

## Factors that Affect Older Adolescent Involvement in Out-of-school Time Programming

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### INTRODUCTION

Research findings suggest that out-of-school time recruitment and retention efforts designed to attract and retain older adolescents are needed (Anderson-Butcher, Newsome, & Ferrari, 2003; Ferrari & Turner, 2006; Huebner & Mancini, 2003; Lauver, Little, & Weiss, 2004; Lock & Costello, 2001). Studies have shown that program recruitment and retention for older adolescents is directly linked to program offerings (Lauver & Little, 2005; Ritchie & Resler, 1993). If programs appear to be of low quality and do not meet the needs of older adolescents, they will look elsewhere to fulfill those needs (Acosta & Holt, 1991; Ferrari & Turner, 2006; Harder, Lamm, Lamm, Rose & Rask, 2005; Lauver & Little; Radhakrishna, Leite, & Hoy, 2003; Ritchie & Resler). Gillard and Witt (2008) state that “programs that provide youth with high levels of engagement and opportunities to develop intrinsic motivation had more impact” (p.178) on positive youth development than those that did not. According to Acosta and Holt (1991), “designing programs to meet felt needs of clientele is definitely the key to maintaining involvement” (p. 4). In addition, overall program quality plays a key role in retaining members in youth community programs (Acosta & Holt; Ferrari & Turner; Harder et al., 2005; Lauver & Little; Radhakrishna et al., 2003; Ritchie & Resler, 1993; Vandell et al., 2005).

Older adolescents can serve as important program resources by providing valuable educational experiences for younger members (Ponzio, Junge, Smith, Mangallan, & Peterson, 2000). Thus, retaining older members strengthens their skills, while enhancing the learning experiences of younger members and reducing the workload of volunteers (Cantrell, Heinsohn, & Doeblen, 1989).

### RESEARCH TO PRACTICE POINTS

1. Teenage youth need to feel like an integral part of program administration (Brennan, Barnett & Baugh, 2007; Gill, Ewing, & Bruce, 2009; Gillard & Witt, 2008; Larson, 2000; Lauver & Little, 2005).
2. Recruitment/retention guides outlining techniques of recruitment/retention should be created and distributed to out-of-school program administrators and staff (Gill et al., 2009; Gillard & Witt, 2008).
3. Leaders and educators should evaluate programs and involve older adolescents in evaluation efforts to help ensure that age appropriate, appealing, and challenging events/activities are incorporated into the program (Acosta & Holt, 1991; Gill et al., 2009; Gillard & Witt, 2008; Harder et al., 2005; Hensley, Place, Jordan & Israel, 2007; Lauver & Little, 2005).

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## DETAILS ON RESEARCH TO PRACTICE POINTS

Teenage youth need to feel like an integral part of program administration. Out-of-school programming educators and leaders should continue to allow members to assist in program facilitation and add new opportunities for planning, leading, and facilitating activities/events (Gillard & Witt, 2008; Hensley et al. 2007). Through the experience of planning events and leading others, out-of-school programming members can fine tune their time management and organizational skills. In turn, these skills will assist members in their future (Gill et al., 2009).

Recruitment/retention guides outlining techniques of recruitment/retention should be created and distributed to out-of-school program administrators and staff. The recruitment/retention guides should demonstrate methods of incorporating members into the decision making processes. The guides should provide the resources (e.g., worksheets, pamphlets, activity/event descriptions, etc.) required for leaders to inform youth and parents of the benefits of out-of-school programming membership (Gill et al., 2009). In addition to providing the guides, leaders should be properly trained and frequent meetings should be held to ensure that leaders remember the purpose of the programming and are given the chance to share their experiences (Gillard & Witt, 2008).

Leaders and educators should evaluate programs and involve teens in program evaluation to help ensure that age appropriate, appealing, and challenging events/activities are incorporated into the out-of-school programming (Acosta & Holt, 1991; Gill et al. 2009; Gillard & Witt, 2008; Harder et al., 2005; Hensley et al., 2007; Lauver & Little, 2005). Many out-of-school programming members find it difficult to participate in the numerous opportunities that are presented to them as they get older and transition from middle school to high school (Weiss, Little, & Bouffard, 2005). One way to compete with other activities is to ensure that all out-of-school program activities and events are age appropriate and present some level of challenge. By allowing youth to be involved in the evaluation process, the chance that youth will buy-in to the program is increased (Gillard & Witt).

## IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Program leaders and educators need to continuously evaluate their programming to insure that activities are age appropriate and that older adolescents are involved in the program evaluation process.

Older adolescent youth are not being involved enough in every aspect of the program management and often do not feel like an integral part of the program. Therefore, out-of-school program administrators should be training their staff about methods to include older youth in the program management process.

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