

TO: Chair and Members of the Board of Health

FROM: Graham L. Pollett, MD, FRCPC
Medical Officer of Health

DATE: 2012 September 13

WORKING TOWARD POSITIVE YOUTH GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

Recommendation

It is recommended that Report No. 109-12 re Working Toward Positive Youth Growth and Development be received for information.

Background

The Young Adult Team (YAT) works toward improving the lives of youth in Middlesex-London through various strategies such as school initiatives, youth engagement, advocacy, and collaborating with community partners. Team members work together to create conditions that decrease the risk factors and increase the protective factors for youth in neighbourhoods, schools and communities. Research has shown that youth who are engaged and active participants in society turn into adults with less health, career, family and societal traumas.

Furthermore, research provides strong evidence that there is a link between youth engagement and positive health outcomes. Youth who were engaged in structured activities (ranging from extra-curricular activities to community service) were less likely to misuse substances, to engage in risky sexual behavior or become pregnant, to engage in violent behavior or be arrested, to drop out of school, and more likely to complete a college degree, than youth who were not engaged in these kinds of activities. Moreover, there is also evidence that engaged youth are less depressed, have higher self-esteem, are more physically active, obtain higher grades in school, and show a greater commitment to their friends, families and communities.

YAT members continue to work effectively with schools and neighbourhoods to promote the development of youth by actively engaging school personnel, families and community partners. Many successful outcomes have been achieved and the following are highlights:

a) Healthy Eating Group Home Guidelines

Based on the need identified to improve the nutrition environment in local group homes, the Youth on Track for Healthy Eating (Pilot Project for Group Homes) was initiated. The goal of this project is to create healthier nutrition environments in selected group homes via the introduction of Healthy Eating Guidelines. The intent was that these group homes would share their successes and become champions of the guidelines for all group homes in this community. Ultimately, these guidelines could be adopted as Best Practices by these agencies so that a healthy eating environment becomes the norm. The project has involved staff from Fanshawe College, Child and Youth Worker Program, to integrate this critical information into course work for future child and youth workers. Activities to date include:

- The development of a Nutrition Environment Guideline Checklist
- An event to kick off the Guidelines and inform group home staff about the Guidelines, and
- Food safety and healthy eating skill building for staff from the respective group homes as well as students from the Child and Youth worker Program at Fanshawe College.

b) Health Promoting Schools

Health Unit staff members mobilize the school communities to assist with the implementation and integration of the four components of the Ontario Ministry of Education's 'Foundations for a Healthy School': High-Quality Instruction and Programs, Healthy Physical Environment, Supportive Social Environment, and Community Partnerships. In the 2010/11 school year, Health Unit staff facilitated 18 healthy school committees which involved 126 youth leaders. The committees implemented 125 healthy school activities, 219 health communication campaigns, 161 health education weeks, and 72 health fairs. These undertakings included and reached over 18,100 students and staff. In addition, public health staff work at a system level with school board committees (e.g. Thames Valley District School Board (TVDSB) Mental Health and Wellness Committee) addressing higher level supports such as policy development and healthy school environments.

c) Teen Pregnancy Prevention

In the 2010/2011 school year, YAT planned, implemented and evaluated 37 teen panel presentations. A teen panel presentation involves a young teen parent describing the challenges of everyday life and the realities of being a teen parent. These presentations were offered in 15 area secondary schools for the purpose of preventing teen pregnancies. Evaluations showed that 81% of students reported the sessions increased their understanding of how to use decision-making and assertive skills to effectively promote healthy sexuality. Over 71% stated they had learned about the challenges related to teen parenting. In December 2011, a stakeholders' meeting was held to identify recommended ways to address teen pregnancy. As a result, a new Teen Pregnancy Prevention Committee has been formed and members from YAT have become the leads for this initiative.

d) Schools Food and Beverage Policy

Training has been provided to school administrators, cafeteria personnel and parents related to the new provincial policy called PPM 150 (Schools Food and Beverage Policy). This is the subject of Board Report No. 107-12. In addition, a new policy was developed in collaboration with the TVDSB, including the participation of 3 dietitians from this Health Unit, Elgin St. Thomas and Oxford Health Units. The new policy went into effect on December 20, 2011. Skill building opportunities continue to be offered by Health Unit staff for school board partners.

e) Youth Create Healthy Communities

The goal of this project has been to empower secondary school students through skill building and health advocacy education so they can take action on health and social issues that affect them. Youth engagement also responds to young people's desires to be heard and to take part in decisions that affect them. To date, 3 leadership skill building sessions involving over 200 youth have occurred which have encouraged the youth to participate in 15 community youth health events. The youth have created a logic model and advocacy plan to address accessibility for youth transportation. This initiative will address two strategic directions of the Health Unit: physical activity & healthy eating and health inequities.

Summary

The Young Adult Team continues to work in schools and neighbourhoods, engaging youth and other partners to work together to achieve positive health outcomes. This report was prepared by Ms. Christine Preece, Manager, Young Adult Team, Family Health Services.



Graham L. Pollett, MD, FRCPC
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This report addresses the following requirement(s) of the Ontario Public Health Standards: Chronic Disease Prevention Standard 3,4 and 11. Child Health Standard 4 and 8.
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