

YOUTH LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

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SYLFF LEADERSHIP INITIATIVE: DEVELOPING YOUTH LEADERSHIP

Adolescence is a period in time marked by change. Youth are faced with many development challenges, physically, psychologically as well as socially. An experience which may result in additional and pressure. It is also during this stage that young people form closer bonds with their peers which in some cases may take precedence over relationships with parents and caregivers. Adolescents is a time when young people establish their autonomy and sense of self.

Morojele, Myers, Townsend, Lombard, Plüddemann, Carney, Petersen Williams, Padayachee, Nel, & Nkosi (2013) suggested that it is also during this time that other challenges such as tobacco, alcohol and other drug use, mental health problems, sexual risk and other problem behaviours may arise. These challenges hold both short- and long-term adverse consequences. Within low and middle income countries such as South Africa, such difficulties are compounded by structural factors, including high levels of poverty and unemployment; socio-economic inequalities; and inadequate access to health care; psycho-social and educational services (Morojele, Myers, Townsend, Lombard, Plüddemann, Carney, Petersen Williams, Padayachee, Nel, & Nkosi (2013). Despite such challenges youth leadership training is widely recognised as a positive, desired youth development outcome. The Developing Youth Leadership Project was based on the premise that becoming a responsible leader requires skills, knowledge, and a deepened understanding of oneself and the contexts in which

one lives and grows. It was the vision of this leadership project to develop the leadership talents of youth who are faced with the adverse challenges in impoverished communities to rise above circumstance and develop resilience to the risk factors.

A Youth Leadership Programme was developed with the following objectives outcomes:

1. Embed youth leadership training in authentic, meaningful projects that youth define and implement;
2. Develop basic youth leadership skills in communications, facilitation, teamwork, and understanding of change-making processes
3. Train youth as community researchers and advocates, including the use of youth-driven research to inform the decisions of school leaders, city leaders, councils, and commissions;
4. Prepare youth for success in real leadership positions, including as mentors, grant-makers and evaluators within youth-serving organizations as well as on school and community leadership teams and advisory boards;

A 3-day Youth Leadership Programme took place on the 3-5 December 2014. An overwhelmingly positive response was received from the schools that were approached to participate in the programme. Initially the programme was to accommodate 30 participants. After receiving more than 40 applications, in which students needed to strongly motivate their reasons for wanting to participate in the programme a final number of 33 students were selected. Parents and school principals were asked for consent for students to participate in the programme and to give a further motivation for student selection. This certainly enhanced the selection process and showed a true commitment from both parents and schools.

Focus of the 3 Day Programme

Day 1: Developing an understanding of leadership, communication and interpersonal skills of youth leaders. The focus of day 1 was for students to gain a better understanding of the importance of effective communication and listening skills. The nature of the programme was interactive and students practiced communication skills and active listening through various activities, while developing an awareness of their personal positive and negative qualities and its impact as applied to leadership. By knowing how they define themselves youth are more aware of their strengths and weaknesses and can improve themselves as individuals and as leaders

Activities included:

- Develop and express an oral commitment to engage in a specific leadership goal or challenge.
- Knowledge of effective communication and active listening techniques and strategies
- Why effective communication and active listening is important
- Skills to effectively communicate ideas and opinions
- Strategies for supporting group communication and decision making

The experience was a positive experience for the students. A digital story has been developed which reflects how students viewed their own personal characteristics and traits which laid a positive foundation for the rest of the programme.

Day 2: Youth critically reflected on their personal leadership styles and strengths, while also reflecting on the purpose of “leadership” in their lives and in their communities. In the Leadership unit, youth developed and deepened their own concept of leadership. Youth were supported in thinking critically about their

personal leadership styles and strengths, while also reflecting on the purpose of “leadership” in their lives and in their communities.

Activities within this unit built on the norms, agreements, and decision-making strategies learned in the previous unit.

Develop analytical and critical reflections skills of youth leaders

- Defining leadership. definition of leadership and its associated knowledge and skills.
- Investigate a variety of leadership types and theories and discuss similarities and differences.

Day 3: Students were introduced to the importance of research. Students were asked to think critically about strengths, challenges, and possible solutions to issues in their communities. By means of an activity to introduce the concept of gathering information, students were divided into groups and were guided by a set of questions to gather information such as “the youngest person in the group”, “shoe sizes that add up to a certain number”, “the number of people who have the same eye colour”. The purpose of these questions were for the students to find a way of gathering information and report it back as accurately as possible. Youth will define what community means to them and understand the interdependency of the people and places within their community.

Activities will include:

- Think critically about strengths, challenges, and possible solutions to issues in their communities
- Develop and use social science research tools and methods.
- Engage in collecting information about, and taking action on issues that directly affect them.

- Learn to use surveys, interviews and focus groups to better understand the contexts in which they live.
- Analyse findings and develop recommendations
- Development of Digital Stories

2 Relevance and Significance:

Youth Leadership can be found in different forms, it can be referred to as the youth voice, youth participation, youth civic engagement, youth decision making, and youth empowerment. A programme of this nature holds relevance and significance as it is aimed at promoting and supporting youth as leaders, while not prescribing a particular type of leadership style. The programme is significant in that it provided an opportunity for youth to look at leadership in context and to find value in different attitudes and definitions of leadership. This project wished to create social change starting with the youth, allowing for participation in and the creation of a more just and equitable society in which youth are valued and have the opportunity to be productive and connected citizens who make meaningful contributions – now and throughout their adult lives.