

# Minnesota 4-H Youth Teaching Youth (YTY)

*Teen teachers in University of Minnesota 4-H YTY are able to make healthy living choices and have their choices reinforced by the program.*

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## **PROGRAM DESCRIPTION: 4-H YOUTH-TEACHING-YOUTH**

The University of Minnesota 4-H Youth Teaching Youth program is a cross-age teaching program sponsored by the University of Minnesota Extension's Center for Youth Development. It was created in the 1980's in response to youth concerns about their peers alcohol and tobacco use; youth in Dakota county approached the local county educator at the time to urge her to start an educational program in which they could teach their younger peers the negative consequences of alcohol and tobacco use. The program involves teen teachers (high school youth) who deliver educational curriculum to peers in elementary and middle schools 3-9 times during the school year. Curriculum topics have been developed based on a needs assessment of elementary and middle school youth's interests and needs and research-based training materials are developed by Extension and school staff. The program model includes a strong sense of partnership between the local 4-H program (staff and youth), the school (students, teachers, and administrators) and the community at large. Teen teachers attend trainings throughout the year in order to prepare themselves to go into the classroom and teach their younger peers.

Research indicates that cross-age teaching is a strategy of reciprocity that builds social networks. Past research suggests that through peer programs, teen teachers obtain a feeling of "social usefulness" and a sense of control that is considered to be an important protective factor in previewing social problems such as substance abuse, teen pregnancy and delinquency (Rutters, 1979, Riessman, 1990, Black, Tobler, & Sciacca, 1998, and Forneris, et al. 2010). According to the literature, youth teaching youth programs share several characteristics: Teen teachers 1) work on projects that affect someone other than themselves, 2) feel challenged by the activity, 3) have some power over what they do 4) have time for reflection, 5) collaborate with adults on the activity, 6) participate in a group activity, and 7) see that the activity satisfies a genuine community need (McNett, 1981).

In Minnesota, curriculum topics include: character building (Character Counts 1 & 2), alcohol and tobacco (Alcohol and Tobacco Decisions), healthy living (Stepping Out, Talking with TJ, and It's Your Choice), internet safety and cyber bullying (Internet Safety), and diversity (We Connect). Schools might choose among the various curricula developed for the program as a topic of interest for their students. There are two target audiences for youth development growth; the teen teachers and 2-7<sup>th</sup> grade students. School teachers, with the support of their administrators, choose to participate in the 4-H YTY program. Teen teacher pairs teach a 30-60 minute lesson 3-9 times per semester to their younger peers.



## Program Outcomes

Youth Teaching Youth Extension Educators and Program Coordinators met over the course of several weeks to draft a program logic model for the 4-H YTY Teen Teachers. These staff developed the following 6 program outcomes for the teen teachers, which focus on their decision making and leadership skills as well as on their ability to make healthy life style choices.

- 1) Teen teachers will learn and engage in wise decision making
- 2) Teen teachers will teach healthy living topics which meet the needs of their community
- 3) Teen teachers will establish a positive youth-to-youth relationship with their peers
- 4) Teen teachers will utilize a variety of effective teaching methods
- 5) Teen teachers will respect their respective teachers
- 6) Teen teachers will contribute to creating a healthy school and community climate
- 7) Teen teachers will demonstrate effective leadership, teamwork, and communication skills.

## DESCRIPTION OF EVALUATION METHOD: TEEN TEACHER SURVEY

As part of a larger evaluation plan, the 4-H YTY team designed and implemented an end of year teen teacher survey to begin examining the outcomes 1, 3, 6, and 7 above and to answer the following questions from their evaluation plan:

- What do teen teachers gain from participating in the 4-H YTY program?
  - What do teen teachers learn about themselves by participating in the 4-H YTY program?
- How have teen teachers developed/improved/gained leadership skills through their participation in 4-H YTY?
- To what extent does the 4-H YTY experience enable teens to avoid negative influences and allow them to focus on their strengths and potential?
- To what extent does the 4-H YTY experience enable teens to make positive healthy living choices?

## Survey content

The 12 item survey was created with input from program staff and sent to the teen teachers electronically. The survey included 9 quantitative items and 3 qualitative items covering areas such as ability to make healthy life style choices, leadership experience, helpful program elements, and barriers to making healthy choices. Respondents received the opportunity to be included in drawings for gift certificates as an incentive to complete the survey.

## Survey audience

An electronic survey was sent out to 600 4-H YTY teen teachers and 138 (23%) of them completed it. Of the 138, 128 (93%) were females and 10 (7%) were male teen teachers; they ranged in age from 14 to 18 years of age with an average of 16.5 years of age and they represented 16 different high schools. When looking at the record of 4-H YTY participants, this sample represents the larger population of teen teachers. In terms of their 4-H YTY teen teacher experience, 49% had been a teen teacher for 1 year, 45% for 2-3 years, and 4% for 4 or more years. The majority (54.7%) of the respondents participated in the Alcohol and Tobacco Decisions 4-H YTY program while 33% participated in the It's Your Choice program. Only 7% participated in the Talking With TJ program, 2.2% in the Character Counts program and 1.4% in the We Connect Diversity program.

## SURVEY RESULTS

### Healthy Life Style Choices

Survey respondents were asked to rank healthy lifestyle choices from most important to least important. Teen teachers (43.2%) ranked abstinence from using drugs as their most important healthy choice, positive social support followed at 20.9%, and managing stress and healthy eating were third and fourth (13.7% and 10.8% respectively). See Table 1.

TABLE 1: Most important healthy living choices	
	%
ABSTINENCE FROM USING DRUGS	43.2%
POSTIVE SOCIAL SUPPORT	20.9%
MANAGING STRESS	13.7%
HEALTHY EATING	10.8%
REGULAR EXERCISE*	6.5%
ABSTINENCE FROM SMOKING CIGARETTES*	4.3%

FIG. 1: This  $n=138$

\*= Teen teachers sign a code of conduct stating they will abstain from drugs and alcohol, which might explain lower frequencies.

### The 4-H YTY experience reinforces healthy behaviors and attitudes

Results demonstrate that the program provides teen teachers with opportunities to make healthy living choices on a regular basis. When asked about their ability to make healthy living choices at least once a week, 81.3% of respondents said they “strongly agree” and 16.5% responded that they “generally agree”. More importantly, when asked to agree or disagree with the following statement “Making healthy living choices makes me feel good about myself”, 82% of respondents said they strongly agreed and 16.5% said they generally agreed. This finding might be of importance as it relates

to teen teacher’s self esteem. Research (Wagner, 1982) has shown that the teen teacher might increase his/her own confidence and self esteem due to their role as a mentors. Table 2 also demonstrates how the 4-H YTY experience has helped teen teachers make attitudinal (feeling good about themselves) and behavioral changes related to a healthier lifestyle. (See Table 2).

<b>TABLE 2: Ability to make healthy living choices</b>				
	<b>COMPLETELY DISAGREE</b>	<b>GENERALLY DISAGREE</b>	<b>GENERALLY AGREE</b>	<b>COMPLETELY AGREE</b>
<b>I AM ABLE TO MAKE HEALTHY LIVING CHOICES AT LEAST ONCE A WEEK</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>1.4%</b>	<b>16.5%</b>	<b>81.3%</b>
<b>THE 4-H YTY TEEN TEACHER EXPERIENCE HAS HELPED ME MAKE HEALTHY LIVING CHOICES</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>4.3%</b>	<b>48.2%</b>	<b>46.8%</b>
<b>MAKING HEALTHY LIVING CHOICES MAKES ME FEEL GOOD ABOUT MYSELF</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>16.5%</b>	<b>82%</b>

### Healthy Living Choices and the Teen Teacher Experience

Teen teachers were asked about how important the Youth Teaching Youth experience was to their decision-making around healthy life style choices, and 41.3% said it was **important** and 44.2% said it was **extremely important**. In addition, 15.1% responded that healthy life style choices were **important** for a better and longer life and 83.5% said these choices were **extremely important** to a longer and better life. (See Table 3).

<b>TABLE 3: Importance of healthy life style choices</b>					
	<b>NOT VERY IMPORTANT</b>	<b>NOT IMPORTANT</b>	<b>UNDECIDED</b>	<b>IMPORTANT</b>	<b>EXTREMELY IMPORTANT</b>
<b>HOW IMPORTANT IS BEING A TEEN TEACHER IN 4-H YTY FOR YOU TO MAKE HEALTHY CHOICES?</b>	<b>3.6%</b>	<b>3.6%</b>	<b>7.2%</b>	<b>41.3%</b>	<b>44.2%</b>
<b>HOW IMPORTANT ARE HEALTHY LIFESTYLE CHOICES TO A BETTER AND LONGER LIFE?</b>	<b>0.7%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>15.1%</b>	<b>83.5%</b>

### The 4-H YTY program elements

Open ended survey questions provided insightful qualitative data about action taken after participating in the program, the most useful program elements, and barriers to making healthy life style choices. Examples of healthy life styles choices made by participants included a large amount of “role-model” type actions. Teen teachers have taken on the responsibility of being positive role models for their younger counterparts; 23 percent of them referred to the words “Role Model”, “Example”, and





additional program elements that attract these youth to 4-H type programs. For example, these youth might be interested in other mentoring roles with younger peers.

- 2) From a **program design perspective**, the 4-H YTY team will work with teen teachers who might be interested in additional 4-H opportunities such as a community or after school club where they will have a chance to reflect on and further improve on their teaching, public speaking, community service, and leadership skills. This could aid the program at implementing a full experiential learning cycle with the teens.
- 3) Pre and post data from the largest 4-H YTY group (younger youth enrolled in the Alcohol Tobacco Decisions) has been collected and will be analyzed to **examine knowledge gained** on part of program participants.
- 4) In future surveys, we hope to collect data about **the reasons and ways** in which teens join the 4-H YTY program and their barriers to joining other 4-H type programs. Such data will assist the program team with **recruitment and retention** of the teen teachers.
- 5) In order to **sustain the already established partnerships with schools**, the program team hopes to survey the school teachers who monitor and work with teens who teach in their classroom. Data from these teachers will provide an additional perspective on the effectiveness of the program and the impact it has on teen teachers.

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