

The Youth to Youth Model

A Synopsis Outlining:

- ▶ **The Historic Overview**
- ▶ **Subsequent Supportive Research**
- ▶ **The Youth to Youth Model Operating in Franklin County, Ohio**
- ▶ **Evaluation Results**

The local staff and operations of Youth to Youth are funded primarily by its' parent organization, CompDrug, with some additional funding from Franklin County Alcohol, Drug Addiction and Mental Health Services Board. Special projects, activities and material are supported by participant fees, grants, foundations, and donations.

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HISTORIC OVERVIEW

In Columbus, Ohio, teens are assets (part of the solution) not the problem when addressing ATOD prevention. This key mind set/paradigm shift was initiated almost two decades ago in Franklin County with the establishment of Youth to Youth. Since that time, the comprehensive peer to peer concepts on which Youth to Youth was founded have proven to not only be effective for Franklin County teens, but have been emulated by other programs and communities across the country and the world, and supported by subsequent national research.

Youth to Youth was researched, designed, and instituted by CompDrug to meet community needs with uniquely inventive strategies and approaches. Early research and theoretic approaches were federally identified to meet national standards for excellence and effective service delivery procedures. As time has passed, current research continues to be closely monitored to assure inclusion of pertinent new knowledge and change. Additionally, with many years of program evaluation and continuous client outcome evaluation, Youth to Youth has accumulated a knowledge and research base which continues to strengthen the program, enrich service delivery, and create opportunity for positive participant change.

Founded in 1982 by Robert E. Sweet, President and Founder, and Mark Sellers, Vice President, CompDrug; the Youth to Youth Model provides comprehensive and ongoing prevention programming as a community-based program which can be adapted on a smaller scale to fit a school setting. Youth to Youth is a universal program reaching the general population of middle and high school aged youth.

Since its' inception, Youth to Youth has featured four major educational and experiential areas (or strategies) as espoused by NIDA (The National Institute on Drug Abuse); research based and proven effective when used in combination:

- Information and Education (knowing the facts).
- Personal Growth and Decision-making (belief in abilities and skills to make good decisions).
- Environmental Change (teen leadership and addressing school community needs).
- Drug-Free Fun (teen developed and led activities promoting a drug-free lifestyle).

The Youth to Youth Model strives to provide a year-round, ongoing comprehensive peer to peer approach with the following operating principles:

- Youth make key program decisions and serve in leadership positions.
- Youth develop skills and resiliency for addressing substance abuse and other teen issues.
- Youth to Youth provides safe and drug-free activities for teens.
- Youth to Youth encourages teens to believe in their responsibility to make their community a better place to live.
- Youth to Youth builds community partnership to support Youth (i.e., Franklin County Safe and Drug Free Schools Consortium's "Winners Choice" and the "Just Say No" March and Rally).
- Youth to Youth espouses a clear and definite "no use" message for teens.

The principles, shown in local and national research to be effective, are the basis of the Youth to Youth Model.

SUBSEQUENT SUPPORTIVE RESEARCH

In addition to the four strategies the Youth to Youth Model is based on, Youth to Youth incorporated the following elements that have assured program success.

1. Uniquely Youth Led

Youth to Youth, as the name implies, is uniquely youth led. Youth to Youth teens have a “real voice” in addressing issues important to them, and the ownership in and identification with the program has proven to be a positive means of enforcing a “drug-free lifestyle.” Search Institute (1996) defines a young person’s perception of their value in the community as an asset for youth empowerment. Research also shows that in programs which youth are planning drug-free events there is reduced use, delayed first use, and the positive development of non-using friends (CSAP 1993). Decades of research into resilient youth, healthy families, effective schools, etc., have identified participation/contribution as one of three critical success variables (Benard 1991). “Giving a voice to youth is probably the ingredient tipping the scale from failure to success in youth-serving programs” (American Policy Forum, Brandeis University 1997).

2. Positive Peer Support Group

One of the strongest predictors of adolescent drug use is association with drug-using peers (Eliot et al. 1985, Kandel 1982). The Youth to Youth model creates opportunities for teens to support each other in the decision to be drug free.

CSAP (1994) states that the main purpose of ‘Positive Peer Clubs’ is to establish attitudes and values that support health-promoting choices. In addition, young people utilize their social influence to communicate non-use norms to their peers.

CSAP (1994) also states that peer clubs provide a continual positive support network to help adolescents make “the right choice.”

CSAP (1993) research suggests that the most effective way to impart accurate information regarding peer norms is in conjunction with peer support groups. Research has shown that young people who lack social bonds engage more frequently in antisocial acts which are associated with earlier and heavier use of ATOD (Hawkins & Catalano, 1980; Hawkins & Lishner, 1983).

In addition, CSAP found that the “Peer Support Retreat Project” (Tucson, AZ) led to successful establishment of peer groups with values and attitudes that supported “no-use” choices as well as an increased acceptance of cultural diversity.

3. **Clear “No Use” Message**

Youth to Youth presents a clear-cut “NO” to tobacco, alcohol, or any other drug at any time. According to Preventing Drug Use Among Children and Adolescents, a Research-Based Guide NIDA (1997), research has found that when children “perceive their friends’ and families’ social disapproval of drug use, they tend to avoid initiating drug use.” (p.5)

4. **Youth Development: A Development of Life Skills**

The Youth to Youth model emphasizes the development of necessary life skills: communication skills, decision-making skills, problem-solving skills, etc., so young people will be better equipped to handle any situation.

In Selected Findings in Prevention: A Decade of Results from the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention, CSAP repeatedly documents that “the transmission of generic life skills is associated with short-term reductions in substance abuse among adolescents.”

Social Learning Theory states that behavior, personal factors, and environment must interact to create a strong individual. The most important personal factors are the individual’s ability to understand behavior, to understand the outcomes of behavior, to learn by observing others, and to control behavior. This theory states that, given the same environment, people who have the skills to change behavior will be more successful in their efforts than those who have more limited skills (Bandura, 1977; Bandura 1989).

Within the Youth to Youth model, development of life skills does not focus on the “model” or “what we do,” but focuses on the “process” or “how we do what we do.” Teens learn skills by participating in the Speakers’ Bureau and the Youth Advisory Board, assisting with trainings, serving as youth staff at conference, serving on committees, implementing prevention activities, participating in retreats, and networking with their peers.

Secondarily, as teens become more active in Youth to Youth, they become trainers of their peers; modeling the skills and behaviors they have learned. This in turn has a tremendous impact on home communities with many more teens being reached with the drug-free message. It also allows trained teens the opportunity to practice and reinforce the skills they have learned through Youth to Youth.

Tobler showed that peer programs training youth facilitators yield the greatest effect in reduced substance use and among successful peer programs, the greatest effect size (Tobler 1992). Additionally Youth facilitators benefit from attending prerequisite skills training (Tobias 1993). They gain confidence and come away with an attitude that “I can do it” and reach out with enthusiasm to their peers with a drug free message.

5. **The Involvement of Adults: Adult Guidance/Support**

Although Youth to Youth is a program that is largely youth run, there is no question in anyone’s mind that adults are vital. The role of the adult, whether paid or volunteer staff, is absolutely critical to Youth to Youth.

Any functioning group must have a clearly identified adult facilitator. A strong adult leader who works directly with the teens, co-facilitates the meetings, and is clearly given the authority to make administrative decisions is very important. How adults facilitate decision-making, how they present problems, and how they meaningfully involve students is key to the functioning of the whole group.

In fact, “Prevention programs in which staff are warm, empathetic, genuine, competent, and non-substance abusing are more effective than programs whose staff do not possess these characteristics.” (Drug Abuse Prevention: What Works, p. 37.)

In Youth to Youth, teens accomplish wonders with the help and support of key adults. Teens learn all the various tasks required to complete projects. One of the things that separates a professional, parent, or adult from a teen is life experience. Experience requires someone allowing the young person the opportunity to learn. Learning comes from doing. Adults who work with teens must have this positive attitude about young people’s abilities to learn, set goals and achieve.

THE YOUTH TO YOUTH MODEL IN FRANKLIN COUNTY, OHIO

Target Population

- Age : Middle and High School
- Sex : Male and Female
- Race : All; emphasizing collaboration between urban and suburban
- Geographic Location : Franklin County
- Specific Schools : Youth to Youth serves all Franklin County Schools

Outputs

The Youth to Youth program is ongoing and multifaceted with year-round opportunities for youth involvement. The level of involvement is determined by various student interests, for some it may be only a drug-free fun event or a one-day conference; for others it may mean involvement in almost every aspect of a comprehensive program. Among the program options are:

- Conferences
- Symposiums
- Youth Advisory Board
- Speakers' Bureau
- Puppet Players
- Annual Meetings & Parent Appreciation Night
- "Just Say No" Project
- Health Fairs and Speaking Engagements
- Newsletters
- Fun Events
- Red Ribbon Campaign
- Working with Younger Students
- Community Service
- Speaking to the Media
- Winners' Choice Camp
- Many others

Number of Times the Program is Offered Per Year: Ongoing throughout the year reaching many thousands of students annually.

Total Number of Sessions in Program: Because of the variety and complexity of activities this would be difficult to describe, but some program session lengths are as follows:

- High School Conference : 4 Day
- Winners' Choice : 2 Days
- Youth Advisory Board : Weekly
- Speakers' Bureau : Averages 2 per week throughout the year
- Conferences & Symposiums : Usually one day in length 25 per year
- Fun Events : Approximately one each month

Amount of Time Per Session: Varies from one hour to multiple days.

Number of People Per Session: Two up to six thousand, depending on the event.

Calendar Length of Program: Year-long; ongoing.

Number of Participants to be Served Directly Per Year: 15,000.

YOUTH TO YOUTH EVALUATION

Evaluation should be an inherent element of prevention programming. Youth to Youth has infused evaluation procedures into its' day to day management so that it has become an integral part of program planning. Evaluation can and should be energizing to staff and participants, allowing them to see not only how well they're doing, but also the support system they share, as they strive to make things even better. Implementation with a positive attitude assures positive programming.

Youth to Youth program staff, many of whom were once consumers of service as youth participants of the program, now deliver service within the community, bringing with them an inherent sense of pride and ownership of the program, and a dedication to excellence that merges with participant enthusiasm to produce positive community change. A vast cadre of trained volunteers reaches even more community members as trainer of trainers; a peer to peer approach that has proven highly effective in allowing us to reach many more community members with a positive prevention message.

To assure successful and non-biased evaluation, Youth to Youth developed and implemented intensive evaluation instruments with Dr. Lawrence Gabel of The Ohio State University in 1992. These evaluative instruments yield consistent findings and have continued to demonstrate the effectiveness of the Youth to Youth conference experience for positive changes in knowledge, skill, attitude, and behavior related to being drug-free with a goal for 70% of participants to state an increase in knowledge from pre-to-post test. Also developed and used each year is a parent survey instrument that provides longitudinal impact knowledge shared by parents and guardians concerning their teens.

Annual program reports dating back to 1982 also reflect the level of ongoing activity generated directly by Youth to Youth conference participants in countywide efforts. The program has consistently achieved high ongoing retention rates. In addition, there are literally thousands of hours of prevention activity performed by our students in their schools and communities that because they are not directed by the countywide Youth to Youth program, go unreported formally. This means the rate of involvement is even higher than data suggests. The goal is for 40% of conference participants to become engaged in ongoing Youth to Youth prevention opportunities with this participation used as an indicator reflecting continuing drug free status.

The primary evaluation instruments are administered before, during and at the conclusion of the conference and are very comprehensive including evaluation of all

program activities, workshops, tracks, family groups, etc. These results guide program changes, alert staff of possible gaps in services, assess participant needs as well as their meeting of expectations brought to the conference with them. This process evaluation has guided the enhancement of Youth to Youth since its inception.

More important, perhaps, is the intermediate outcome for participants measured in a “Looking Ahead” section of the evaluation and completed at the end of the conference experience.

Current results show teens responding with an overwhelmingly positive attitude toward the changes they believe have occurred for them personally. The percentages for youth reporting on a 1-5 scale show the following percentage of those responding in agreement with the evaluation statement.

1. I will be more likely to stay drug-free this school year as a result of participating in the Youth to Youth Conference. 96%
2. I gained new skills that will help me say no to tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs. 89%
3. I gained new friends as a result of participating in the Youth to Youth Conference. 97%
4. I learned new facts about tobacco, alcohol, and other drug abuse. 92%
5. I now feel more confident about myself and my abilities as a result of this conference. 94%
6. I feel better prepared to cope with life problems as a result of this conference. 97%
7. I believe the experiences of this conference will help me deal better in family situations. 86%
8. I now feel better prepared to listen and support friends who need help. 93%
9. I plan to talk to my parents or other adults about tobacco, alcohol, and other drug use following the conference. 86%
10. I plan to talk to other students in my school and community about the choice to be drug free. 92%

11. I feel more comfortable with youth of difference races and cultures as a result of this conference. 91%
12. I plan to stay active in Youth to Youth after the conference (i.e., fun events, YAB training's, and community action groups.) 96%

Coupled closely with process and intermediate goal outcome is Youth to Youth's parent survey sent to parents/guardians of youth participants of the local conference. This instrument is sent 6-9 months following the conference and registers the highly important responsible adult observation of behavior, attitude and knowledge changes of their teen since participating in the Youth to Youth Conference. This survey, has for many years, produced consistent and highly positive statements from parents.

Parental response to the latest survey showed:

- 96% believed that the conference provided additional incentive to their teen to stay drug free.
- 85% stated their tens were active in Youth to Youth projects.
- 69% said their teen's participation in school/community prevention projects had increased.
- 64% said family discussion concerning ATOD had increased.
- 76% said their personal awareness/knowledge of alcohol and other drugs had increased as a result of their teens' participation in Youth to Youth.

When asked to respond to positive benefits for their teens as a result of Youth to Youth, the following responses were elicited:

- Skills of staying alcohol/drug free 69%
- To help other stay alcohol/drug free 63%
- More knowledgeable about alcohol & drugs 61%
- More knowledge about issues related to alcohol & drugs 59%
- More compassion for other affected by alcohol or drugs 31%
- Increased/better communication skills 43%
- Made new alcohol/drug free friends 78%
- Reinforcement/commitment to be alcohol/drug free 73%
- Importance of staying alcohol/drug free 80%

○ Confidence against peer pressure	63%
○ Learned about self	35%
○ Increased self confidence	63%
○ Increased/better attitude	33%
○ Increased self esteem	47%
○ Meeting positive role models	76%
○ How to have fun and be drug free	88%

All evaluations allow also for individual comments with these anecdotal responses reflecting a great deal about the “heart” of the program, the staff, volunteers and participants. These comments are invaluable as an additional source of evaluative information and program spirit.

In essence, each individual participant is affected differently by Youth to Youth, with some seeking very active ongoing involvement, while for others it may mean incorporating some key program aspect that helps them lead a better life. Among the principle ways in which students are touched are the following:

- Youth to Youth arouses “new” thinking in teens:
- They think differently about their influence on the community.
- They think differently about how they can affect their peers.
- They think differently about their ability to stand up for their beliefs.
- Youth to Youth success markers:
- Teens’ energy is redirected toward the positive.
- Teens are better able to voice perceptions and opinions of their beliefs about alcohol and other drugs.
- Teens feel responsible for themselves and others.
- Teens see the value in diversity and acceptance.

We believe the values, traditions and beliefs of Youth to Youth’s home base community are reflected in programming and in turn within the evaluation results.

Replication of the Youth to Youth Model in other communities must include all described program elements coupled with community assessment, acknowledgement of values and traditions inherent within the community, and ongoing evaluation to assure that all are honored.

Although Youth to Youth is not individualized for each person, it is adaptable to meet the community/school setting in which it operates. Some schools have strongly trained adult advisors, others have only a few students. For others, Youth to Youth has countywide experiences like Youth Advisory Board, Puppet Players, Speakers’ Bureau, Youth to Youth Newsletter, and fun and training as their options.

Listed below are some of the communities that have adopted the Youth to Youth Program into their youth prevention efforts.

San Bernardino, California	Nome, Alaska
Carmel, California	Rocky Mr. Y2Y, Colorado
Redding, California	Omaha, Michigan
Wilton, Connecticut	Berrien Springs, Michigan
Bridgeton, New Jersey	Garden City, Kansas
Union, New Jersey	Hernadon, Virginia
Souderton, Pennsylvania	Licking County, Ohio
East Greenwich, Rhode Island	Rochester, New York
Lucas County, Ohio	Cayman Islands
Landstuhl, Germany	Bermuda
Long Island, New York	Guam
Dover, New Hampshire	Malta
Vicenza, Italy	Jamaica

Youth to Youth is honored to have been the recipient of numerous local and national awards for service to youth and the prevention field. We value highly the awards given to us and strive to continue the enhancement of quality service that precipitated the commendations. Some of these awards include:

- Recognition as the 925th Point of Light for the Nation by President Bush
- The United States Department of Education's "Excellence in Drug Prevention Education"
- The Certificate of Participation from the Columbus, Ohio Chapter of the NAACP
- The Columbus Dispatch's Community Service Award
- Strategies Against Violence Everywhere (S.A.V.E.) Award for Non-Violence
- The Action Award, given by CADFY (Californians for Drug-Free Youth)
- Red Ribbon Award, given by The Franklin County Prevention Institute
- A commendation from The Ohio Commission of Minority Health for providing quality health services to Blacks, Native Americans, Hispanics and Asians in Ohio
- The Addy and ITVA Craft Awards for the video production "Drug-Free TV"
- The nomination of Robert E. Sweet, founder and current president of Youth to Youth International by USA Today as one of this country's top five "drug-busters."

THE YOUTH ADVISORY BOARD PROCESS OF THE YOUTH TO YOUTH MODEL

The Franklin County, Ohio Youth Advisory Board (YAB) is a group of about 70 high school aged students that meet on a weekly basis. These students come from all over the county and are the primary source of ideas for the Youth to Youth Program. The meetings are open, meaning anyone of high school age is welcome to attend as long as they come drug-free, stay drug-free, and leave drug-free. Students however, are not considered members until they have attended three meetings and signed a drug-free pledge. It is with this membership that they can become an active part of the board and the decision making process.

YAB meetings take on various forms throughout the year based on the needs of the program and the board. The four basic forms are:

○ Committee Nights

- Committee nights are the predominant form of YAB, making up over 50% of the meetings. The board breaks into a variety of committees that determine the direction of the program. Some examples of operating committees are: Fun Event, Fundraising, Conference Event Planning, Red Ribbon Week, Senior Awards, Community Service, and even a “Word” Committee (a monthly newsletter written by the teens).

The board members select which committee they would like to be involved with and work with that committee until the project is completed.

○ Worknights

- Worknights are meetings that are set aside before a big event. Board members take care of whatever work is required to prepare for the event (i.e., create decorations, stuff folders, make phone calls, draw posters).

○ Personal Growth Nights

- These evenings are set aside to deal with specific issues that affect our young people. From violence to personal organization to transitioning to college, any topic can be addressed. These discussions definitely provide students with developmental opportunities and produce a greater feeling of support among board members. These nights are also used to update teens on ATOD information.

- Social Nights

- These are the nights when the board gets together to hang out, have fun, and get to know each other. They usually develop creative themes to help the process, such as the YAB Café, where various board members share their “talents” on stage in a coffee-house style atmosphere.

The “multi-night” approach provides board members with more planning and teambuilding opportunities and the varied styles help prevent a monotonous routine.

The typical format of a YAB Meeting is:

- 6:00-6:20 p.m. - Get Acquainted Activities
 - These usually go deeper than name games, but highlight anyone who is attending their first meeting.
- 6:20-6:40 p.m. – Announcements
 - These are updates on all ongoing projects and information of upcoming events.
- 6:40-7:30 p.m. – Committee Meetings
 - The large group breaks into smaller committees to plan.
- 7:30-7:45 p.m. – Break and Socialize
- 7:45-8:00 p.m. – Report Out
 - Committee members report back to the larger groups on the progress they made.

Youth facilitators are selected on a week-to-week basis to assist in running the meetings.

Although the meeting lasts only two hours, it is imperative that program staff is available to the students during the hours prior to the meeting. Board members will often arrive early to prepare for their responsibilities during the meeting.

There are many other components of YAB that have greatly contributed to its success. One is the creation of a team mentality. Several members of our program staff are assigned to the “YAB Team.” This group is responsible for the weekly meetings. By utilizing the same staff each week, greater continuity of the YAB process is maintained with strong bonding occurring with board members. This team meets two days prior to every YAB to assign tasks to ensure we are completely prepared.

After every YAB Meeting the team stays afterward for what is known as “post-mortem,” which is a discussion that puts the meeting to rest. This helps us to deal with any new issues while they are fresh in our minds. This also provides the staff a chance to unwind while we discuss the pros and cons of the meeting.

The final piece to YAB is the understanding that not all of the work can be done in the meetings themselves. The staff and students have demonstrated a willingness to meet at convenient times to continue working on projects. These additional meeting times outside of the actual YAB meetings are critical to the success of the committees, the Youth Advisory Board, and the Program.

The Youth to Youth Model

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