adults attending March follow-up meeting indicated "YES" on the Feedback form.

Implications

1. Local collaborations with UW-Extension will increase public awareness of the application and value of 4-H Youth Development programming, and encourage citizens to utilize university resources to make positive changes in their communities. Additionally, community collaborations will expand the base of UW-Extension clientele and enable the university to serve a larger percentage of the population.

2. The proven techniques and principles of community outreach programming can and should be applied to enhance traditional 4-H programs in their efforts to support an environment for positive youth development.

3. It has been proven that young people who participate in pro-social acts develop social competencies, positive values, and a sense of purpose. Therefore, youth should continue to be given the opportunity to make significant changes in their communities so they will be empowered to contribute to society presently and in the future as adults.

4. Successful prevention programs focus on desirable youth outcomes, such taking a pro-active stance on the future of youth in their communities. This cannot be accomplished by one single person or program, but rather through cooperative and collaborative efforts. By expanding cooperative efforts, communities will increase their ability to provide effective programming for their youth.
## I. Teaching Outline

*"Taking Charge" Central District Youth Forum*

**DAY 1, (Saturday, November 5, 1994, 12:30 pm to 8:00 pm):**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teaching Concepts</th>
<th>Teaching Methods</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Introduction</td>
<td>Introduce presenters and the concept of the youth forum to participants. County teams introduced their members.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Establish Ground Rules</td>
<td>Lead a group discussion designed to develop ground rules that were acceptable to all participants. Additional ground rules indicated by the group were added to the &quot;Full Value Contract&quot; and signed by each member to indicate commitment to the program, and commitment to respecting all participants for their values and opinions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Ice Breakers/Get Acquainted</td>
<td>Lead &quot;Group Knot&quot;, &quot;4-H Bingo&quot;, and other cooperative games to build camaraderie among the participants. In addition candy bars were made available to the group and used to randomly determine small groups that would be used throughout the day.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Expectations of Participants</td>
<td>Lead group discussion to establish expectations participant had when they came to the youth forum, and developed consensus of expectations from the group.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Inclusion Exercise</td>
<td>Exercise designed to emphasize the similarities between members of diverse groups. The information processing portion of this exercise allows participants to establish several things in common with the other members of the group. By concentrating on similarities, they can overcome differences that are often more easily apparent; and develop alliances that can benefit the group and assist in cooperative efforts as the process continues.</td>
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</table>
6. Scavenger Hunt  Activity to develop team work and provide a break from intense proceedings of the program.

7. Concerns Not Solutions  Lead the nominal group process designed to identify concerns of teens in central Wisconsin by small diverse groups.

DAY 2, (Sunday, November 6, 1994, 8:00 am to 1:30 pm):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teaching Concepts</th>
<th>Teaching Methods</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8. Review</td>
<td>Review events of the previous day, including results of the nominal group process and prioritized concerns that were identified by participants. Ground rules were also reviewed to establish a constructive working environment.</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Establish County Teams</td>
<td>Help county teams to discuss local concerns and to determine which of the identified concerns are applicable to their local county situation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. Force Field Analysis</td>
<td>Use the Force Field Analysis technique to allow county teams to identify strategies and barriers to addressing identified concerns.</td>
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<tr>
<td>11. Tower Building</td>
<td>Guide teams through a teamwork exercise that requires the groups to work together to build the largest tower out of simple supplies. Groups spend a few moments planning strategies, but are not allowed to communicate verbally during the actual building process. The faculty member helps the groups to process the experience, pointing out elements of planning, teamwork, and effective communication when carrying out a plan.</td>
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12. Action Plans

Distribute an action plan worksheet to each group. Teams are instructed to develop plans that could address high priority concerns identified for their county. Teams publicly take ownership and commit to completion of the plan as they present strategies to participants.

13. Accomplishment Exercise

Lead the teaching team in a presentation of certificates of completion to participants. Teams are challenged to share action plans with governing leadership of their county programs, and to work toward completion of action plans. Teams are encouraged to return to share progress at a Follow-Up conference.

Follow-Up Program, (Saturday, March 4, 1995, 9:30 am to 12 noon):

1. Large Group Game/Activities

Conduct exercises to re-introduce participants and to build camaraderie.

2. Act Against Violence Survey

Conduct a survey that was designed by the Wisconsin Public Television "Act Against Violence" program. Youth Forum participants were identified to participate in the survey because of their teen concerns identification experience at the November Youth Forum.

3. Action Plans

Encourage teams to update action plans from November, noting progress and deviations from the original plan. Groups assess their effectiveness and developed additional strategies toward meeting goals.

4. Group Reports

Facilitate group reports of updated action plans. This public presentation encourages commitment to continued progress on the plans.
5. **Feedback/Journal Activity** Facilitate completion of the Feedback Forms. The forms ask participants to evaluate the November Forum, identify changes in their behavior, and to assess their progress toward the original goals. The forms are completed on carbon paper so that one copy could serve as a journal of accomplishment to the participant and the other could be compiled by the teaching team to evaluate effectiveness of the program. Separate forms are used for youth and adult participants.

6. **Large Group Discussion** Lead a discussion to contemplate application of this process to other groups/projects and to determine the usefulness of this program in the future.