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Public Health Youth Leadership Academy Program

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Background:

The public health workforce shortage projected that 250,000 health professionals in the US will be in demand by 2020. Studies showed youth-targeted hands-on trainings promote awareness and interest in health career subjects. Peer-delivered youth education is effective in influencing health behaviors.

Purpose:

This one-year Public Health Youth Leadership Academy (PHYLA) aimed to expose youth in the area of public health and provide hands-on training experience.

Method:

Six teen trainees attended the PHYLA. The program included in-person trainings on basics public health, leadership skills, intervention material development and evaluation of its efficacy among their peers, participation in abstract and manuscript development and conference presentation. Mixed-methods were used to evaluate the program. Items from 2013 State and Local Youth Risk Behavior Survey and Perceived Stress Scale-4 (PSS-4) were used to assess efficacy of the materials at baseline and 3 months following baseline among trainees' peers (N=67). Focus group interviews with the trainees (N=6) were conducted to learn and understand about their experience with the program. Descriptive analysis was conducted on survey data.

Results:

Themes from the qualitative data described changes in leadership skills, perception of, and interest in public health among the trainees. Survey findings revealed positive trends in increase of trainees' vegetable consumption, physical activities, and confidence level.

Conclusions:

These formative results suggest that PHYLA program helped teens to learn about public health careers and provided hands on experience in intervention material development and its evaluation. Findings add to emerging participatory youth programs addressing health workforce development and health promotion.