Youth advocacy for policy, systems, and environmental changes for healthy eating/active living: Pilot evaluation of the Healthy Young People Empowerment (HYPE) Project

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Background and Significance

- Childhood obesity a **significant public health concern** (Olds et al., 2011, Ogden et al., 2012)

- Approximately **12.5 million children** aged 2-19 currently overweight (USDHHS, 2008)

- 34% of SC youth are obese or overweight (SC DHEC, 2011)

- 56.6% of SC students do not meet PA recommendations (SC DHEC, 2011)

- 92.2% of SC students do NOT meet fruit and vegetable recommendations (SCDHEC, 2011)

Youth who are overweight are **70% more likely to be overweight or obese as adults** (Ferraro, Thorpe, & Wilkinson, 2003)
Youth Empowerment/ Advocacy for PSE change

• Modifying community policies, systems, and environments (PSE) is recognized as one of the most promising strategies for combatting obesity at the population level (Sallis et al., 2008)

• Creating healthy communities will require the interest and participation of multiple partners (Sallis et al., 2006)

• Youth voices can be powerful in influencing the priorities and decisions of policymakers (Checkoway et al., 2005; Ribisl et al., 2004)

• Engaging youth in advocacy and community change efforts is critical
  • positive youth development
  • youth empowerment
  • civic engagement
  • future public health leadership

• Youth advocacy for obesity prevention has been called the next wave of social change for health (Millstein & Sallis, 2011)
Healthy Young People Empowerment (HYPE) Project

HYPE Partners

- CDC, Community Transformation Grants
- Healthy South Carolina Initiative
- Eat Smart Move More South Carolina
- University of South Carolina, Arnold School of Public Health
- South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control
Purpose of HYPE

HYPE is designed to enhance the capacity of adolescents (12-17 years) to plan, implement, and advocate for community PSE change centered around healthy eating and active living.
Youth Advocacy for Obesity Prevention

Fig 1 | A multi-level conceptual model of inputs, processes, and outcomes of youth advocacy for obesity prevention. NPA: Nutrition and Physical Activity

Healthy Young People Empowerment (HYPE) Project

Motivation for PSE Change

Skills for PSE Change

Knowledge of HE/AL

Interest in HE/AL

Individual Youth Empowerment

Group Cohesion

Group Climate

Individual Group Voice

Relationships with Adults

Youth Viewed as Agents of Change

Youth Viewed as Resources

Youth Participate in Community Change Efforts

Community / Coalition Efforts

PSE Change

HYPE Logic Model based on Social Ecological Model for Health Promotion Programs (McLeroy et al., 1988)
HYPE Curriculum Overview

- Theoretical Foundations
  - Social ecological model framework
  - MATCH model of health promotion
  - Positive youth development theories

- Five Phases
  - Think
  - Learn
  - Act
  - Share
  - Evaluate
THINK

- Youth are encouraged to THINK about what they know about stereotypes, health disparities, and HE/AL.

- Youth will participate in group discussions, draw their community HE/AL environment, and interview community members to gain perspective on HE/AL issues.
Healthy Young People Empowerment (HYPE) Project

LEARN

- Youth LEARN knowledge and skills around HE/AL, PSE change, and being a Champion for Change

- Youth will practice public speaking and leadership skills, learn how to work with the media, and create a project action plan
ACT

• Youth are called to ACT by creating an action plan for successful PSE change for HE/AL in their community.

• Youth will identify a HE/AL issue, collect and analyze data, determine SMART goals and objectives, identify key players, and create a PSE change action plan.
SHARE

• Youth will SHARE their action plan with local stakeholders/policymakers as well as present at the HYPE Summit
EVALUATE

- Youth will EVALUATE changes created by action plans, review project outcomes, and discuss sustainability strategies.
HYPE Curriculum Structure

- 60-minute sessions
- Once per week
- Evidence-based information and activities
  - Individual and group-based
  - On and off-site
- Led by adult facilitators trained by ESMMSC
- Two guides:
  - Adult Facilitators’ Guide
  - Youth Guide
Implementation of HYPE

- Pilot in 3 selected SC communities
  - Richland County
  - Pickens County
  - Fairfield County

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HYPE Pilot Implementation

- Pilot in 3 selected South Carolina communities during 2012
- All completed curriculum, including several common, key components
- Achieved varying degrees of success
  - One created a detailed plan for improving park amenities (e.g., restrooms, drinking water, safety) and talks ongoing
  - One met with resistance from local sports complex when advocating for healthier menu options
  - **One surveyed the community and got approval for the addition of a walking trail and bike racks in the local park**
- Numerous **lessons learned** that will be applied in future communities
Healthy Young People Empowerment (HYPE) Project

HYPE Summit
May 2013
HYPE Immediate Outcomes

• ↑ Youths’ knowledge of
  • Healthy eating
  • Active living
  • Systems and environments that affect healthy eating/active living
  • PSE change strategies and solutions
  • Community action plans

• ↑ Youths’ ability to
  • Develop relationships with each other, adults, and community members
  • Identify causes/implications of health disparities
  • Conduct community & PSE assessments
  • Present accomplishments

• ↑ Youths’ skills in implementing PSE action plans and PSE change

• ↑ Youths’ motivation to be involved in PSE change

• ↑ Community’s perception of youth as partners in promoting change
HYPE Long Term Outcomes

• ↑ Youth empowerment
• ↑ Youth engagement in PSE Efforts
• ↑ Community awareness and acceptance of youth promoting change
• ↑ Youth-led PSE changes for HE/AL
Process and Outcome Evaluation

- Curriculum content review by an advisory board (e.g., structure and content, appropriateness for age, race/ethnicity, and readability)
- Monthly facilitator reports (e.g., attendance, content covered)
- Direct observation of HYPE sessions
- Focus groups and informal discussions with youth
- Surveys and interviews with adult facilitators
Lessons Learned

• Recognize and respect diversity in youth knowledge and interest for PSE change and HE/AL (individual and group level)
  • PSE change vs individual level change

• Why youth groups together important
  • Afterschool program vs purposeful HYPE group

• Making curriculum interactive and relevant is key
  • Participation in observations, interviews, and assessments increased feelings of empowerment

• Adult facilitators’ knowledge/competency, relationships with youth, and capacity to foster group cohesion vital for youth engagement and successful advocacy efforts

• Curriculum flexibility and adaptability key to creating ownership and accountability

• Education of community members and decision makers essential for youth to be seen as viable PSE change agents
Next Steps

• Lessons learned from this pilot year will be used to revise the HYPE curriculum
• Next round of six youth groups started Fall 2013
  • Beaufort/Jasper, Berkeley, Fairfield, Marlboro, Orangeburg, Richland
• CTG goal of achieving 30 HYPE groups across South Carolina by 2015
• More extensive evaluation efforts will explore outcome measures
  • youth capacity (awareness, skills, empowerment, self-efficacy)
  • community change (improved policymaker attitudes and intentions, PSE modifications)
Trimease K. Carter, MSW, Youth Coordinator
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