YOUTH AS RESEARCHERS AND SOCIAL CHANGE AGENTS

What’s All This YAC about Youth Action Crews?

PROJECT OVERVIEW

The Youth Action Crew is a youth-led research, mapping, marketing, and community development initiative to build awareness and increase participation in youth development programs and opportunities.

Teams or “crews” of young people and the adults who support them canvass their community and interview youth and adult community members, create maps of youth-friendly places, and distribute the maps to parents and youth in order to promote youth participation in out-of-school time activities. They also distribute You’re Here!™ signs to designate youth-friendly places and programs. Some crews work further to promote the development of opportunities and resources to better serve the community’s youth and families.

RESEARCH

Research demonstrates that involvement in high-quality youth programs benefits young people personally, socially, and academically. Yet many families—particularly low-income and minority families—are unsatisfied with the quality, affordability, and availability of options in their communities.

In addition, growing evidence documents that participation rates in youth development programs drop around age 12 or 13 and remain low. In many communities, opportunity gaps limit how many youth can benefit. The limited number of available opportunities is one barrier to participation. Lack of awareness of programs that do exist is another persistent barrier.

1 Walker, K. & Saito, R., You’re Here: Promoting Youth Spaces through Community Mapping Afterschool Matters, Number 14, Fall 2011, National Institute for Out-of-School Time.

2 To see a video about the Youth Action Crew http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6iYL8vqZ4t0

The Youth Action Crew initiative is a youth-adult partnership dedicated to addressing the critical social issue of equal access to and engagement in non-formal educational resources in the out-of-school hours.

**FINDINGS**

YAC data from nearly 5,000 Minnesota youth indicate:

- The percentage of young people who have *NEVER* participated in an after-school youth program ranges from 25% to 41%;
- The greatest barrier is “lack of information about what is available”;
- Young people are interested in a great many things but there are relatively few youth engagement opportunities designed for older youth.

**RESULTS**

As a result of YAC we have:

- Implemented with partners the Youth Action Crew mapping project in 15 Minneapolis neighborhoods; Brooklyn Park and Brooklyn Center; Richfield; Worthington, Pipestone, Marshall; five communities in Carver County, and the Fargo-Moorhead area;
- Collected data about participation rates, barriers, interests and marketing strategies from nearly 5,000 young people in Minnesota;
- Created a toolkit and training to help young people increase awareness of and participation in youth development programs, and work to address participation and opportunity gaps in their community.

**TOOLS FOR CHANGE**

If you are interested in finding out how you can help your community identify participation and opportunity gaps or to learn more about the Youth Action Crew training and curriculum, please contact Rebecca Saito, Senior Research Associate, Extension Center for Youth Development at the University of Minnesota, saito015@umn.edu or 612-821-8866

Join the movement at [www.YOUTHENGAGEMENT.UMN.EDU](http://www.YOUTHENGAGEMENT.UMN.EDU)!

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