

Evaluation of the Youth-Driven Spaces Project

Final Report

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Summary

The Youth-Driven Space (YDS) program, funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, was comprised of a coaching/training model implemented in eight youth-serving organizations in Michigan. The intervention was designed and conducted by The Neutral Zone in collaboration with The David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality (Weikart Center) and S|Y|N Associates. Michigan State University's Community Evaluation and Research Collaborative (CERC) participated as the evaluation partner for the initiative and provided ongoing input in meetings with the partners.

The program was designed to increase the capacity of organizations serving high-school-age youth to develop youth 21st Century skills (or "soft skills"), including collaboration, communication, problem-solving, critical thinking, teamwork, and leadership, by providing opportunities for youth to function within the management system of the organization.

This evaluation report addresses the period between January 25, 2010 and December 31, 2011. During the reporting period, a series of evaluation activities, including surveys, focus groups, interviews, and observations with youth, staff, administrators, and coaches, were conducted for the YDS project to fulfill two major purposes: (a) to document program implementation to contribute to the manualization of the program; and (b) to assess the impact of the YDS intervention on organizational and youth outcomes.

Implementation of the YDS Intervention

All components of the intervention received highly favorable evaluations from participants. An overview of the data indicates that the following elements comprise the essential components of the YDS intervention:

Structure. The structure of the intervention provides guidance for overall implementation, including formats, frequency, staff qualifications, and populations to be targeted. The YDS structure was comprised of:

- **A residential Summer Institute**
- **Follow-up forums**, both youth-adult and administrator-specific
- **Coaching**
 - **Approximately monthly on-site coaching** with phone and email support between on-site meetings. This was enough to produce sizable impacts.
 - **Coaches who were highly experienced in positive youth development and staff training.** These coaches had the skills and knowledge to deliver the content, provide acceptance and support, and challenge sites to push the boundaries of what they had considered possible and appropriate roles for adults
- **Programs that demonstrated readiness (need, motivation) and capacity (administrative buy-in, dedicated time, potential opportunities to implement YDS)** for becoming a youth-driven space as evidenced by a competitive application and screening process.

- **Programs that serve high-school-age populations**

Content. The content of the intervention is the information, skills, and practices to be learned and developed. YDS content was comprised of:

- **A curriculum that provided information regarding positive youth development and YDS practices.** It is crucial for stakeholders to have a clear understanding of positive youth development and youth-driven practices. This allows staff and youth to be able to conceptualize how to implement YDS into their organization, along with a clear understanding of the benefits.
- **Creation of a structured youth leadership group.** Teen advisory councils were formed by all sites. Teen advisory councils were found to be a manageable first step for organizations to develop or strengthen youth governance. Youth wrote by-laws, developed leadership skills, and formed a cohesive group allowing them the opportunity and structure to make higher-order programmatic decisions.
- **A variety of other content specific to the site context and needs** that builds youth opportunities and engagement in organizational management (e.g., fundraising, marketing, hiring)

Process. The process of the intervention is the strategies used to deliver content directly to participants. YDS processes primarily took the form of:

- **Training and coaching processes that promote fun and interactive reflection, exchange of ideas, and strategic planning.** Using didactic methods only sparingly permits opportunities not only for learning but for modeling appropriate practices for doing youth-driven work. YDS processes focused on reflection, brainstorming, and planning.
- **Building adult allies across administration, program staff, and board members.** While this is also a piece of capacity, continuing to strengthen buy-in from top-level administrators, staff who are less directly involved, and especially board members who can provide additional opportunities for influential youth-adult partnerships will increase a site's success in implementing and sustaining youth-driven practices.
- **Youth running meetings.** Planning for and conducting meetings provides youth with invaluable opportunities for developing management and administrative skills as well as facilitating groups.
- **Modeling good YDS practice.** Sites found visiting the Neutral Zone and observing teens co-lead activities at the Summer Institute provided a window into how a true youth-driven space could operate.

Within the relatively short period of time that YDS was implemented, these components were able to be implemented with high quality.

Recommendations. Recommendations for improvement included: (a) explicitly addressing cultural and background differences between participating programs and The Neutral Zone, which serves a relatively educated and affluent community, as well as among the participating programs; (b) incorporating administrators in YDS event planning; (c) pairing organizations on similar characteristics to permit them to support one another; and (d) extending the intervention into multiple years.

Challenges. Challenges reported by sites in implementing YDS included: (a) staff turnover, reducing continuity as new staff needed to be trained; (b) constraints due to organizational structure or mission, particularly in school-based programs; (c) staff challenges in supporting youth as they encountered fears that they would be unsuccessful in supporting youth, frustration with youth who appeared to not want to work, and worries that youth would be overburdened; and (d) tensions in challenging established youth-adult roles and hierarchies.

YDS Impacts

The results indicate that the YDS intervention had substantial effects on the development of youth partnerships and opportunities for involvement as well as on youth program engagement, peer relationships, and especially 21st Century skills. The data also indirectly suggest that participants became more sensitized toward potential opportunities for youth involvement, revising their understanding of youth decision-making and responsibility to reflect a more critical definition.

Organizational Outcomes

- Youth reported significantly stronger opportunities for involvement, adult support, and youth-adult partnerships.
- Staff and administrators reported significantly more youth responsibility for decision-making in activity and organizational management.
- All groups appeared to have become more critical about how to define *meaningful* youth involvement and responsibility.

Youth Outcomes

- Youth reported significantly greater sense of community and engagement in the program, as well as feeling less socially excluded.
- Youth reported significantly more opportunities to explore their identities and reflect on who they wanted to be in the future.
- Youth reported significant gains in a wide variety of 21st Century skills, with the greatest changes in problem solving, organizational skills, management and administrative skills, creative thinking and innovation, goal setting, group process skills, and linkages to community.
- During youth-adult meetings, youth were observed to show increased solution generation, providing information, problem identification, and evaluation of information.
- Youth, staff, administrators, and coaches described YDS benefits for youth communication, critical thinking, and self-regulation skills.

Stages of YDS

The YDS design team, based on experiences with the programs, evaluation results, and other input from participating programs, coaches, and other YDS stakeholders, concluded that programs go through a set of stages on their way toward becoming a youth-driven space. Sites selected to participate were at the *Exploring* stage, and one or two were at the *Emerging* or

possibly even Advancing stage; by the end of the intervention, all sites were at the *Emerging* or *Advancing* stage. To get to the *Sustaining* stage, several things are necessary:

- Staff trained in YDS and certified to train others in order to ensure continuity in staff practices
- A pipeline of youth, with younger youth mentored by more experienced youth, to ensure continuity in youth engagement in the YDS processes
- The organizational mission, by-laws, and values reflect YDS principles so that YDS practices and principles are institutionalized and organizational culture embeds YDS

While excellent progress was made toward these goals, one year of YDS support appears insufficient to achieve them, particularly with organizations beginning at the *Exploring* phase. Organizational change is difficult to achieve, and we believe that the degree of change made during this pilot phase was substantial; but we also believe that extending the intervention by one to two years would provide the support necessary to get most organizations on the path to sustainability. Additional time would permit the YDS team to (a) build capacity for sustainability through strengthening the teen advisory councils to solidify the structure and develop the pipeline of youth; (b) work with programs to ensure dedicated staff members are allocated to support YDS; and (c) install youth on the board of directors.

Introduction

The Youth-Driven Space Program

The Youth-Driven Space (YDS) program, funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, was comprised of a coaching/training model implemented in eight youth-serving organizations in Michigan. The intervention was designed and conducted by The Neutral Zone in collaboration with The David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality (Weikart Center) and , and S|Y|N Associates. Michigan State University's Community Evaluation and Research Collaborative (CERC) participated as the evaluation partner for the initiative and provided ongoing input in meetings with the partners.

The program was designed to increase the capacity of organizations serving high-school-age youth to develop youth 21st Century skills (or "soft skills"), including collaboration, communication, problem-solving, critical thinking, teamwork, and leadership, by providing opportunities for youth to function within the management system of the organization. The intervention consisted of the following components:

- A competitive application and selection process (March-April 2010). As part of this process, a readiness assessment was conducted. The readiness assessment was developed as a tool for the YDS team to identify the sites that appeared most committed—and therefore most likely to engage with the program—and that had some capacity for developing into a full-fledged youth-driven space. It was tied to the Youth-Driven Formative Index, which was developed as part of this project as a reflection tool for sites and documented a set of indicators of high-quality youth-driven programs. It was completed by team members who reviewed the application, conducted phone interviews with administrators, and conducted on-site visits, including informal conversations with staff and youth participants.
- A 3-day residential youth-adult YDS Institute (July 2010) with teams of administrators, staff, and highly involved youth
- Two 1-day youth-adult forums (December 2010, April 2011)
- A 1-day administrators' forum (November 2011)
- Individualized coaching (July 2010 – December 2011)

The project had several purposes:

- Develop and manualize the YDS intervention model
- Identify the extent to which the intervention contributed to organizational change
- Identify the extent to which the intervention contributed to youth change

During the program period, the evaluation team participated in the development of the YDS logic model; worked to build capacity in the programming team for identifying core and adaptive programming elements and for understanding and assessing fidelity; and used data collected during the evaluation for evaluation-capacity building and program development among both the programming team and the YDS site participants.

This evaluation report uses data collected to describe the intervention's core components, or those that are an essential part of the intervention's success, and its flexible components, or those that support the intervention goals but can be adapted to fit different programmatic contexts and needs. Additionally, the report describes organizational and youth outcomes that emerged from the YDS intervention. Finally, the report provides recommendations based on the data collected for modifying the intervention.

Methods and Measures

Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used to answer meet the evaluation goals. Methods and measures are outlined below.

- **Surveys.** Surveys were administered at the beginning and end of the intervention to program administrators, staff, and highly involved youth. Board members were also asked to complete a survey at the beginning of the program, but due to a lack of consistent involvement, were not asked to complete the survey at the end of the program. For all respondents, surveys asked about the division of responsibilities between adults and youth (adapted from the Kalamazoo Youth Development Network post training/youth version survey, 1999), the strength of partnership between adults and youth (Involvement and Interaction Rating Scales, Jones & Perkins, 2006), and the sense of community (developed for this study from work by Zeldin 2002, Chavis & Pretty, 1999, and Chavis & Wandersman, 1990) within the site. Each respondent group also completed a set of questions that were specific to their groups, described below. Surveys took the form of both online and paper. Respondents were provided with a \$10 gift card to Target or Meijer for each survey completed.
 - **Youth survey.** Youth surveys also assessed 21st Century skills, or soft skills, such as goal setting, problem solving, leadership, group process skills, organizational skills, and communication skills, using an adaptation of the Youth Experiences Survey 2.0 (Hansen & Larson, 2008). They were also asked to report on their engagement in the program (items from the Youth Program Quality Intervention youth survey (Smith et al., 2012). Due to shifts in participation and turnover of youth, baseline and follow-up surveys were completed by somewhat different sets of youth. Baseline surveys were completed by 25 youth (response rate = 60%; M per site = 3.6, SD = 1.5) and follow-up surveys were completed by 40 youth (response rate = 98%; M per site = 5.0, SD = 2.3). Ten youth completed both the baseline and follow-up surveys. The substantial difference in response rate from baseline to follow-up was due to different methods of data collection strategies. Pre-survey data were collected online and by mail, and the post-survey data were collected on-site.
 - **Staff survey.** Staff surveys also assessed orientation toward continuous program improvement and supervisor support for quality programming (Michigan 21st Century Community Learning Centers staff survey, 2010). Baseline surveys were completed by 43 staff (response rate = 77 %; M per site = 5.4, SD = 4.1) and follow-up surveys were completed by 36 staff (response rate = 92%; M per site = 4.5, SD = 3.0). Fifteen staff completed both the baseline and follow-up surveys.
 - **Administrator survey.** Administrator surveys also assessed orientation toward

continuous program improvement and supervisor support for quality programming Michigan 21st Century Community Learning Centers supervisor survey, 2010). Baseline surveys were completed by 15 administrators (response rate = 100%; M per site = 1.9, SD = 0.8) and follow-up surveys were completed by 11 administrators (response rate = 100%; M per site = 1.4, SD = 0.5). Nine administrators completed both the baseline and follow-up surveys.

- **Board member survey.** Board member surveys were administered to board members identified by administrators as particularly knowledgeable about the youth component of their agencies. Administration occurred only at baseline (response rate = 46%; M per site = 1.9, SD = 0.8). Greater familiarity with the agencies over the intervention period suggested that most board members were not in a position to report on youth partnerships, and the decision was made not to administer a follow-up survey.
- **Interviews and focus groups.** Phone interviews were conducted with administrators (9 at baseline, 10 at follow-up) and board members (10 at baseline). Focus groups were conducted with youth (baseline: N = 42, M per site = 5.3, SD = 1.8 ; follow-up: N = 33; M per site = 4.1, SD = 1.7) and staff (at baseline: N= 31; M per site = 3.9, SD = 1.7 ; at follow-up: N = 33, M per site = 4.1, SD = 3.1). Questions focused on participants' vision of YDS for their site, existing opportunities for youth engagement and governance, and attitudes about youth involvement within the program context. Follow-up interviews and focus groups also addressed the benefits and challenges of the YDS intervention, areas their programs needed to improve, plans for sustaining youth-driven practices, and feedback regarding the overall YDS model and process. The youth and staff focus groups included two scenarios that presented a problematic issue for the organization (e.g., in the youth scenario, a funding crisis) and asked participants as a group to identify how they would respond.
- **Youth-adult meeting observations.** At baseline and follow-up, observations were conducted of meetings between youth and adults at each site. These meetings typically were convened to plan for upcoming events. The meetings were audiotaped and transcribed, with each transcript divided into segments of 20 lines. A coding system was developed to document the presence of youth vs. adult facilitation and for evidence of youth critical thinking and collaboration. Results were documented as the percent of segments in which a code was observed. Observers also rated the meetings on a 3-point scale for administrative effectiveness, youth-adult partnerships, adult facilitation of youth skills, and youth engagement.
- **Session evaluations.** At the 3-day Summer Institute and the December Forum, each separate activity session was evaluated by all participants, resulting in 505 session surveys across 14 sessions for the Summer Institute and 136 for the December Forum. Results of these data were provided back to each session convener(s) for program improvement.
- **Post Institute Survey.** Participants of the Summer Institute completed a pre-post retrospective survey assessing their experiences and learning from the Summer Institute (23 youth, 52% response rate; 15 staff, 50% response rate; 9 administrators, 100% response rate; and two board members, 40% response rate).
- **Coaching logs.** An online system was developed to capture coaches' programmatic activities, including content and strategies, as well as their observations of changes and challenges occurring at the sites. These data were used to identify core components of the YDS

program that were implemented at every site and components of the program that were adapted from site to site according to unique contextual needs, note barriers to successful implementation, and document dosage of programming received.

Evaluation Use

Evaluation results were provided throughout the project to both the coaches and sites. Evaluators observed the Institute and forums as well as on-site planning meetings between youth and adults and reported feedback at YDS coach meetings regarding youth-adult interactions and roles. At the end of the intervention, the evaluation team provided a report to each site with results for the site compared to the all sites from pre-post surveys and youth focus groups. These reports reported data on benefits and successes reported as well as areas for improvement. Coaches presented the reports to each site on their final visit along with their own written interpretation and reflection about the results.

Intervention Delivery

The YDS intervention included a 3-day Summer Institute in August 2010 attended by administrators, staff, and highly involved youth from each site; follow-up forums in December 2010 and April 2011; an administrator forum in November 2011; and coaching that occurred at least monthly from an experienced coach/trainer.

Summer Institute

The three-day residential YDS Summer Institute functioned as the sites’ introduction to the YDS model. Sites sent teams of 5 to 8 people that included adult staff, administrators, and youth identified as highly involved by program personnel. In some cases, these youth had already been involved in advisory councils or planning; in other cases, staff invited youth whom they felt had the potential for commitment and engagement at higher levels. Board members were also invited to participate in a session on integrating youth into agency boards.

At the Institute, Neutral Zone and Weikart Center staff provided intensive training and practice in development of youth-adult partnerships and in creating opportunities for youth to take on leadership roles. In addition to the demonstration of the Neutral Zone programming space, workshops and activities were delivered to help disseminate ideas around team building, youth leadership, adult active listening, youth voice and choice, “no-adult talking time” and SWOT analysis. Results from the retrospective pre-post surveys from youth, staff, and administrators are presented below in Tables 1 to 6.

Teamwork and belongingness. As shown in Table 1, the Institute was successful in promoting teamwork and belongingness among team members who reported that they had room to improve. The majority of youth and nearly all staff and administrators reported that they felt close to most or all youth and adults in their groups, that they were a team, and that they could make their organization a youth-driven space. In general, youth were somewhat more cautious than adults about reporting that the group had become a team and that they had the potential for collective change.

Table 1. Improvements in Teamwork and Belongingness

	<i>Youth</i>	<i>Staff</i>	<i>Administrators</i>
Feel close to most or all youth in my group.	85%	100%	88%
Feel close to most or all adults in my group.	84%	92%	75%
Feel youth and adults in our group were a team.	72%	92%	100%
Feel working together, youth and adults could make our organization a youth-driven space.	75%	100%	100%

Note. Percent of respondents reporting improvement out of respondents reporting room for change. N = 23 youth, 15 staff, 9 administrators.

Knowledge of youth-driven spaces. Table 2 describes the percent of participants who reported improvements in their knowledge of youth-driven spaces. Nearly all adults reported increases in their knowledge in all areas. Most youth also reported increases in knowledge in all areas, although they were somewhat less likely to have learned how a youth advisory board works.

Table 2. Improvements in Knowledge of Youth-Driven Spaces

	<i>Youth</i>	<i>Staff</i>	<i>Administrators</i>
What a youth-driven space is.	90%	100%	100%
Ways to create opportunities for youth voice.	81%	100%	100%
Ways that youth can lead the program.	86%	100%	86%
How a youth advisory board works.	74%	92%	100%

Note. Percent of respondents reporting improvement out of respondents reporting room for change. N = 23 youth, 15 staff, 9 administrators.

How program adults can work with youth. Table 3 displays the percent of participants who agreed or strongly agreed that they received new ideas at the Institute about how program adults can work with youth. For all areas, a substantial proportion of respondents reported that the Institute provided new ideas. Most respondents reported learning new ways to listen to youth and how to let youth lead conversations. Most youth also felt that new ideas were provided about how adults could talk to youth with respect, although adults were less likely to think these ideas were new, suggesting a disconnect for some groups around what constitutes respect.

Table 3. New Ideas of How Program Adults Can Work with Youth

	<i>Youth</i>	<i>Staff</i>	<i>Administrators</i>
Listening to youth.	83%	80%	78%
Talking to youth with respect.	75%	47%	56%
Giving youth opportunities to lead activities.	75%	67%	78%
Helping youth get comfortable voicing their opinions to adults.	63%	60%	78%
Letting youth lead conversations more than adults.	75%	80%	78%
Following youths' lead.	74%	73%	67%

Note. Percent of respondents reporting "agree" or "strongly agree" that they received new ideas. N = 23 youth, 15 staff, 9 administrators.

YDS Process. Table 4 displays the percent of participants who agreed or strongly agreed about items regarding the YDS process during the Institute. Most respondents left the Institute feeling that they had a good plan with which to proceed making their programs youth-driven spaces. About half felt that they knew how to use their coach and what to do differently, suggesting that these areas could be strengthened in future Institutes.

Table 4. YDS Process

	<i>Youth</i>	<i>Staff</i>	<i>Administrators</i>
I got specific feedback about what I need to do differently.	58%	53%	44%
I learned how to use our coach.	58%	40%	56%
I learned how to make our program a more youth-driven space.	75%	73%	89%
We made a good plan for making our program a youth-driven space.	83%	87%	78%

Note. Percent of respondents indicating “agree” or “strongly agree” that the item occurred. N = 23 youth, 15 staff, 9 administrators.

Inspiration and connections. Table 5 reports the percent of participants who agreed or strongly agreed about items regarding the connections that they had made and expectations that the Institute had instilled in them. Most respondents reported having fun at and being inspired by the Institute, although the percent of youth was lower than of staff or administrators. However, open-ended responses indicated that many youth wished the Institute had been longer, and none provided insight into why any youth did not enjoy themselves. Most respondents also indicated that the Institute had opened up previously unconsidered possibilities, although staff were somewhat less likely to report this. Most respondents also reported getting to know different kinds of people than they would typically meet – unsurprising given the great diversity of organizations, both in mission and location, invited to participate. Forty to 50% of respondents expected to connect regularly with youth and adults from other YDS programs.

Table 5. Connections and Expectations

	<i>Youth</i>	<i>Staff</i>	<i>Administrators</i>
The Institute opened up possibilities that I hadn’t thought of.	83%	67%	78%
I was inspired by the Institute.	83%	87%	78%
I had fun at the Institute.	79%	93%	100%
I got to know different kinds of people than I usually meet.	83%	67%	78%
I expect to connect regularly with youth from other programs participating in YDS.	42%	53%	44%
I expect to connect regularly with adults from other programs participating in YDS.	42%	40%	56%

Note. Percent of respondents indicating “agree” or “strongly agree” that the item occurred. N = 23 youth, 15 staff, 9 administrators.

Importance of Institute activities. Table 6 reports the percent of participants who strongly agreed that particular activities would be important for helping make changes in their programs. These questions were asked to assess which activities were viewed as most meaningful and relevant for making change. It should be noted that some activities were designed to be icebreakers or teambuilders and were not as directly relevant to YDS content, but were

important for developing the sense of community, teamwork, and cross-site networking. The following activities were reported as most useful for making change (at least 70%):

- Youth: The Youth Leadership Morning, No Adult Talking Time (a period where adults were forbidden to talk while youth conducted planning), seeing Neutral Zone activities, seeing Neutral Zone teens helping run the Institute, seeing the Neutral Zone space, and hanging out with people from their own and other groups.
- Staff: Seeing the Neutral Zone teens in action, seeing the Neutral Zone activities, planning for their program and presentation to the other groups about what they would do to change their programs, and hanging out with people from their own and other groups.
- Administrators: Seeing the Neutral Zone teens in action, the Ask-Listen-Encourage session, No Adult Talking Time, the SWOT analysis, planning for their program and presentation, and hanging out with people from their group.

Table 6. Importance of Institute Activities for Making Changes in Your Program

	<i>Youth</i>	<i>Staff</i>	<i>Administrators</i>
ALL DAYS			
Seeing the Neutral Zone teens help run the Institute	74%	93%	88%
Hanging out with people from my group	79%	80%	88%
Hanging out with people from other groups	70%	73%	50%
DAY 1			
Seeing the physical space at Neutral Zone	74%	60%	50%
Seeing the different kinds of activities (literary arts, visual arts, SEEDS, music, etc) at Neutral Zone	87%	87%	63%
The Robots activity	40%	8%	13%
DAY 2			
The Youth Leadership Morning (youth only)	86%	NA	NA
Ask-Listen-Encourage (adults only)	NA	53%	75%
Youth Voice and Choice (adults only)	NA	60%	63%
The boatbuilding activity	61%	8%	33%
DAY 3			
The Zoom activity (with the cards with different pictures)	41%	15%	43%
NATT-No Adult Talking Time	83%	60%	100%
SWOT analysis	64%	46%	83%
Planning for your program and group presentation	68%	94%	100%

Note. Percent of respondents indicating “strongly agree” on a 3-pt scale. NA = Not applicable. N = 23 youth, 15 staff, 9 administrators.

The results suggest that all groups found the Neutral Zone’s modeling and demonstration of youth-driven practices, especially Neutral Zone youth in leadership roles, as well as time spent with their team and other teams, most beneficial. In addition, each group gravitated toward different activities, with youth focusing on learning how they can be leaders and getting the

chance to practice these skills, staff focusing on planning what they'll do in their own programs, and administrators crossing both areas.

The activities with lower ratings from at least some groups (i.e., Robots, Zoom, boatbuilding) were either icebreakers for developing community (and were observed to be adopted in multiple sites) or promoted concepts in a relatively abstract way. For example, the boatbuilding exercise provided an opportunity for teams to reflect on how their team worked together on a task as well as consider how adults and youth divided responsibilities. The facilitators may choose to consider how to help teams link these lessons more explicitly to their anticipated challenges in creating a youth-driven space.

Logistics. Table 7 reports the percent of participants who agreed or strongly agreed about aspects of the Institute's logistics. Most respondents were favorable about the trainers, and they generally liked the locale and felt the Institute was well-organized (youth and administrators more so). Nearly half of the youth and staff felt it should be a different length; open-ended responses suggested that they wanted it to be longer.

Table 7. Satisfaction with Institute Logistics and Staff

	<i>Youth</i>	<i>Staff</i>	<i>Administrators</i>
The Institute was a good length (3 days).	54%	53%	89%
Walden Woods was a good place for the Institute.	71%	80%	78%
The Institute staff and trainers were warm and welcoming.	83%	93%	100%
The Institute staff and trainers were knowledgeable.	83%	100%	100%
The Institute was well organized.	79%	67%	89%

Note. Percent of respondents indicating "agree" or "strongly agree" that the item occurred. N = 23 youth, 15 staff, 9 administrators.

Follow-Up Forums

Two one-day youth-adult forums were conducted in December 2010 and April 2011; an administrators-only forum was held in November 2010 (not evaluated). The December and April youth-adult forums were designed to permit shared learning and provide deeper understanding about youth-driven practices.

December 2010 Forum. To evaluate the December 2010 Forum, a survey assessing overall experiences as well as surveys for each session were administered. Thirty-eight youth and 19 adults responded to the surveys. Table 8 reports the percent of respondents who agreed or strongly agreed with each item. The forum appeared to be a great success, with nearly all participants feeling that it was useful, inspiring, well-implemented, and sufficiently of value that they wanted to meet again in the spring. Networking was perceived to be of benefit by somewhat fewer people, but the majority still agreed that the networking piece was valuable.

Table 8. Experiences at the December 2010 Youth-Adult Forum

<i>Item</i>	<i>Youth</i>	<i>Adult</i>
Forum was a good length.	92%	83%
The Neutral Zone was a good place for the Forum.	97%	100%
Forum staff and trainers were warm and welcoming.	97%	100%
Forum staff & trainers were knowledgeable.	100%	94%
Forum was well organized.	95%	94%
Forum provided new ideas that will be helpful for our program.	97%	100%
I was inspired by the Forum.	89%	89%
It is good for me to reconnect with people from other YDS agencies.	71%	72%
I had fun at the forum.	97%	89%
I am interested in meeting in the spring.	94%	94%

Note. Percent of respondents indicating “agree” or “strongly agree.” N = 38 youth, 19 adults.

Table 9 reports the percent of respondents who agreed or strongly agreed about the usefulness, opportunity to practice strategies, and ability to implement *before* and *now* for each session held at the December 2010 forum. Most youth and adults reported that all topics were useful and provided opportunities to practice strategies, and substantial change in respondents’ ability to implement these activities was evident for every session.

Table 9. December 2010 Youth-Adult Forum Session Evaluations

<i>SESSIONS/ROLES</i>	<i>Useful</i>		<i>Practiced strategies</i>		<i>Could implement this</i>			
	<i>YOUTH</i>	<i>ADULT</i>	<i>YOUTH</i>	<i>ADULT</i>	<i>YOUTH</i>		<i>ADULT</i>	
					<i>BEFORE</i>	<i>NOW</i>	<i>BEFORE</i>	<i>NOW</i>
Advocacy	100%	100%	100%	100%	33%	100%	67%	100%
Community Building and Icebreakers	93%	100%	93%	100%	40%	93%	80%	100%
Creating By-Laws for Your Youth Advisory Committee	83%	100%	83%	-	50%	100%	NA	NA
Designing a New Program	92%	80%	93%	80%	25%	92%	50%	80%
Dialogue	72%	100%	72%	100%	43%	94%	20%	80%
Facilitation	100%	100%	100%	100%	40%	100%	50%	100%
High/Scope Basic Training	NA	100%	NA	100%	NA	NA	44%	100%
Marketing Graphics	100%	NA	100%	NA	40%	100%	NA	NA
Youth-Led Evaluation	100%	100%	91%	100%	18%	100%	40%	100%
Youth-Led Fundraising	100%	100%	100%	100%	20%	100%	100%	100%
YPQA Basic Training	78%	100%	89%	86%	33%	89%	57%	100%

Note. Percent of respondents indicating “agree” or “strongly agree.” YPQA = Youth Program Quality Assessment. NA = Not applicable. N = 38 youth, 19 adults.

April 2011 Forum. To reduce the evaluation burden on participants, an anonymous sticker game was used to assess April 2011 Forum participants' experiences. Participants put stickers on large post-it notes that had evaluation questions written on them to indicate how satisfied they were with the Forum. Results showed high satisfaction with the forum's quality and helpfulness.

Coaching Activities

Because behavior change without continued support is difficult to create, coaching was presumed to be a critical part of this intervention. Each program was assigned a coach to provide individualized training and support following the Institute. Within the coaching component, the structure, content, and process of the intervention was developed by the intervention team and documented by the evaluation for manualization and replicability.

Structure

Structure refers to the delivery requirements of the program, including number of hours/visits, staff qualifications, and populations targeted.

- Coaches were required to be highly experienced in conducting youth development training and knowledgeable about implementation of youth-driven spaces. Four coaches, two Neutral Zone administrators/staff and two Weikart Center staff, provided coaching, with each assigned to two programs.
- Coaching was designed to occur at least monthly, primarily on-site with regular phone and email supports. Programs received 9.9 visits on average ($SD = 2.6$). This was slightly less than the intended monthly contact, but we believe reasonable given holidays and program schedules.
- Coaches spent a total of 249 hours ($M = 31$ hrs per program, $SD = 7$ hrs) in direct coaching contact. An average of 54% of those hours was spent on site.
- Coach visits mostly occurred with both youth and adults. Phone and email planning and support was usually conducted with a designated staff person or administrator.
- Coaches helped facilitate the Institute and youth-adult Forums.
- Coaches did not follow a set curriculum. Instead, they tailored their coaching content and process to needs identified in collaboration with site staff and administrators based on a set of principles and content.

Content

Content refers to the information, skill areas, and principles that guide intervention. Table 10 presents the major content areas on which coaches focused with hours provided and number of sites receiving this content. While content might have been addressed with a program, it may also not have been a major part of what the site team worked on. The final column in Table 10 shows the number of sites for which content areas were a primary (top 3) focus based on number of hours.

Table 10. Coaching Content

	<i>N Coaching Hours across Sites</i>	<i>% Hours across Sites</i>	<i>N of Sites Received Coaching</i>	<i>N of Sites w/ This as Top 3 Coaching Activity</i>
TEEN ADVISORY COUNCIL (TAC) OPERATION				
TAC development, by-laws, and resource allocation	42.6	19%	7*	5
TAC meeting facilitation	10.0	5%	4	2
ORGANIZATIONAL OPERATION				
Goal identification, monitoring, revision	69.3	31%	8	8
Program design and activity offering	6.5	3%	5	0
General program quality enhancement	28.0	13%	4	3
Youth involvement in evaluation	12.0	5%	4	1
Youth involvement in developing norms or program policy	7.0	3%	4	0
Youth involvement in board	0.5	<1%	1	0
ACTIVITY PLANNING				
Youth leading events or projects (i.e., fundraise, advocacy, community partnership)	15.9	7%	6	2
YOUTH LEADERSHIP				
Youth team building	15.8	7%	6	0
Youth leadership or mentorship to other youth	14.8	7%	5	3

*One site already had TAC as part of the regular program.

Core components. Two content areas were addressed in all programs: (a) Goal identification, monitoring, and revision; and (b) Teen advisory council (TAC) development. These appear to constitute the *core* components that are the foundation of the YDS model. Goal identification, monitoring, and revision are critical because they contribute to changing the culture and practice of the program to become more youth-driven; however, the ways in which those goals played out from program to program differed. Thus, most of the content areas varied by program to support their modified goals. The other core component, TAC, emerged as a central content area as well. Few programs had TACs at the beginning of the intervention, and the intervention team felt that the TAC model was the most effective way to rapidly develop a venue for youth voice and to build youth-adult partnerships.

Adaptable components. Adaptable components are elements that do not need to be addressed in every program for the intervention to be effective, but can be implemented depending on the needs and context of an individual program. The most common adaptable content components implemented by coaches focused on: (a) youth leading events or projects such as fundraising, advocacy, or community partnerships; (b) youth teambuilding; (c) program design and activity offering; (d) TAC meeting facilitation; (e) general program quality enhancement; (f) youth involvement in evaluation; (g) youth involvement in developing norms

or program policy; and (h) youth leadership or mentorship to other youth. These occurred in at least half of the 8 sites. However, sites often did not receive coaching on specific content because they already had the content in place. For example, the two programs that did not receive coaching around youth leading events had a long history of having youth run activities, and the program that did not receive TAC coaching already had an effective youth advisory team operating.

The pattern of content suggests that most programs worked on developing youth voice and involvement in activity provision and event planning. However, embedding youth in higher-level operations such as policy formation, evaluation, and board involvement within a year was more challenging and tended to occur in the programs that already had some experience in having youth work with activities and events.

Process

Process refers to the strategies and techniques that coaches used to impart content and promote learning and skill building. These were also the processes used at the Institute and Forums. As shown in Table 11, while coaches used explicit training, it did not constitute one of the most common coaching strategies. The most commonly used processes to activate change were strategic planning, reflection, and brainstorming. These permitted coaches to model processes with adult staff that they could then use with their youth.

Table 11. Coaching Processes

	<i>% of time</i>
Strategic planning	26%
Reflection	24%
Brainstorming	23%
Training	15%
Observations	6%
Group games	5%
No Adult Talking Time	1%
Neutral Zone program demonstration	1%

Participant Perspectives on Coaching

In focus groups and interviews, participants reflected on the helpfulness of the coaching process. The quotes in Table 12 illustrate the kinds of input that each group provided. They discussed how coaches understood the issues, provided support and feedback, and challenged them to work through difficult issues.

Table 12. Participant Perspectives on Coaching

<i>Source</i>	<i>Illustrative Quotes</i>
Youth focus group	<i>I think having the coaches come out here is more... it makes it more personal and you get to deal with issues that you have on hand. And by having that coach come out here, we get to deal with our problems that we're having at, like, in a more personal scale so it won't happen in the future.</i>
Staff focus group	<i>Like [coach] was in [location], she's from here, like, she gets what they're going through. Like, she's, she gets them and they get her and I think, and she's just got this amazing style of where she can also like relate to the adults and give positive feedback in a way that's like very supportive.</i>
Administrator interview	<i>I think putting things in context combined with brainstorming. And I think [coach] was also really, really responsive when our staff would say, "Oh," you know, "I'm not sure that that will work." And, I think she did a healthy balance of trying to, like, to really push us to think...So I appreciated that aspect of it too. So, like, when we talk about, that we're not going to have youth involved on our board of directors, I think we had a healthy discussion and I think the coach, she did a powerful job for us to really push to think through why, like, what our assumptions were for why that wouldn't work, or what our assumptions were for why it would work, and how we came to that.</i>
Coach interview	<i>I think it's about, like, adults understanding young people and wanting to work in partnership with them. I think it's about adults stepping back, but still providing structure. So that was a big meeting that we had about scaffolding. I showed up at [site] and they were like, "Well, you don't get our kids." Like, "Your kids are different." Like, "They've grown up privileged and they've been reading the New York Times since they were 10." Like, that is the perception. And so, "Those kids are ready to be leaders. Our kids are not." So I think, like, giving the knowledge about scaffolding and how to build structure into your program.</i>

Key Intervention Components According to Participants

In focus groups and interviews, participants identified the specific components of the overall YDS intervention that they found most beneficial. Table 13 shows the number of focus groups and interviews across sites that identified particular intervention.

Major findings included:

- **All groups.** Sites identified coaching, the Summer Institute, and feeling connected to other youth organizations through networking opportunities as most beneficial. Every adult group/interview mentioned coaching, and every staff group mentioned the Summer Institute. Within coaching, sites found critical feedback, training, and general support most helpful.
- **Youth.** Youth reported that coaching and the Summer Institute were most helpful, but were less likely to identify aspects within those areas as helpful. Youth were the group most likely to appreciate feeling connected to other youth organizations.

Table 13. YDS Intervention Components Identified as Most Beneficial in Post-Intervention Focus Groups and Interviews

YDS Components	N of sites/focus groups/interviews			
	Across sites (N= 8)	Youth focus groups (N = 9)	Staff focus groups N = 8)	Administrator interviews (N = 11)
Coaching	8	5	8	11
Providing critical feedback	6	2	5	2
Training sites	4	1	4	2
Being a support system	4	1	4	2
Summer Institute	8	5	8	6
No Adult Talking Time	3	1	3	0
Networking				
Learned from other youth organizations	2	1	1	3
Felt connected to other youth organizations	7	6	3	3

Note. Boldface indicates that at least half of the interviews/groups of this type mentioned this component.

- **Staff.** Staff found coaching and the Summer Institute to be most beneficial. They were the group most likely to attribute change to the specific aspects of coaching such as feedback, training, and support. They were also most likely to mention the No Adult Talking Time that occurred within the Institute.
- **Administrators.** Administrators focused on coaching. Just over half also mentioned the Summer Institute. Administrators were more likely to mention learning from other youth organizations compared to the other groups.

Improvements to the YDS Model

While programs were very positive about their participation in the YDS project, they also provided suggestions during focus groups and interviews for consideration in future implementation.

- Find additional ways to incorporate administrators into YDS. Call administrators before large-scale YDS events to seek input, and have administrators share their skills.
- Provide more information regarding how to incorporate YDS into school settings.
- Make YDS a multiple-year project to allow for more assistance and transition in helping sites involve youth in higher-order governance.
- Provide a timeline of the YDS stages. Help organizations orient themselves to where they are and what they need to accomplish to get to the next stage.
- Discuss the intervention challenges during administrator events.
- Consider pairing organizations by characteristics such as the youth they serve to allow similar organizations to support one another.

- Provide an agenda of workshops before large events.
- Have intentional conversations regarding the diversity of the various youth-serving organizations during large YDS events.

With respect to this last suggestion, the cultural and contextual differences between the sites and The Neutral Zone were an issue identified by some sites. The Neutral Zone is located in Ann Arbor, a university town. While the Neutral Zone serves a diverse population, white upper-middle class youth are overrepresented. In contrast, many of the participating sites served youth from predominantly low-income, ethnically diverse, and historically marginalized communities. Concerns about these differences and some sites’ difficulty adapting and envisioning the YDS model to meet specific needs emerged in focus groups and interviews. Table 14 presents representative quotes.

Table 14. Cultural Differences with the YDS Model

Source	Illustrative Quotes
Staff Focus Group	<i>The kids felt put down because their educational level isn't the same as, like, the kids in Ann Arbor. There's, like, that piece too of, like, when they're given something to read out loud that has, like, 10-letter words in it and they just, they can't do it. And it's just another shame thing. And so there's, like, I think the starting point is like we assume that all kids have the same educational level as our kids.</i>
Administrator Interview	<i>I remember going to that and feeling, like, this was a model that works really well in Ann Arbor with students whose parents are professors and middle-upper class. And here we are working in poverty-stricken areas with single parents who are working three jobs or no support from their parents academically. So it's just two different worlds, you know?</i>
Coach Interview	<i>You know, there are some pieces that need to be stressed then. But the other thing is they feel, like, we're kind of promoting like Neutral Zone's model as YDS, but they are from a different background.</i>

Despite the differences noted, every site noted multiple benefits to participating in the YDS initiative. Nonetheless, to ensure that the model can be widely adopted, we recommend that the YDS developers identify ways to address the concerns. For instance, various stakeholders suggested having an open dialogue regarding differences in sites’ cultural and personal backgrounds, especially at large events when sites are together. This might help sites reflect on the differences and similarities among sites as well as differences and similarities between their sites and The Neutral Zone. It can also help coaches be aware that these issues exist within their sites.

Program Challenges in Implementing YDS

YDS was implemented successfully in all participating sites to varying degrees. However, several factors have the potential to limit a program’s capacity for adopting YDS practices.

High staff turnover. Turnover can occur when staff change responsibilities or move into administrative roles, youth become regular staff, or staff leave for other positions. Because most YDS intervention components require front-line staff to partner with youth, when staff trained in YDS are no longer directly involved, the partnership is disrupted. While it is possible for replacement staff to learn the YDS model, additional support may be required from coaches. The desired option would be for the YDS model to become sufficiently institutionalized within an organization that the organization's hiring, professional development, and supervision processes integrate YDS principles and practices.

Constraints within organizations' structures or missions. Most organizations that work with youth should theoretically be able to implement YDS practices. However, some contexts are more suited than others to building youth into the existing organizational structure. For example, the participating sites included two school-based youth programs operating under the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program, a federal grant that focuses on academic enrichment for at-risk populations. It was an open question to the YDS team as to whether the YDS model could be effectively enacted in school-based sites. We learned that these sites benefited significantly, but were also constrained by the administrative structure of the school and by the constraints of the grant requirements.

Staff challenges in supporting youth. In focus groups, staff reflected on challenges that they discovered as they worked to implement YDS practices. For example, they described fears that they would be unable to successfully support youth, frustration that youth seemed not to want to do the work, and worries that involving youth in organizational operations would overburden youth who were already struggling.

Tensions in challenging the established hierarchy. One of the most common issues raised was difficulty challenging the social norms and established hierarchies between youth and adults. Table 15 presents representative quotes from focus groups and interviews.

Summary

The YDS intervention rolled out over the 14-month period went smoothly and was responsive to participant needs by adding forums to promote continued learning, connections, and sustainability. Throughout the project, there was significant buy-in from pilot sites; we attribute this to the careful selection process that ensured sites had interest and capacity to participate as well as to the engaging activities within the intervention. Sites were eager to continue their work in developing sustainable practices to support youth governance and decision-making within their organization. Organizations were successful in structuring teen advisory councils, helping youth establish by-laws, building youth's facilitation skills, and incorporating youth into programmatic decision-making roles, primarily around conducting activities and events.

As anticipated, the Summer Institute and coaching were identified as the primary components of the intervention. The Summer Institute met four critical needs at the beginning of the intervention: (a) introducing YDS principles and practices; (b) facilitating planning for action upon return to the home program; (c) developing a sense of teamwork and collective efficacy

Table 15. Challenges Around Established Youth-Adult Roles

<i>Source</i>	<i>Illustrative Quotes</i>
Youth Focus Group	<p><i>And one of the challenges that I experienced was being too young. Like, whenever I spoke out against, like, things I didn't agree on and things like that, like, everybody thought, "Oh, what do you know. You're only 17," and went to downing me.</i></p> <p><i>It's kind of hard for them to take you seriously at first until you can really prove or gain their trust.</i></p>
Staff Focus Group	<p><i>I think the fear of feeling like they can't change or always get stuck in the stereotypical things of adults supposed to run the show, and it's not me being a youth, I can't change anything. So I think that's a big factor.</i></p> <p><i>And, because they still very much have the adult-child piece in them. It's hard to break them of it. And we're so used to playing the role too that when they're falling into line with the child role and we're falling into line with the adult role, none of us have red flags.</i></p>
Administrator Interview	<p><i>The adults can say, yeah, it's a great idea, but when there's a crisis or when the kids want to do it their way or when the kids kick the adults out of the room, inexperienced adults can freak out. I mean, the adults can freak out, quit, or adults can say, "This is too much. I can't handle it." Or the adults can overreact and over-manage and over-babysit.</i></p> <p><i>I think the hard part with the kids is one of engaging them and getting them to buy into the leadership thing when there's not much youth voice going on in the building.</i></p>
Coach Interview	<p><i>I think it is really hard for adults to shift their paradigm the longer they've worked for youth in particular. If they have a style that they've always used. Especially, like, classroom teachers I think is an example of this.</i></p> <p><i>The main thing was going from having a struggle in power between youth and adults where it's always either the youth trying to have all the power and didn't want the adults to do anything, or the adults wanted all the power and didn't give the youth enough.</i></p>

within sites, particularly between adults and youth; and (d) promoting connections and learning across sites. It served as an eye-opening demonstration of what a YDS program might look like, presented the possibilities and practical techniques of youth-driven practices, and helped youth and adults from each program work as a group to develop goals and a vision for their own program. Stakeholders reported the importance of having additional forums to sustain the energy and motivation for implementing youth-driven practices as well as providing networking opportunities and cross-site learning.

All groups identified coaching as the most helpful component, attributing coaching success to several factors. First, the trust and relationship-building between coaches and program adults, especially staff or adult advisors, was the foundation for coaching effectiveness. Second, because the sites had diverse missions and service populations, coaches were able to tailor the intervention content to fit the organizations' needs. Last, coaches served as the YDS network facilitators and helped programs connect to outside resources for developing high-quality programs and YDS practices. Coaches were crucial in helping sites deal with issues that affected successful implementation of YDS such as tensions that emerged between youth and adults,

training new staff, youth turnover, and staff anxieties about how to provide both autonomy and direction for youth. Coaches were also instrumental in challenging sites to advocate for including youth on the board of directors, helping staff strategize ways to advocate for change, recruit more youth, diversify youth leadership and construct a leadership pipeline to sustain youth-driven practices.

YDS Intervention Components

An overview of the data indicates that the following elements comprise the essential components of the YDS intervention:

Structure

- **A residential Summer Institute**
- **Follow-up forums**, both youth-adult and administrator-specific
- **Coaching**
 - **Approximately monthly on-site coaching** with phone and email support between on-site meetings was enough to produce sizable benefits
 - **Coaches who are highly experienced in positive youth development and staff training**, and who are able to provide acceptance and support while still challenging sites to push the boundaries of what they had considered possible and appropriate
- **Programs that demonstrate readiness (need, motivation) and capacity (administrative buy-in, dedicated time, potential opportunities to implement YDS)** for becoming a youth-driven space
- **Programs that serve high-school-age populations**

Content

- **A curriculum that provides information regarding positive youth development and YDS practice.** It is crucial for stakeholders to have a clear understanding of positive youth development and youth-driven practices. This allows staff and youth to be able to conceptualize how to implement YDS into their organization, along with a clear understanding of the benefits.
- **Creation of a structured youth leadership.** Teen advisory councils were formed by all sites. Teen advisory councils were found to be a manageable first step for organizations to develop or strengthen youth governance. Youth wrote by-laws, developed leadership skills, and formed a cohesive group allowing them the opportunity and structure to make higher-order programmatic decisions.
- **Inclusion of a variety of other content specific to the site context and needs** that builds youth opportunities and engagement in organizational management

Processes

- **Training and coaching processes that promote fun and interactive reflection, exchange of ideas, and strategic planning.** Using didactic methods only sparingly permits opportunities not only for learning but for modeling appropriate practices for doing youth-driven work.

- **Build adult allies across administration, program staff, and board members.** While this is also a piece of capacity, continuing to strengthen buy-in from top-level administrators, staff who are less directly involved, and especially board members who can provide additional opportunities for influential youth-adult partnerships will increase a site's success in implementing and sustaining youth-driven practices.
- **Youth run meetings.** Planning for and conducting meetings provides youth with invaluable opportunities for developing management and administrative skills as well as facilitating groups.
- **Model good YDS practice.** Sites found visiting the Neutral Zone and observing teens co-lead activities at the Summer Institute provided a window into how a true youth-driven space could operate.

Within the relatively short project period, the YDS team implemented these components with high quality. As described in the next section, they also produced substantial changes in a number of areas.

Outcomes

The evaluation assessed organizational and youth outcomes of the YDS intervention. Evaluation data that informed these results included pre-post surveys of youth, staff, and administrators, youth and staff focus groups, administrator interviews, and youth-adult meeting observations. Because of high turnover rates among youth and, to some degree, staff, or their unavailability at times when data were collected, pre- and post-test samples differ. While some individuals are the same at pre- and post-test, many are not. Thus, the results generally represent change in overall group experiences at a particular timepoint rather than change in individuals who were continuous participants. Additionally, sample sizes are small for all groups, but especially for administrators. This means that substantial changes may not have reached statistical significance.

A control group was not available that would allow the effects of the YDS intervention to be tested against a group of sites that received no intervention. However, the difficulty of making change around the development of youth-adult partnerships is well-known, and it is unlikely that changes were due to other initiatives or policies. The qualitative data support this assumption.

Organizational Outcomes

Organizational outcomes are represented by youth-adult partnerships, division of youth-adult responsibilities, adult support for youth-driven practice, and youth investment—not individual motivation to be part of the program, but rather the extent to which youth as a group have both initiative and opportunities to participate in informed and equal ways in program management.

Practices and Partnerships

Table 16 shows survey results for practice and partnership outcomes. The major findings are:

- Youth reported significantly stronger youth investment, adult support for youth-driven practice, and youth-adult partnerships.
- Administrators reported stronger youth investment and adult support for youth-driven practice, but it did not reach significance due to the small sample size.
- Staff reports in all areas and administrator changes in youth-adult partnerships showed no change or slight increases. Based on observations and qualitative data, we suggest that these results do not indicate weaker or poorer partnerships and youth involvement, but rather that adults became more sensitized to what youth-driven practices entail and used a more critical eye after the intervention in rating the extent of youth and adult partnerships and supports.

Table 16. Change in Youth-Driven Practice and Partnership Outcomes

Area	<i>M (SD)</i>					
	YOUTH		STAFF		ADMIN	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
Youth investment	3.4 (0.7)	3.9 (0.8)*	3.5 (0.7)	3.6 (0.6)	3.5 (0.7)	4.0 (0.6)
Adult support for youth-driven practice	3.8 (0.9)	4.3 (1.0)*	4.0 (0.7)	4.1 (0.6)	4.2 (0.5)	4.5 (0.6)
Youth-adult partnership	3.7 (1.1)	4.2 (0.9)*	4.0 (0.6)	4.0 (0.6)	4.2 (0.4)	4.3 (0.5)

Note. Involvement and Interaction Rating Scales, Jones & Perkins, 2006. Youth N pre = 25, post = 40; staff N pre = 43, post = 36; administrator N pre = 15, post = 11. Significant pre-post differences within a group are marked by the post-test number. * $p < .05$.

Division of Responsibility for Decision-Making

Table 17 exhibits results of the YDS intervention on change in organizational responsibilities and decision-making between youth and adults. The major findings are:

- Both staff and administrators reported significant change toward youth taking on organizational responsibilities and decision-making. Administrators were particularly likely to report these changes.
- Youth reported little change in responsibility for decision-making. Similar to the staff perceptions of change shown in Table 16, we suggest that youth became more sensitized to what meaningful decision-making and responsibility are in a youth-driven context, and that they initially overrated in the pre-test. Their post-test ratings are fairly similar to those of the program adults.
- In general, results indicate that by the end of the program, division of decision-making for activity planning/execution was approximately equal for youth and adults, program design/marketing approached equality with slightly greater responsibility by adults, and that adults had more decision-making power in the areas of organizational policy formation/examination and organizational governance, but that youth were also involved.

Table 17. Change in Division of Responsibilities Between Youth and Adults

Area	<i>M (SD)</i>					
	YOUTH		STAFF		ADMIN	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
Activity planning and execution	3.1 (0.9)	3.2 (0.7)	2.4 (0.5)	2.7 (0.6)*	2.2 (0.7)	3.2 (0.6)**
Program design and marketing	2.8 (0.8)	2.9 (0.5)	2.2 (0.6)	2.7 (0.5)**	2.0 (0.5)	2.8 (0.4)**
Organizational policy formation and examination	2.5 (0.9)	2.4 (0.7)	1.9 (0.5)	2.2 (0.6)*	1.9 (0.6)	2.7 (0.6)**
Organizational governance	2.3 (0.8)	2.4 (0.6)	1.7 (0.5)	1.9 (0.5)*	1.5 (0.4)	2.4 (0.5)***

Note. Adapted from the Kalamazoo Youth Development Network post training/youth version survey (1999). Lower scores indicate more staff responsibility, higher scores indicate more youth responsibility, and 3 = evenly split. Youth N pre = 25, post = 40; staff N pre = 43, post = 36; administrator N pre = 15, post = 11. Significant pre-post differences within a group are marked by the post-test number. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

Participant Perceptions of Partnership Development

In interviews and focus groups, YDS participants and coaches described changes in youth-adult partnerships and relationships that they had seen result from the YDS intervention. Table 18 presents representative quotes from each participant group.

Table 18. Participant Perceptions of Youth-Adult Partnership Development

<i>Source</i>	<i>Illustrative Quotes</i>
Youth focus group	<i>No, I mean, well, last year it was kind of run on by the adults. So, I mean, we did voice our opinions, but I think this year we have more choices and a variety to make more decisions and practically running the program.</i>
Staff focus group	<i>I think the communication piece and hopefully some of that healthy tension will remain, but there was a very unhealthy tension that existed between the adults and the young people. And part of that was just about communicating. There needed to be [coach], confronting the issue. I think, now that we have a consistent person that's able to do that, and have some historical knowledge, I think all of that has been helpful. And part of that really engaging in healthy communication.</i> <i>The opportunity. Like we are now, giving them the opportunity to run the space accordingly to their own standards.</i>
Administrator interview	<i>By giving a real purpose to the students who are the leaders of the advisory board, the ones that are facilitating. And the students have really taken ownership of this advisory board and they see that it does have, you know, power and influence over the programs.</i>
Coach interview	<i>I think starting with [site], I mean, they were really ready to give youth real significant roles. And I think they did a very effective job for structuring those roles and providing the kids those opportunities. And they've been building and building and building. I just saw such tremendous positive growth throughout my work with them.</i>

Staff Practices

We hypothesized that the YDS intervention might have an effect on general staff practices, supports, and roles. These included staff teamwork, where staff provide feedback and support to one another, supervisor support in the form of feedback and review, continuous support such as setting expectations for how to work with youth, mentoring, and co-planning, and staff decision-making roles within the program. We originally planned also to conduct program observations using the Youth Program Quality Assessment (YPQA). However, as the intervention rolled out, we learned that several of the sites did not conduct the types of activities that the YPQA was designed to assess, and this process was discontinued.

As shown in Table 19, the hypothesis was not supported. No changes were significant, and most scales remained stable or decreased, especially according to administrators. Because the YDS

Table 19. Change in Staff Practices

<i>Area</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>			
	<i>STAFF</i>		<i>ADMINISTRATOR</i>	
	<i>Pre</i>	<i>Post</i>	<i>Pre</i>	<i>Post</i>
Staff teamwork	3.8 (0.6)	3.8 (0.7)	4.1 (0.5)	3.8 (0.6)
Supervisor feedback and	3.8 (0.9)	3.7 (0.9)	4.3 (0.4)	4.1 (0.3)
Continuous support around working with youth	3.9 (0.7)	3.8 (0.6)	4.1 (0.8)	3.8 (0.6)
Staff decision-making roles in program	3.5 (0.8)	3.7 (0.8)	3.8 (0.8)	3.8 (0.6)

Note. Adapted from statewide evaluation of Michigan 21st Century Community Learning Centers staff and supervisor surveys. Youth N pre = 25, post = 40; staff N pre = 43, post = 36; administrator N pre = 15, post = 11.

intervention was in development, we had thought that it might include training and coaching related to general staff practice and staff roles. However, because the final YDS intervention did not focus on these areas, the lack of findings is unsurprising.

Youth Outcomes

Youth outcomes were assessed in the areas of program experiences, developmental experiences, and 21st Century skills.

Youth Program Experiences

Youth reported about the sense of community that they experienced in the program, their engagement and motivation to be at the program, and the degree to which they felt socially excluded. Table 20 shows that youth reported significant improvement in all areas.

Table 20. Change in Youth Program Experiences

<i>Area</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	
	<i>Pre</i>	<i>Post</i>
Sense of community	4.1 (0.6)	4.4 (0.5)*
Program engagement	3.8 (0.8)	4.3 (0.6)**
Social exclusion	2.3 (1.2)	1.7 (0.9)*

Note. Sense of community: adapted from several measures; Program engagement: Michigan 21st Century Community Learning Centers youth survey; Social exclusion: Adapted from the Youth Experiences Survey 2.0 (YES 2.0; Hansen & Larson, 2008). N pre = 25, post = 40. Significant pre-post differences within a group are marked by the post-test number. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

Youth Socioemotional Development

Youth socioemotional development was assessed in three areas: identity exploration, which examined whether youth tried doing new things and new ways of acting and had opportunities to do things in the program that they did not have elsewhere; identity reflection, which assessed the extent to which the program got youth to think about who they are and their future; and prosocial norms, which addressed whether youth learned about helping others, were able to change their school or community for the better, and moral development.

Table 21 shows that youth reported significantly greater identity exploration and identity reflection at the end of the YDS intervention. They reported the same amount of change in prosocial norms, but it did not reach statistical significance.

Table 21. Change in Youth Socioemotional Development

Area	M (SD)	
	Pre	Post
Identity exploration	3.8 (0.8)	4.3 (0.6)**
Identity reflection	3.9 (1.0)	4.3 (0.6)*
Prosocial norms	3.8 (0.8)	4.2 (0.8)

Note. Adapted from the Youth Experiences Survey (YES 2.0; Hansen & Larson, 2008). N pre = 25, post = 40. Significant pre-post differences within a group are marked by the post-test number. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Youth 21st Century Skills

Change in youth 21st Century skills was a critical outcome for this study. It was assessed in three ways: self-report surveys, meeting observations, and focus groups.

Surveys. Youth reported on 21st Century skills in a wide variety of areas that encompassed skills important for management and organizational leadership, skills that contribute to self-regulation, skills necessary to work in groups, and links to community, work, and college.

As shown in Table 22, youth reported increases in every area. All changes were statistically significant except media (computer and internet) skills. Changes were most substantial for problem solving, organizational skills, management and administrative skills, creative thinking and innovation, goal setting, group process skills, and linkages to community.

Meeting observations. Naturally occurring meetings were observed at the beginning and end of the program. For a couple of sites, the pre-meeting was the first time the program had convened a youth-adult meeting. Most meetings focused on event or activity planning, although other purposes emerged as well. For example, the purpose of one meeting was to develop interview questions for hiring staff. Meetings were considered appropriate for data collection if they had extended periods of dialogue around issues, events, or problems and included both youth and adult participants.

Table 22. Change in Youth Experiences (YES 2.0)

Area	M (SD)	
	Pre	Post
Organizational skills	3.6 (1.0)	4.2 (0.8)*
Management and administrative skills	3.8 (0.9)	4.4 (0.7)**
Media (computer/internet) skills	3.5 (1.1)	3.8 (0.9)
Communication skills	3.6 (0.8)	4.1 (0.7)*
Creative thinking and innovation	3.7 (0.9)	4.3 (0.8)**
Goal setting	3.7 (0.8)	4.4 (0.7)**
Effort	3.7 (0.9)	4.2 (0.8)*
Problem solving	3.2 (0.9)	4.3 (0.6)***
Time management	3.7 (0.9)	4.2 (0.8)*
Group process skills	3.8 (0.8)	4.4 (0.6)**
Feedback	3.8 (1.0)	4.3 (0.8)*
Leadership and responsibility	3.9 (0.8)	4.4 (0.6)**
Linkages to community	3.5 (1.0)	4.1 (0.8)**
Linkages to work and college	3.5 (1.1)	4.0 (0.8)*

Note. Adapted from the Youth Experiences Survey (YES 2.0; Hansen & Larson, 2008). Significant pre-post differences within a group are marked by the post-test number. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

An evaluation team member attended and audiotaped the meetings. Tapes were transcribed, and the transcripts were divided into 20-line segments. Each segment was coded based on a coding system developed through transcript review. Since meetings varied greatly in length, using segments permitted us to standardize the unit of analysis. Of the eight sites, six were included in this analysis because two did not have usable post-meeting transcripts. For one, the meeting time lasted only a few minutes (the group then broke into small groups working on projects); the other site did not have a relevant meeting during the observation period. Table 23 displays the coding framework and examples from transcripts.

Table 24 presents the results, showing:

- Increased solution generation, providing information, problem identification, and especially evaluation of information, which doubled between pre and post
- Increased perspective-taking and knowledge of one's organization. However, these were low-frequency (present in 5% or less of excerpts).
- Stable or decreased clarification, volunteering, and working with systems. We believe that clarification (asking questions to understand something better) and volunteering (agreeing to do something when a volunteer is called for) are lower-level skills than those that showed improvement. Working with systems was primarily demonstrated in one site and was low-frequency. We suggest this is a high-level skill that the YDS intervention did not affect during this intervention period. Rather, this site, a youth-organizing group, already had substantial connections outside of its own program.

Table 23. Youth-Adult Meetings: Examples of Codes for 21st Century Skills

Source	Illustrative Quotes
Provide Information	<p>Youth 1: <i>“Which I don't really get how that works with the buses.</i></p> <p>Youth 2: <i>“They changed it from all three bells and high-schoolers no busing. And then they changed it back this year to the hour difference and then high-schoolers who live with, are out of two miles, like within two miles don't get busing.”</i></p>
Clarification	<p>Youth : <i>“We have a clean slate? Who are our partners? Like do we have any partners for the next year?”</i></p>
Problem Identification	<p>Youth: <i>“I think there were like a few kids, like when the computer room was full and they like, there's no controls left for video games, they were just kinda like sitting around, kinda... they looked kinda bored. Just like on their phones or just like, like passed out or something.</i></p>
Solution Generation	<p>Youth: <i>“Um, I was thinking maybe we could pass out fliers like during lunch...Or we could do like a, what they're doing, like and, like have a bake sale or, you know, sell the bags as the advertisement...And have like, with a little pamphlet in there or something.”</i></p>
Evaluation of Information	<p>Youth 1: <i>“I've seen how fun the kids were having, it's like we need to have a dance class here.</i></p> <p>Youth 2: <i>“Well, I think the problem with that is that there's like a lot of dance studios around. Like, I don't know, maybe like, 'cause like most of, like the kids that like wanna dance, don't they go to schools and stuff? Or classes?”</i></p>
Perspective Taking	<p>Youth: <i>“You talk about professionally, not, not crossing their boundaries because you don't know if you... like you don't know how they feel. If they're feeling attacked or if you... you know, if like you're coming off to them strong or... you know what I mean?”</i></p>
Volunteering	<p>Youth 1: <i>“Now we need a deadline. I say Monday would be good.”</i> Youth 2: <i>“Let me do it!”</i></p>
Knowledge of Own Organization	<p>Youth: <i>“Um, so basically the exec board is the main head of [organization]. Um, [organization] has many members... And the executive board determines what [organization] is going to, what issues they're going to be involved with and try to accomplish. And we make sure that we involve youth...to make sure that we get the stuff [to] elected officials. Um, basically for the betterment of all the youth in [city].”</i></p>
Working with Systems	<p>Youth: <i>“...But we're still researching about more cities that we can go to...And then report back to them, say these are the places we want to go...we want a public official to go with us, it's better than just going by theirselves and then come back into retirement and do a one real good meeting like they usually do... I'm like, ‘Oh, okay. Yeah, that will work for our city.’ So basically we're trying to actually make them make it a commitment to us...”</i></p>

Table 24. Change in Youth 21st Century Skills in Youth-Adult Meetings

<i>Skill</i>	<i>% of excerpts</i>	
	<i>Pre</i>	<i>Post</i>
Solution generation	24%	35%
Providing information	27%	32%
Evaluation	14%	28%
Clarification	19%	18%
Problem identification	4%	8%
Volunteering	11%	6%
Perspective taking	1%	4%
Knowledge of organization	0%	3%
Working with systems	5%	1%

Note. N = 6 sites.

Qualitative data. In interviews and focus groups, participants described a variety of YDS intervention impacts on youth 21st Century skills due to greater opportunity, more trust from adults that permitted youth to try in these roles, and increased experience due to practice. Impacts tended to center around the areas of communication, critical thinking, and self-regulation.

Communication. Table 25 shows representative quotes from focus groups and interviews that demonstrated benefits in the area of communication skills. Participants reported that youth gained skills in communicating and negotiating with group members. These skills entailed active listening, cooperation, and learning to understand, manage, and work with different points of views. Multiple sites had youth speak in public formal gatherings, providing youth the opportunity to develop their professional public speaking skills.

Critical thinking. Youth were provided with new opportunities to plan and run events. In the process, they were able to learn from their mistakes and strategize for future events. Participants described that youth had grown as a result of YDS in developing critical thinking skills. These skills included long-term strategic planning and problem solving. In addition, youth demonstrated a greater awareness of their organizations' future needs and the importance of youth's roles within their organization and the larger community. Table 26 presents participant quotes in the area of critical thinking.

Table 25. Participant Perspectives on YDS Impacts on Youth Communication

Source	Illustrative Quotes
Youth focus group	<i>Well, we've been working on that, to tell what our group is. To be able to talk to people about our group. To say, what we do, all the information that we have to give to other people. We want everyone in our group to be able to project that to other people.</i>
Staff focus group	<i>A lot of that training this summer that we did, [YDS staff] did those wonderful circles where the kids talked things out. So they learned some listening and communication skills that have helped us eliminate some of those other problems that we had.</i>
Administrator interview	<i>When we first started this process, they spoke at one of our board meetings. And you could just tell that they were, like, meek and mild and scared. And then post this process kind of going through, they're willing to speak up, they're willing to reach out not only to board members, but they're willing to speak out when they're doing fundraising, when they're talking to other kids and they're talking to staff members, people who are older than them. They've kind of broken down that fear level, which I think has been great.</i>
Coach interview	<i>That it continued in the outreach, the roles that teens were playing in outreach both to [site's] community and to the larger community, and then even to the larger mental health community. I mean, they went to Chicago and did presentations.</i>

Table 26. Participant Perspectives on YDS Impacts on Youth Critical Thinking

Source	Illustrative Quotes
Youth focus group	<i>I've learned that even though we're kids, we do matter. Because most of the things that happen in society, they don't just affect adults, they affect us. But this is, like, a way for us to be able to be heard. Because if we weren't here, then our voices really wouldn't matter.</i>
Staff focus group	<i>And they've been, able to gain some skills and some tools to help them be more youth guided. I would say that they're able to problem solve more the ideas that they get from YDS. And, also, they're more ambitious than they were before.</i>
Administrator interview	<i>Yeah, I think they feel a lot more ownership of what the group is and what their personal goals and missions are for that council. And they do have a mission statement and all that, but for kids to understand the greater component of that, and "Here's what we're able to do. We're able to really do these events" and "Here are all the skill sets that I'm learning."</i>
Coach interview	<i>The kids are getting the ideas of why outreach is important to the mission of [site]. I think that that's a way to make sure that the youth-driven practice is not a Neutral Zone kind of youth-driven practice, but it's a practice reflective of organizations and missions that we're working within.</i>

Self-regulation. Participants described that as a result of YDS, youth took more active and engaged roles in helping run the daily activities of the organization and, within that context, showed more self-regulation. They demonstrated greater initiative in implementing and following through with their ideas and responsibilities, spent their time productively and actively working within the organization, and had fewer behavioral issues. Table 27 provides representative quotes related to increased self-regulation.

Table 27. Participant Perspectives on YDS Impacts on Youth Self-Regulation

<i>Source</i>	<i>Illustrative Quotes</i>
Youth Focus Group	<i>I've seen myself change in ways of controlling my temper more and being more responsible and being more active.</i>
Staff Focus Group	<i>Last year, it was a lot of conflict resolution and there was a lot of times when I had, I had to write up reports just because simply bad behavior. And I don't think I've written up a single bad behavior report this year which, to me, is a good thing because I don't have to worry about that anymore.</i>
Administrator Interview	<i>They hold each other accountable for the different things that go on now that they're in those roles. Whereas before they might have to go to an adult about something, they hold each other accountable now. And if they see an issue or if they have a problem, they'll sit down as a group and possibly talk out or they might do a one-on-one.</i>

Summary

The results indicate that the YDS intervention had substantial effects on the development of youth partnerships and opportunities for involvement as well as on youth program engagement, peer relationships, and especially 21st Century skills. The data also indirectly suggest that participants became more sensitized toward potential opportunities for youth involvement, revising their understanding of youth decision-making and responsibility to reflect a more critical definition.

Programmatic changes included more youth leadership opportunities and responsibilities within the organization. These opportunities included serving on a youth advisory board, making programmatic decisions regarding the organization and programs available, running activities, writing grants, creating a budget and facilitating meetings. These leadership experiences allowed youth the opportunity to develop professional skills and self efficacy. Youth were also involved in community work from running community service projects and talking on expert panels to lobbying for policy change. In addition, other organizations in the community have reached out to sites to learn more regarding the YDS model. Youth changes included improved critical thinking skills, including problem-solving and evaluation of information, communication skills, and ability to self-regulate individually and as part of group process. These are essential skills that provide building blocks for success as youth transition into adulthood and independence.

Conclusions

This report indicates that the YDS intervention effectively promoted organizational change, identified how YDS practices can be implemented in diverse program contexts, developed key measures for program- and youth-level outcomes, and showed promising impacts on the development of youth social-emotional competence and a variety of 21st Century skills.

Stages of YDS

The YDS design team, based on experiences with the programs, evaluation results, and other input from participating programs and coaches, concluded that programs go through a set of stages on their way toward becoming a youth-driven space. Figure 1 presents the critical stages and important characteristics associated with each stage. Sites selected to participate were at the *Exploring* stage, and one or two were at the *Emerging* or possibly even *Advancing* stage; by the end of the intervention, all sites were at the *Emerging* or *Advancing* stage. To get to the *Sustaining* stage, several things are necessary:

- Staff trained in YDS and certified to train others in order to ensure continuity in staff practices
- A pipeline of youth, with younger youth mentored by more experienced youth, to ensure continuity in youth engagement
- The organizational mission, by-laws, and values reflect YDS principles so that YDS practices and principles are institutionalized into organizational culture

While excellent progress was made toward these goals, one year of YDS support appears insufficient to achieve them, particularly with organizations beginning at the *Exploring* phase. Organizational change is difficult to achieve, and we believe that the degree of change made during this pilot phase was substantial; but we also believe that extending the intervention by one to two years would provide the support necessary to get most organizations on the path to sustainability.

Recommendations for Sustainability

Build on the Teen Advisory Council. One of the core organizational structures that supports and sustains youth governance is a structured youth leadership group such as a teen advisory council or youth advisory board. Creating a structured group allows youth the opportunity to contribute to the organization in areas that range from running activities and events to making programmatic decisions such as forming policies and hiring staff. In addition, staff and administrators have the opportunity and structure to support a core group of youth in new leadership roles within the organization.

In this project, staff and administrators viewed the creation of a youth advisory board as a manageable first step in implementing youth-driven practices into their organization. In order to sustain a youth advisory board, the organization needs to incorporate the group in a

Figure 1. Stages of YDS Organizational Development



formalized manner into its structure by adopting the group's self-created by-laws or revising current policies and procedures. Structures also need to be in place to incorporate new youth into the advisory board to ensure that the board itself, and therefore youth leadership, is sustained. The teen advisory council becomes a critical avenue to developing the pipeline necessary to keep the "youth" in "youth-driven spaces."

Dedicate staff members to YDS. We learned that it is vital that key staff members have time and responsibility officially dedicated to supporting youth leadership and organizational decision-making. These staff members attend the Institutes and Forums, are heavily engaged with the youth advisory board, and work actively in goal setting with the administrators and coach. In most cases, sustaining YDS practices is not the centerpiece of an administrator's job. Moreover, leaving YDS implementation to staff without explicitly making it part of the responsibilities of key staff increases the likelihood that it will be overlooked or put off, even among highly invested staff. Having a key staff member active and cognizant of how to sustain and support YDS practices is crucial to an organization succeeding.

Install youth on the board of directors. One of the most important factors for sustaining YDS and institutionalizing the model is the inclusion of youth on the organization's board of directors. Engaging youth in these higher-order roles *if accompanied by meaningful decision-making roles* helps shift power dynamics between adults and youth by having youth as partners in working towards the agency's mission. Having youth on the board of directors also institutionalizes YDS, sending a message throughout the organization of its commitment to ensuring youth-driven practices. Within this structure, the organization has the ability to align its mission, by-laws, and policies to fully represent a YDS model.

Align the mission, policies, and procedures with YDS principles using YDS practices. To make YDS sustainable within a program, the program must ensure that its mission, policies, and procedures match those considered best practice for a youth-driven space—and these changes are best made through meaningful youth participation in the development of those statements and processes. However, groups attempting to make changes at this level may very well encounter obstructions and challenges. The support of a coach would be particularly helpful in negotiating how to work with organizational leaders to make changes essential to reflect a YDS culture.

Limitations and Next Steps

This pilot study had several limitations: a small scale given the wide diversity of youth-serving organizations; lack of a control group; a limited intervention period that permitted assessment of short-term change but was unable to address whether programs can sustain the model without ongoing support; and a youth sample concentrating on highly involved youth. While YDS involvement clearly benefited these youth, the question remains as to whether the organizational changes that occurred had any benefits on the general population of youth who were served by the programs but did not participate in direct YDS intervention activities.

Interest is growing in using YDS practices in youth-serving programs to promote positive youth development. Nonetheless, interventions to help program implement YDS are rare, and the

field lacks rigorous examination on the effectiveness and sustainability of those interventions that do exist. A next step would be research conducting controlled trials and scale-up studies to examine the efficacy and effectiveness of YDS intervention in promoting program changes, developing youth's 21st century skills, and understanding the effect of organizational changes on the general service population.