



Youth Service Provider Networking Supports Awareness of County Services

Youth Council: Santa Cruz County Youth Council

Element: Comprehensive Approach

Function: Coordinating Youth Services

Subject: Coordinating Youth Services, Staff Development

The Challenge: According to Paul Demarest, Youth Council Senior Analyst, the youth of Santa Cruz County were not being adequately served. Despite perceptions to the contrary, the WIA Youth Program in Santa Cruz County can serve only about 4 percent of the youth who are eligible with the level of federal funding, according to their estimates. Youth Council members knew of many other nongovernmental programs that might help additional youth throughout the County. However, they also saw that these programs were often operating in relative isolation rather than aligning with other complementary efforts. Furthermore, the WIA Youth Program staff did not have complete information about their services.

Youth Council members saw that youth could be better supported if there were greater cooperation among local service providers. They viewed their own role as being central to fostering connections. “We need to be the force for change,” said Demarest. In order to move Santa Cruz County forward, they had to make sure that “all the providers were aware of each other,” Demarest noted. “In a larger view [we] hoped . . . that some of these agencies might consider cooperation, that they might acquire resources together, and go after a project together.”

The Practice and Evidence: The Youth Council developed a two-part strategy to increase connections and cooperation: create a service provider directory and host a service provider poster fair.

The Council staff created a directory that included over 50 youth-serving organizations and offered information on locations of sites, hours of operation, demographics of youth, range of services, and sources of funding. Two hundred directories were printed and distributed not only to the providers listed, but also to middle and high schools as well as other organizations that serve both adults and youth or families. Council staff also shared the directory on a CD with Together for Youth, the regional United Way agency focused on young people. The first edition was created in 2003, and an updated version was made available in 2004.

Two service provider poster fairs were also held, one in 2003 and another the following year. The primary focus was to get the providers aware of one another and to give the WIA Youth Program staff an opportunity to meet them. Each of the 50-plus providers that participated was supplied with table space for displaying a poster and presenting literature. Almost every agency

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had at least 2 people, so they were able to engage with all those who visited their area.

On the evaluations, everyone indicated that the most valuable part of the 2004 fair was the opportunity to ask questions and meet people. “At that second fair, everyone commented about how excited everyone was to have an opportunity to sit down and talk about the challenges they were facing and also to form some alliances and do things they couldn’t do alone,” Demarest stated. “We feel that we have accomplished making all the providers aware of one another, and we have put the idea out as a County entity that they need to be leaders for youth services.”

The Details: The Youth Council members used some creative strategies to locate resources for the 2004 fair and directory. First they asked one of their own, Rock Pfothenauer, Dean of Career Education and Economic Development of Cabrillo College, to arrange for the school to provide a meeting room free of charge. In addition, members were aware that two local agencies, the Housing Authority and County Mental Health’s Drug & Alcohol Division, had grants that were coming to a close that had some funds left. The Housing Authority and Mental Health used these funds to pay for the directory publication costs and for the fair’s refreshments. Council members formed a partnership with the philanthropic arm of a local business, the Sea Odyssey Program of O’Neil and Company, to handle the refreshments.

The Council staff did a mailing that included both a request to fill out a [provider information](#) sheet for the directory and an invitation to participate in the fair. The cover letter explained that it was not necessary to attend the fair in order to be included in the directory. Nevertheless, of the 50+ providers who completed the information sheet, only two did not attend.

Breakthrough Moment: Demarest reports he knew the fair was working when “the Chair of our Youth Council picked up the portable microphone to welcome everyone and still could not get people’s attention because everyone was talking so loud. You could barely hear yourself think . . . because there was a din in the room. And when she was done speaking, people were calling back to her, saying, “Thank you for giving us this opportunity to get together!”

What’s Next for this YCidea? The Santa Cruz Youth Council is “hoping there will be more cooperation and another agency will pick up the gauntlet, do an annual update [of the directory], . . . and keep it updated so that people can use it for a real resource,” said Demarest. Meanwhile, the Youth Council is pursuing its mission to be the force behind change in the delivery of services for youth in their county. Their next initiative entails identifying and marketing soft job skills curricula to meet employers’ needs for employees who are “socially well adjusted and trainable.”

Where to Go for More Information

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