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

Gina M. Besenyi, MPH, Trimease K. Carter, MSW, Andrew W. Pope, DrPH, MPH, Kristian L. Gordon, MPH, CHES, Suzanne Hebda, MS, Andrew T. Kaczynski, PhD

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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.
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
Healthy Young People Empowerment (HYPE) Project

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
Healthy Young People Empowerment (HYPE) Project

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
Healthy Young People Empowerment (HYPE) Project

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
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
Eat Smart, Move More South Carolina
803-667-9810, ext. 306
trimease@eatsmartmovemoresc.org

https://www.facebook.com/thehypeprojectsc

www.eatsmartmovemoresc.org/the-hype-project
Gina M. Besenyi, MPH, Doctoral Candidate
Department of Health Promotion, Education, and Behavior
Arnold School of Public Health
Email: besenyi@email.sc.edu

Built Environment and Community Health Laboratory
www.beachlab.sc.edu