



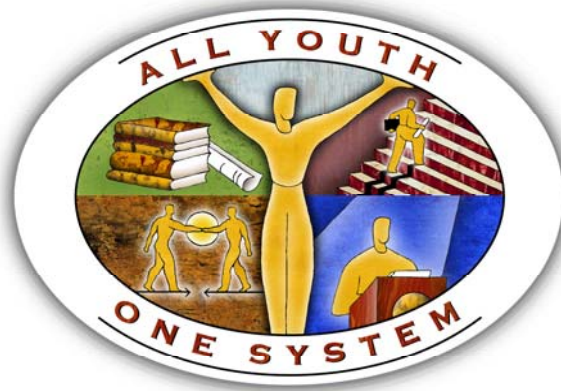
YCIDEAS

*A Compilation of Promising Practices from Youth Councils throughout California
2001-2005*

Youth Council Institute

Chapter Eleven

Youth Involvement



In this section:

- *Nontraditional Outreach Brings More Diverse Groups of Youth onto Marin Youth Council*
- *Youth Philanthropy to Support Career Preparation in Rural Areas*
- *Youth Forums Garner the “Voice of Youth”*
- *Building an Effective Youth Advisory Board*
- *Council of Youth Advises Local Youth Council*
- *Youth Redesign “Cool” Youth Resource Website*



Nontraditional Outreach Brings More Diverse Groups of Youth onto Marin Youth Council

Youth Council: County of Marin Youth Council

Element: Youth Leadership

Function: Convening Local Leadership to Take Action

Subject: Youth Involvement, Serving Special Populations

The Challenge: The County of Marin Youth Council members wanted to involve a truly diverse group of youth on their Youth Subcommittee. They envisioned the Subcommittee as a vibrant forum for youth from throughout the county, a place where they could voice their opinions on a wide range of issues. However, the Youth Council had relied on traditional community partners such as schools and Parent Teacher Associations to invite young people to join the Subcommittee. These partners did not have strong connections with at-risk youth and so were not able to reach out effectively to them.

The Practice and Evidence: Members of the Subcommittee had to find other, more direct avenues for engaging vulnerable youth. They realized they would have to build a relationship with each youth. The Council members also saw that they would have to show the youth that their vote counted just as much as the adults' votes did. The adult members recognized too, that one member of their Council already had relationships with the youth they were trying to reach, Janis Reynolds of the County Department of Health and Human Services. Council members agreed to have Reynolds take charge.

Reynolds reports that the Marin County program she works for, the Youth Employment Program, "had already formed partnerships with local court-mandated schools." These partnerships seemed like perfect avenues for accessing at-risk youth. In particular, the Youth Employment Program, working with its school partners, had run summer career preparation programs under WIA's predecessor, the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA). One summer program, Project Workability, involved recruiting and training youth to be peer mentors at their schools and various service organizations for the following year. Reynolds thought this program would be an excellent place to find and invite youth to participate on the Council.

Reynolds went to her Youth Council and asked them to request that the Workforce Investment Board let the Marin Youth Council use some of its funding to run the summer program. Given the opportunity the summer program offered to engage at-risk youth on the Council, the Board agreed. Reynolds then asked the alumni of Project Workability who were serving as peer mentors to recommend youth they were working with for the 2000 summer program.

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During the summer program, Reynolds used a three-stage process to select potential Youth Council members. First, she identified the youth who seemed most likely to be a good match. The criteria she used included their determination and their belief in themselves.

Reynolds emphasized that the youth were selected based on their abilities, not on their age. Second, Reynolds invited these young people to serve as peer mentors during the summer program so that they could be involved in leadership right away and so she could support them in their leadership roles. Third, at the end of the program, after working with the youth as they mentored others, Reynolds invited seven of the peer summer mentors to serve on the Youth Subcommittee. All seven agreed to join.

Once the initial group was established, Reynolds asked these youth members to do outreach in their communities by talking about the Youth Council and by recommending other potential members. As a result, the youth members have been very involved in engaging other youth. Since July of 2000, twenty youth have served on the Marin Youth Council. “Whether it’s a question of the Council finding the right youth or vice versa, the level of commitment is exceptional,” reports Reynolds.

The Details: Reynolds shares two valuable sets of practices that have emerged from their experience on the Marin Youth Council. The first is to make sure that at least one member of the Youth Council has a strong relationship with any prospective youth member. “You have to establish a real reason why they should bother with you. [You have to show them that] the discussion isn’t the same without them,” Reynolds emphasizes. Council members like Reynolds, youth service providers who already have relationships with young people, are especially well positioned to do outreach. Worth noting is that Reynolds incorporates her engagement efforts into her regular work, which means that only very modest additional resources need to be allocated for outreach.

The second practice has to do with how youth are identified. Reynolds explains, “There are lots of terms to describe these youth, but they all carry baggage: WIA eligible, low income, part of the juvenile justice system, pregnant, parenting, and dealing with substance abuse. I don’t want them to carry that baggage, so I use the term ‘nontraditional’ [when I refer to them outside of Youth Council meetings].” Even more important, Reynolds says, is not to identify youth members in any way other than as youth. “When you bring any youth together, and they bring their identity badges on, they bring that identity. To be able to participate without the stigma or the baggage was our goal for them. To us, they’re just youth.” Because Reynolds didn’t identify them in any specific way when they joined the Youth Council Subcommittee, the nontraditional youth were able to “participate with a clean slate, just like anybody else.”

Breakthrough Moment: Reynolds knew that their engagement strategy was really working when the Youth Council learned of a grant program designed to help homeless youth stay in school. One youth on the Subcommittee helped several young homeless youth get access to the grants. Afterward, an adult member of the Subcommittee asked the youth, “How did you get so

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many people connected with the program?” “Because they were at the shelter with me,” was her reply. That was the first time that she identified herself as a homeless youth, and it was a powerful moment for everyone.

What’s Next for this YCidea? The Marin Youth Council and Janis Reynolds continue to reach out to nontraditional youth through Youth Employment Programs, and youth members of the Subcommittee also engage their peers. They still use the practices Reynolds describes above.

Where to Go for More Information

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Youth Philanthropy to Support Career Preparation in Rural Areas

Youth Council: Mendocino County WIB Youth Council

Element: Youth Leadership and Career Preparation

Function: Coordinating Youth Services

Subject: Youth Involvement, Convening Local Leadership to Take Action

The Challenge: Mendocino County is a large rural area in the north coast region of California. Most jobs are found in the incorporated areas (Point Arena, Willits, Fort Bragg, and Ukiah) although 68 percent of the people live outside of these areas. According to Kathleen Swain, staff to the Mendocino County Workforce Investment Board Youth Council, “Transportation can be a major barrier to youth trying to find jobs. The coast is about a one and a half hour drive on winding narrow roads through rugged mountain ranges to the inland region, where most of the jobs exist. We have many remote communities, Point Arena and Laytonville for example, where public transportation is limited or non-existent.”

In addition, Mendocino County is going through a change in employment opportunities. Swain says, “In the last ten years, the local economy has shifted dramatically. The county has historically been dependent on high wage industries such as timber, fishing, and manufacturing, and those jobs are declining. Like many counties, we have become service-sector oriented, and the jobs tend to be low wage. While this might indicate more available jobs for youth, instead they are competing for those positions with adults who have work experience. Even when it comes to subsidized vocational training opportunities, Worker’s Compensation becomes an expensive issue for our small businesses, who comprise about 81 percent of businesses in our county. And there are almost no jobs for youth ages 14-15.” The lack of jobs and training opportunities for young people was confirmed during youth focus groups conducted in 2002 by the Youth Council, in which youth also indicated a need for more access to leadership activities in their communities.

The Practice and the Evidence: In an effort to address some of these issues, the Mendocino Youth Council hosted two Youth Summits to stimulate youth engagement in local projects. The idea for the Youth Philanthropy Board (YPB) to oversee the youth-led projects was incubated during the second Youth Summit. The aim of this project was to provide youth with leadership and vocational skills and to encourage involvement in their communities (which may be otherwise thwarted by transportation, economic or other barriers.). According to Swain, the Youth Council envisioned that the projects funded by the YPB and Youth Council be “developed by youth, led by youth, and awarded by youth.” In addition, they hoped that the projects would focus on gaps within their communities as well as produce possible entrepreneurship opportunities for youth as they grow into adulthood.

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The Youth Council successfully applied for and received a \$9,000 grant from the S.H. Cowell Foundation in San Francisco for training purposes, and received additional Mendocino County Department of Social Services (MCDSS) funding to grant additional projects. Teens and young adults from throughout the county were recruited by the Youth Council to be YPB members, attend five trainings, develop a request for proposal, award funding, and oversee all of the ongoing youth projects.

Since 2002, the Mendocino County Workforce Investment Board Youth Council along with the YPB (beginning in 2004) have funded ten youth-led, community-based projects using funds donated by the MCDSS. At this point, the Youth Council has handed the grant making reins over to the group of young philanthropists. By conclusion of the pilot project in June of 2005, the YPB members successfully provided oversight for six local youth projects.

The Details: Before members of the YPB were selected, a five-member Youth Council subcommittee took the primary role for engaging and supporting youth involvement. They recruited fifteen youth to be YPB members (to compensate for dropouts) and in the end, eight members completed the project. Subcommittee members planned every training, and Youth Council staff supported logistics. Each youth was sponsored by one of the committee members who made sure that he or she got to the trainings. In addition, YPB members were given a \$30 stipend per meeting/training, and meals were also provided. Swain says, “One of the biggest challenges is not to take over, and to trust that the youth will figure it out. It’s easy for adults to step in and state their opinions. Part of the learning process for the adults is allowing youth to make their own decisions about how to fund the projects.”

Once the YPB was selected, the Youth Council subcommittee coordinated several trainings to support their personal/professional development and work on the board. In September 2004, an introductory training was held to provide general information about youth philanthropy to both YPB members and the Youth Council subcommittee. Youth Leadership Institute (YLI), a national organization with expertise in youth philanthropy, facilitated the training.

The Youth Council contracted with a local non-profit, the North Coast Rural Challenge Network, to lead a second training for the YPB and other youth who were potential project applicants. Approximately 100 students from throughout the county attended this training, which covered project development and documentation. Members of the YPB developed and distributed their Request for Application (RFA) at the event. In addition, the RFA was sent to schools and distributed through the Youth Councils regular email channels. Press releases to the local media also announced the RFA.

In January 2005, the YPB reviewed the seven submissions/applications for the project. Using a rubric tool, the YPB selected three youth-led projects. Each of the awardees received \$500. Project topics included an outdoor education and recreation program for teens, a video project about life on the reservation in Point Arena, and a high school coffee cart business.

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In addition, at the following Youth Council meeting, the members elected to give the YPB full oversight of three more projects, previously funded by the Youth Council, including a teen nightclub, cultural diversity training, and a presentation to high school students on the dangers of drinking and driving.

In March 2005, the YPB asked representatives from each of the projects to present updates on their progress. In addition, the Youth Council arranged for a panel of community funders to provide fundseeking advice for the project participants.

YLI facilitated the fifth and final training for the year, and the youth assessed their efforts to date. As the pilot project reached its conclusion, the YPB scheduled their final meeting to discuss ideas for sustainability and board structure without projected funding. Seven of the eight YPB members elected to stay on the board for the next year, even without stipends. They will also explore different avenues for meeting (due to transportation challenges) such as video conferencing.

Breakthrough Moment: As the funded projects are reaching completion, the Youth Council and YPB are seeing an incredible impact on the community and they are reaping local support. According to Swain, the breakthrough has been “recognizing that the projects have gone beyond the initial concept and have had a bigger impact than originally imagined.”

Swain reflects, “for example, a teen night club received the funding to establish a safe and drug-free environment for teens to have dances and concerts. [They] held a concert that about 200 youth attended. Community members are starting to come forth to support them, so it has a good chance of becoming a successful, long term project.” A second project funded a “cultural awareness training” at a local high school, with the intention of addressing concerns about race and ethnicity. An unexpected outcome of this event was the unveiling of issues related to a lack of awareness of gay students’ concerns. In response, the high school has formed a gay-straight alliance club.

What’s Next for this YCidea?: The next phase for the Youth Philanthropy Board involves fundraising, both to continue trainings for the board members and to acquire funds to grant to future projects. Recognizing the valuable contribution they have made to the community, seven board members elected to continue as philanthropists and will recruit additional members. They have assessed a need for additional training in project evaluation and formal board procedures.

Where to Go for More Information

Mendocino County WIB Youth Council

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Tools

[Sample Youth Philanthropy RFP Application](#)

(<http://www.nww.org/yci/documents/YouthPhilanthropyRFPApplication.doc>)

[Sample Youth Philanthropy RFP Proposal](#)

(<http://www.nww.org/yci/documents/YouthPhilanthropyRFPApplication.doc>)

[Mendocino Workforce Investment News June 2005](#)

(<http://www.nww.org/yci/documents/YouthPhilanthropyRFPApplication.doc>)

[Economic Scorecard](#)

(<http://www.nww.org/yci/documents/June%20Economic%20Scorecard.pdf>)



Youth Forums Garner the “Voice of Youth”

Youth Council: Orange County Youth Council

Element: Youth Leadership

Function: Measuring Quality and Impact of Local Efforts and Convene Local Leadership to Take Action

Subject: Youth Involvement

The Challenge: Young people have valid and innovative ideas regarding how to best address the needs of youth. They can also greatly benefit from being involved in designing youth programs and policies and in leadership efforts in their communities. However, youth programming and policies are often planned and developed with little or no youth involvement or input. Following its Resource Mapping Project, the Orange County Youth Council wanted to meaningfully engage youth in decision making. They wanted to find a way to hear from youth about their needs.

The Practice and Evidence: To initiate the effort in involving youth, Orange County Youth Council, along with partner organizations, planned and hosted four regional youth forums throughout the county to hear what youth thought they need to be successful. Three additional forums were held at a later time. The youth forums were a catalyst for the development of leadership teams called Youth Action Committees (YACs). (Regional provider networks were also created as a result.) Furthermore, the information gathered at the forums was collected and disseminated. It was used to shape Orange County Youth Council’s work plan and RFP as well as to fuel other initiatives to address common needs.

Other benefits from the youth forums have been the continual source of youth representation to the Youth Council and their integral role in decision making as well as the restructuring of Youth Council meetings to be more “youth-friendly.”

The Details: Beginning in 2003, the county’s three Youth Councils partnered to engage youth leadership and hear what youth felt was important to their success. Spearheaded by an intermediary coalition, the Orange County Coalition for Youth (OCCY), all seven forums collected common data, had similar formats, and shared practices from one forum to the next. OCCY was supported by the three Youth Councils as well as over twenty other youth-serving agencies to be a leveraging agent for youth programs and to serve as a means to help get closer to the common goal of “All Youth - One System.”

Four of the seven youth forums were co-sponsored by the Orange County Youth Council, and the results have had a direct impact on WIA Youth program design. The findings have been incorporated in the county’s WIA RFP by requiring providers to facilitate active YACs that

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are ongoing sources of youth feedback and leadership. “Our Youth Council work plan has now been aligned to address the most current [Orange County] youth issues as expressed by young people,” says Mercedes Julian, staff to the Orange County Youth Council.

The youth forums were sponsored, in part, by the Youth Demonstration Grant from California Department of Education in 2002-2003. The grant was used in part to support the resource mapping project/capacity building project. The county’s three Youth Councils partnered with the project. The youth forum data provided qualitative information, which helped support the resource mapping results from 2002 and 2003.

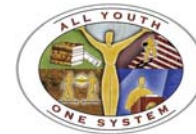
Breakthrough Moment: Collaboration was critical to making the forums successful, and each partner was able to contribute to the tangible project of a forum. According to Julian, a breakthrough moment occurred when the forum planners began working together. “Partners found they had a common goal of hearing and involving youth.” This discovery energized all the participants. All in all, over 40 youth-serving agencies and 75 local businesses contributed to the youth forum initiative.

What’s Next for this YCidea? This is a constantly evolving process as youth-involvement continues to grow and build capacity. The Youth Action Committees continue to be active in giving input and in community service projects. Some areas are planning mini-forums to rekindle enthusiasm and involve more youth in their regional efforts. Julian comments, “Now youth have built confidence from working side by side with adults and having their voices heard.”

Where to Go for More Information

Orange County Youth Council

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Building an Effective Youth Advisory Board

Youth Council: San Diego School-to-Career Youth Council

Element: Youth Leadership

Function: Convening Local Leadership to Take Action

Subject: Youth Involvement

The Challenge: The San Diego School-to-Career Youth Council was concerned with its level of youth involvement; youth attendance was poor and their input limited.

The Practice and the Evidence: Inspired by information from YCi about the value of Youth Advisory Boards, the San Diego Workforce Partnership (staff to the Youth Council) decided to increase youth engagement by establishing one as an offshoot of its Youth Council. Of the seven youth members who joined the Youth Advisory Board when it began in June 2003, six remain active members and one new youth has joined. The group meets at 4PM on the last Monday of each month at the Workforce Partnership offices. Rotating slots enable each youth member to attend one of the bi-monthly Youth Council meetings. Most discussion is about matters on which the Youth Council is seeking youth input, but youth also contribute agenda items. When youth member Michelle Watson proposed scheduling Youth Council meetings at a time more convenient for youth members, the Council readily agreed. Program Specialist Mark Nanzer sees this as just one example of effective youth-adult interactions that have come out of the Youth Advisory Board. “The program is not without its challenges, but successes outweigh them,” he observes. After a year in operation, the Youth Advisory Board is busy determining the status of present members, recruiting new ones, and getting word out to providers who are interested in forming their own Youth Advisory Boards.

The Details: Nanzer and Dan Radojevic of the San Pasqual Academy Youth Employment Services started the recruitment process by building on relationships with existing WIA-funded providers. Dan was the link to Michelle, a former foster youth who was eager to participate, having seen too many organizations with “youth” in the name but little authentic youth involvement. Intern Jason Adame created fliers, recruitment materials, and applications, which were sent in an email blast to providers, who were asked to pass along information and recommend candidates. “Those staff members were a tremendous help,” Nanzer recalls. “They helped the youth feel supported by their local organizations and transported them to our original meetings. And we did a lot of follow-up phone calls.”

Sixteen youth showed up at the original meeting in May 2003. “We understood we were all there to make a difference, and we couldn’t get anyone to be quiet,” Watson recalled. The group brainstormed about the structure of the subcommittee and its role relative to the Youth Council,

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then established membership and recruitment procedures. Six of the seven original members remain active, in part because of support provided by the San Diego staff. Before each Youth Council meeting, Nanzer sits down with the youth delegated to attend it and reviews the terms, the agenda, and the protocol in detail. “We committed to doing that because we feel it’s so important for them to be knowledgeable about what they’re voting on - funding recommendations, programmatic implementations,” he explains. “We learned early on that when it’s time to vote, we don’t want youth turning around and looking to us for direction.” Staff also provide transportation to meetings.

Subcommittee processes are constantly being reviewed and revisited. For example, at the first Youth Council retreat, potential mentors put their contact information on cards and youth were expected to make follow-up calls. Youth found this intimidating, and staff realized that face-to-face socializing would be more effective in building relationships, so the Youth Advisory Board is considering another retreat. Other lessons learned include the following ideas:

- Select representative youth, not valedictorians, but those who are struggling. “They’re harder to serve and harder to transport, but they’re the ones who receive the services, and they should have a say on whether services are appropriate or not. They become ringleaders,” says Nanzer. Watson confirms that “as a leader, I pulled other youth to a more positive self-image, to where they believed that positive change is possible,”
- Administrative follow-up is essential. “If you have a lead, if you get a phone call, follow it up; call, visit, bring a youth to share his experiences. Until youth actually go through the process, it’s hard to engage them,” Nanzer advises. The challenge in San Diego is all the greater because no funds are available with which to pay youth participants.

Breakthrough Moment: Youth member Watson set a precedent by sitting on a four-member panel that evaluated the yearlong youth program’s RFP. She read five different proposals, scored them, discussed her opinions with the other members, and voted. This kind of collaboration and cooperation has given youth genuine voice on substantive issues like funding recommendations and program design that have historically been voted on only by adults.

What’s Next for this YCidea? After the Youth Advisory Board is functioning smoothly, San Diego staff plans to follow up with partners who expressed interest in creating Youth Advisory Boards of their own. The San Diego subcommittee would be bumped up to a Youth Advisory Board Council (though remaining a subsidiary of the Youth Council).

Still in the brainstorming stage, the idea is to create a network of WIA-funded, program-specific Youth Advisory Boards. Two members from each YAB would rotate onto to the YAB Council, providing input on items beyond standard funding and programming matters. “We want a mixture of youth from all over because I know how important good youth representation is, and I want youth to succeed,” Watson declares. If successful, the San Diego program will provide a model of youth involvement for other social service programs that are helping youth.

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Where to Go for More Information

San Diego School-to-Career Youth Council

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Tools

Click the following links to access the San Diego Youth Advisory Council's supportive tools and documents.

[Youth Advisory Board application](#)

(http://www.nww.org/yaci/fallreporterdocs/YAB_application.doc)

[Youth Advisory Board flier](#)

(<http://www.nww.org/yaci/fallreporterdocs/YABflyer.doc>)

[Youth Advisory Board interview questions](#)

(<http://www.nww.org/yaci/fallreporterdocs/YABInterviewQuestionsGroup.doc>)

[Youth Advisory Board recommendations](#)

(<http://www.nww.org/yaci/fallreporterdocs/YABrecommendation.doc>)

[Youth Advisory Board update](#) (March, 04) to inform Youth Council of youth members' activities

(http://www.nww.org/yaci/fallreporterdocs/YAB_update_03-04.doc)

[Youth Advisory Board presentation](#) at CWA conference

(http://www.nww.org/yaci/fallreporterdocs/YAB_CWA_presentation3.ppt)

[Youth Advisory Board members Role/Responsibility/Authority document](#)

(<http://www.nww.org/yaci/fallreporterdocs/draftroleresponsauth.doc>)

Council of Youth Advises Local Youth Council

Youth Council: Solano Youth Advisory Council

Element: Youth Leadership

Function: Convening Local Leadership to Take Action

Subject: Youth Involvement

The Challenge: The Solano County Youth Council’s mission is to advocate for youth employment for the community. They wanted to find a way to involve youth in their mission.

The Practice and Evidence: When approached with the idea of bringing ten WIA-enrolled youth together to create a council of youth, the Solano County Youth Council enthusiastically supported the concept. The Youth on the Rise Council was formed and, according to Youth Council members, soon became “where all the action is”! The most effective strategy the Council engaged in, however, was to hire an energetic young adult who related well to the youth to facilitate Youth on the Rise meetings. Another simple but important strategy was for the youth group to have its own name and identity.

- Youth members regularly “check the horizon” to learn effective practices of other communities. The youth identify program gaps and revise workshop curriculum to change how youth are taught in WIA workshops.
- Seventy-five youth have gone through the workshops re-designed by Youth on the Rise members. Participant evaluations indicate that young people are more receptive to the interactive style of teaching that uses their language. Young leaders are becoming more comfortable conducting and participating in the workshops.
- Youth are engaged. The Council lets them in on the challenges of running programs and engages them in problem-solving and decision-making.
- Work experiences for Youth on the Rise members include employment at the One-Stops, or as school liaisons. All of them dedicate a portion of their hours to work directly with the Youth Council.
- Youth on the Rise members tackle difficult issues such as how to improve activities in One-Stops, ensuring services are youth friendly, identifying duplication of services, influencing policy issues, and planning and producing events.

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Details: Council staff worked with the youth leaders, teaching them community organizing principals, empowering them to develop grassroots initiatives and showing them how to rally around an issue. Youth on the Rise members became active about their particular environment and learned how to create alternative activities and models for other youth. Work experience opportunities were also intended to include youth at a future stage working directly with case managers to develop and implement youth activities.

Where to Go for More Information

Solano County Youth Council

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SNIPPET

Youth Redesign “Cool” Youth Resource Website

Youth Council: The Teen Employment Network, the Youth Council for the Carson, Lomita, Torrance Investment Network Board

Element: Youth Leadership

Function: Convening Local Leadership to Take Action

Subject: Youth Involvement

The Challenge: The Teen Employment Network (TEN), the Youth Council for the Carson/Lomita/Torrance Investment Network Board, has articulated a vision for its work: “Every young person shall have access to the resources needed to successfully transition into a productive and meaningful working adulthood.” Their mission, therefore, is to “establish a collaborative network for local organizations and educational institutions that supports the well being of youth, promotes lifelong learning, and offers opportunities for young people to conduct wide-ranging explorations of career and educational options.” The Youth Council members thought that creating a web site with links to resources for youth would be a powerful way to create the network they envisioned.

At first, the web site was designed by the adult members of TEN. Later, it occurred to these members that they had not worked with any youth on the project, so they decided to get youth input. Unanimous feedback from the youth indicated that the site was not one that young people would find “cool.”

The Practice and Evidence: The TEN members decided they needed more youth input. As a result, the web site redesign and maintenance are now the responsibility of the TEN Marketing Committee, chaired by two youth. The web site content is reviewed by the TEN prior to posting.

The youth resource web site has a link to the Workforce Investment Network (WIN) web site that organizes youth information in an easy-to-use format. The web site walks youth through the information categories and links to career centers, jobs, college information, and youth resources, enabling the TEN and WIN to highlight selected services.

The Details: Initially, the site was funded by a portion of a program grant. Maintenance of the site is possible by leveraging funds from the WIN marketing budget, and by including a request for web support into each grant proposal that is written.

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Where to Go for More Information

The Teen Employment Network, the Youth Council for the Carson, Lomita, Torrance Investment Network Board

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Tool

Program information, links and resources available at:
http://www.careerzone.torrnet.com/youth_programs/defyouthres.htm