



## Achieving the HYP missions through youth leadership and participation

### Reasons for action

Enabling students to have opportunities to lead change and participate in decisions can have a positive impact on both individual students and the school community.

Evidence strongly suggests that students in this age group need to be given opportunities to participate in the design and implementation of health promotion programs within their schools.

Young people are also recognised as important mediators for change in adolescent health promotion activities(1).

They can influence their peers in ways that other interventions cannot and therefore participation of young people in any form of health promotion activity is critical.

The Health Promoting Schools Framework also encourages youth participation. Most importantly the literature tells us clearly that health outcomes can be improved when young people are active participants in decision making about issues affecting their health and wellbeing.

### Importance of youth leadership and participation

Throughout the literature there is an increasing recognition of the need and importance for young people to be active participants in a range of decision making processes that affect their lives. Having access to effective youth participation in our communities is important for young people's wellbeing and their sense of belonging, identity and citizenship.

The World Health Organization also suggests that peers are an important part of the environment with which young people interact, thereby forming part of their attitudes, beliefs, intentions and behaviour.

In particular, peer-led interventions may be able to alter the person's perception of the social norms related to the behaviour, or his/her attitudes towards the behaviour(2).

While youth lead programs have had varying degrees of success it is important to note that a review of international youth health projects suggests that a high level of adult participation in the youth-led activity is critical to sustainability.

## **Benefits of youth leadership and participation**

Having access to effective youth participation in our communities is important for young people's wellbeing and their sense of belonging, identity and citizenship. Young people are able to develop skills, confidence and provide a unique perspective while outcomes for policies or programs are improved when young people are involved.

The programs used to inform the HYP resources, and suggested implementation cycle, found there is a range of benefits for students from participating as leaders. For example eat well be active in South Australia found that benefits to students involved in the program includes the development of practical skills in teamwork, communication and leadership,

increased understanding of the environmental, political, physical and social aspects that affect healthy eating choices, being active and understanding social marketing approaches to health promotion.

***“I don't think the project would have gone anywhere without the Ambassadors. They are the project” – Principal involved in It's Your Move!***

## **Models of Youth Leadership**

There is a range of language used when considering youth participation – youth development, citizenship, youth empowerment, youth leadership, youth participation and young people's voices. In simple terms youth participation is about the active engagement of young people throughout their communities.

There is also a range of models of youth participation which are based on theories of youth participation. Participation can vary from simple consultation through to young people being fully involved in decision-making.

The focus of youth participation to achieve the HYP Missions is that of student leadership whereby a team of student leaders will be supported to drive the program and implement the changes within the school.

HYP also encourages participation through students at all levels being actively involved in decision making and consultation about their school, particularly in relation to issues that affect their health and wellbeing.

## **A Health Promoting School: Practical strategies for supporting student leadership in HYP**

HYP recognises all schools operate differently. How your school incorporates student leadership into the achievement of the HYP Missions will be very dependent on the needs of your school; whether you have an existing student leadership group, peer support leaders, a particular health class that could act as student leaders or whether you wish to develop a group of student leaders specifically for HYP.

The student leaders may be senior students or students from across the grades – using students from different grades may be a good strategy for building sustainability for achieving the HYP Missions within your school community. If the student group you decide on is an existing group they may not need any training in student leadership, but might need some support and training to achieve the HYP Missions.

If your school has never had a leadership group or you wish to start up a new group it might be worth thinking about what sort of training and support the students might need. It is really important that the student leaders, however they are selected, have a very clear understanding of what is expected of them. This can be done with a “job description” a HYP student leader’s charter or even in a letter to the student. It’s particularly useful if the students themselves help to define what their role is.

Some suggestion to ensure student leadership works effectively:

- A key adult/teacher needs to be provided with time to support the students and coordinate the group
- The school must have a commitment to student participation/leadership
- The student leaders need training and opportunities to form as a group
- The student Leaders need support from the HYP coordinator and other members of the HYP Mission Team– support may include time, guidance and assistance in implementing actions
- The student leaders need to have a clear understanding of what their task is and what are the expectations and limitations of their role.

These ideas for strategies to implement within secondary schools have been gathered from other projects and resources. They are suggestions to get you started.

Find out more about consulting with young people with The Statewide Youth Collaborative (SYC) group’s Top Ten Tips: SYC’s Guide for Consulting with Young People and SYC’s Consultation: A Guide for Young People which can be found on the DHHS web site

[www.dhhs.tas.gov.au/publichealth/healthy\\_communities/young\\_people](http://www.dhhs.tas.gov.au/publichealth/healthy_communities/young_people)

### **Strategies to create a supportive school environment**

- Student leaders are supported to identify and implement changes to create a healthier school environment
- The school encourages student input into the design/layout of eating and recreational areas.

### **Strategies to create supportive school policy**

- The school has a written policy, endorsed by the school leadership that encourages youth leadership and participation at the school.

### **Strategies to create supportive school ethos**

- Include a statement in the school mission statement about providing an environment that encourages youth leadership and participation
- Encourage staff to use youth engagement strategies
- Empower students to make decisions concerning their school
- Encourage and support staff to attend professional learning about youth leadership and participation

### **Strategies to create supportive school curriculum**

- Students are regularly involved in some decision making about their health and wellbeing learning priorities and this information is used in health and wellbeing planning
- Opportunities to practice and develop leadership skills are available to students.

### **Strategies for partnerships with families, carers and community**

- Invite families and carers to be involved in youth leadership and participation activities
- Consider involving community members or parents to work alongside the student leaders
- Harness opportunities for students to attend events and forums run by outside organisations that build leaderships skills and participation opportunities for students.

### **Case Studies**

The following case studies are programs that have similar objectives to HYP and have been evaluated.

#### ***It's your move!***

It's Your Move! aimed to promote healthy eating patterns, regular physical activity and healthy bodies amongst youth aged 13-17 years; and to improve the capacity of families, schools and community organisations to sustain the promotion of healthy eating and physical activity.

It's your Move! was based on the premise that young people are recognised as important mediator for change in adolescent health promotion activities.

Student ambassadors were a key component of the program. Each of the five It's Your Move! schools recruited a set of five Ambassadors at the start of the implementation phase of the project .

The Ambassadors were guided and supported by their It's Your Move! School Project Officer.

- The Student ambassadors were deemed natural leaders within the school or had the potential to be natural leaders.
- Had an interest in the area of healthy eating and/or physical activity.
- In year level 7,8 or 9 (aged about 14-16).

The recruitment process varied from school-to-school. Some elected to use an expression of interest method where interested students were required to apply for the position addressing selection criteria with a written application.

Other schools opted to hand select potential ambassadors.

The five It's Your Move! schools all recruited ambassadors differently.

The role of the Ambassador encompassed five areas: to implement strategies of the action plan, contribute to the methods of delivery for project strategies, contribute to social marketing messages, advocate for the project in their school and community, and role model the messages of the project.

Training was provided to both the student ambassadors and the teachers.

### ***Eat well be active (EWBA)***

The EWBA program was based on the recognition that young people are capable of contributing to and supporting positive change in their school community.

The EWBA program was based on the following principles in terms of youth participation:

- Young people had a right to participate in decision making and have their say.
- Young people were capable of contributing to, and supporting positive change in their school environment .
- Young people could be empowered by providing them with skills and knowledge to bring about change.
- Young people had the right to participate in an area of concern that directly affected them.

The Youth leadership program (YLP) was the secondary school component of the broader EWBA program. The YLP was designed to increase youth action and leadership on issues that affect their healthy eating and active living choices, both within the high school setting and their local communities. The program recognises that young people are capable of contributing to and supporting positive change and gives them the skills and knowledge to make these changes.

The program involves training a core group of young people (10-12) in a school to develop their own projects and action plans to promote healthy eating and regular physical activity to young people in their school. EWBA implemented three peer education/leadership programs to increase overall student participation in regular healthy eating activities and physical activity at school, through the development of student leaders.

The role of the student leaders was to take a leadership role in implementing change and to develop their own local marketing messages and materials to promote healthy eating and physical activity.

Student leaders received training (three half days) and were then supported by the project coordinator (school staff member) to develop and implement action plans in their schools. EWBA also provides ongoing mentorship and student resources as well as funding to assist the student's implementation plan.

### ***MindMatters***

MindMatters first started in schools in 1997 and is a whole of school approach to mental health and wellbeing. The aim of MindMatters is to build the capacity of schools to promote social and emotional wellbeing, or mental health.

MindMatters recognises student leadership as key part of mental health and wellbeing leadership in schools. There are four main reasons why MindMatters includes a student empowerment focus;

- A rights argument - The United Nations Rights of the Child
- An “apprenticeship in democracy” argument
- An effectiveness argument – improved decision making occurs when young people are part of decision making
- A health promotion argument.

There are four key elements that contributed to the success of student led initiatives:

- a school **commitment**: Development of young people's knowledge and skills
- developing young people's **confidence**
- creation of **opportunities and responsibilities** for action by young people
- providing **active support** (this includes advocating for young people to have their voices heard, providing appropriate advice and support, ensure a supportive environment in which young people are valued and full able to participate and celebrating and acknowledge the strengths and successes of young people.).

### **Key guiding resources**

[The Australian Curriculum](#) – setting consistent national standards to improve learning outcomes for all young Australians.

[The United Nations Convention for the Rights of the Child, 1989](#)

[UNICEF - The State of the World's Children 2011: Adolescence an Age of Opportunity, New York, USA](#)

[The Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians \(2008\)](#)

### **For further information**

Eat well be active Strategy 2011 - 2016

[www.sahealth.sa.gov.au](http://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au)

Mind Matters

[www.mindmatters.edu.au](http://www.mindmatters.edu.au)

### **Appendix**

1 Simmons, A, Bell, A.C., Swinburn, B. (2009) It's Your Move! Implementation report 1 and 3 project Design and capacity Building, WHO Collaborating Centre for Obesity Prevention and Related Research and Training, Deakin University, Geelong.

2 McCall, D. Shannon, M. (1999) Youth Led Health promotion, Youth engagement and Youth participation: A research Review. Tobacco Control Unit, Canada