

YOUTHFUL PROGRAMMES DESIGNED BY YOUTH



Background

We know that youthful engagement can and does change lives. A big question now is, how can we design programmes that actually work for young people? What are the factors to consider? Studies show that we can achieve this by engaging youth in the design of these programmes. It is as simple as that. A programme for youth, designed by youth.

Youth involvement in programme design acknowledges the right of young people to participate in issues that affect them and recognizes the enormous talents and strengths they bring to the table. It recognises young people as valued contributors in developing policies, programmes, and environments that are efficient and inclusive. Research shows that effective youth engagement leads to positive outcomes for young people at three different levels, which are:

1. **The Individual Level:** Healthy choices, increased personal skills, and self identity.
2. **Social Level:** Stronger positive connections with friends and family, and a large support network
3. **System Level:** Greater civic engagement, new creative ways to govern, policies, and programmes responsive to the needs of young people.

How Can We Engage Youth Better? - Make them feel heard.

Studies show that young people feel a sense of belonging when their thoughts and opinions are heard. When we engage with young people and request their opinions on certain matters. It is important to listen actively to them, as this creates a sense of value. For most young people,

meaningful engagement is achieved when we combine fun with a meaningful opportunity to learn, contribute and be challenged. Research shows that it is important to create a youth friendly environment for any youth engagement activity. As the quality of these environments matter just as much, if not more than the activity itself.

According to Eccles and Gootman, there are eight key qualities that are associated with positive development settings that promote youth engagement These eight qualities are:

1. Physical and Psychological Safety

Young people are better able to study and participate freely when they are physically and psychologically safe. We must make participants feel safe at all times if we want young people to enjoy an activity to its fullest potential. This entails holding programmes in areas with low levels of violence and the likelihood of unexpected threats.

2. Appropriate Structure

When we talk about having the right structure, we mean establishing a setting with unambiguous expectations, boundaries, and adult support as required. Well trained staff, age appropriate activities, and unambiguous rules are some of the elements that contribute to an appropriate structure.

3. Supportive Relationships

This can also be mentorship and coaching efforts. Young individuals exhibit fewer risky behaviors, more academic achievement, and higher self esteem when they have at least one supportive adult in their lives.

4. Meaningful Inclusion

This characteristic is concerned with giving young people opportunities for social inclusion, social engagement, and integration. This includes teaching and encouraging cultural competence, as well as providing opportunities for the formation of socio-cultural identities.

5. Positive Social Norms

Young people are encouraged to act positively and to feel safe because of positive social standards and a respectful environment. This entails fostering and preserving a welcoming, unbiased and inclusive workplace. It's critical to uphold high standards for young adults, particularly in terms of their behavior, social interactions, and adherence to the norms and values established by the group.

6. Support For Efficacy And Mattering

Young people ought to feel important, like their opinions matter, and like they can have an impact on their neighborhood. Youth friendly settings give young people the freedom to be independent, to speak up, and to take part in bringing about change in their communities. This

entails using techniques that are demanding and call for youth to assume responsibility, as well as techniques that concentrate on growth and improvement. It is about continually acknowledging young people's opinions and ideas and creating an environment where they feel like they are contributors.

7. Opportunities For Skill Building And Learning

Unsurprisingly, opportunities to learn and practice new skills benefit young people. This quality is about gaining new skills, confidence, and self esteem. It is also about stimulating curiosity and providing opportunities for youth to discover new interests.

8. Integration of Family, School and Community Efforts

This characteristic is concerned with fostering connection and synergy among a young person's social environments, thereby increasing their sense of community belonging. Young people have connections with different people and aspects of their lives, such as their friends, sports, extracurricular activities, their communities, and families. Encouraging a sense of connection is key.

At LEAP Africa, we understand the importance of infusing these qualities in our programme design. Going by the recommendations of these qualities, we are positioned as an organization who consistently deliver world class youthful interventions for young people across Africa. Over the last 20 years, we have created an atmosphere of safety, inclusion, structure and learning in our programmes, projects and events.

As the saying goes; "There is nothing for us without us". Without young people involved in the project design process, youth programmes cannot be effective. Delegate some responsibility to the youth, and then watch as their innovative ideas revolutionize programming.

<http://www.jcsh-cces.ca/> Joint consortium for school health
Youth engagement toolkit.