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Teen Outreach Program Activity

Savannah A. Sehenuk
Boise State University

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Abstract

This project outlines research and first hand accounts from non-profit organizations and teens and young adults both in and out of the system. Using this research, I have created a sample event in order to aid in getting more teens involved in outreach programs that will help with both life skills and having fun and responsible peer groups to aid in development.

Keywords: teen, outreach, non-profit

Introduction to your Capstone Project

Youth and teens are amongst some of the most vulnerable demographic groups while remaining the ones adults fail to understand in the way of improving their lives and teaching them valuable skills. Each generation changes so much from the last that the adults running youth and teen outreach groups are out of touch with what may be successful in reducing the stigma of those who attend teen outreach programs in order to achieve their goals. My plan for this project is to educate myself more on why these teen outreach groups are important and then bring together ideas from teens and current outreach groups to take their successes as a new approach to teen outreach programs. A book titled Understanding and Mentoring the Hurt Teenager outlines how each teen is different and sometimes just caring about them is not as important as the approach to which you help them succeed (Baranovich 45). The goal of this is not to make those who are working in teen outreach feel they are failing, but rather to give the grace that is difficult to accurately assess the needs of youth and teens. My hope is that by learning from those who have more expertise in this field as well as knowing what the overall impact is for those who are failed by this system, I will be able to create a unique approach in the way of proposing events that will get more teens effectively involved in these groups.

Section 1: Innovative Approach

The main perspectives that are important to this project's success were from those who are already involved in these groups and those who attend them. Peer pressure and upbringing are the top two factors that lead to the necessity of caring for teens' well-being (Baranovich 36). According to psychologists in Pediatrics who deal with teens that are experiencing this peer

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pressure, it is important to speak to them about tough issues like sex, alcohol, drugs, and petty crimes instead of remaining naive that they will not learn about these on their own (Scripps par. 3). It is important to note that teens make their own choices but having a good role model that teaches them skills to avoid the temptations of peer pressure is what keeps them from making poor choices when they are inevitably in those situations. In an interview with Sam Winegar, a former attendee of teen outreach groups, she states that they treated you like a child or a criminal and there was no in between. They focused more on people who made mistakes rather than people getting put in hard situations. She said that she learned some valuable skills like getting a job and saving money, but did not usually have fun attending these groups (Winegar). I was also allowed to sit in on an entrance interview to be admitted to therapy and group sessions done by NuView undercover with a current patient, Anonymous (age 23). He has been in this system since he was kicked out of his house at 16 and has attended countless teen outreach groups. This allowed me to get a view of how these outreach groups talk to their attendees without them trying to “put on a show” for someone doing a project. These groups are very private about what goes on because there are many legal matters that could cause investigation and I was asked not to use names for any current employees as it could be dangerous for their safety. They asked questions about his entire life, asking about any trauma that could have been attributed to his behavior. After getting kicked out and having nowhere to turn, he had gone to teen outreach groups for help and a place to live. He found that they would either put him in the social service system or they could not help him regardless of him wanting to be independent.

Having talked to a few groups, many teen outreach groups could really not do much in the way of helping teens for more than a couple hours without insurance. Insight is an organization that reached out to tell me about events they hold that invite teens that have been attending to bring in their families to have them be involved as well. They play games and also engage in helpful tools for the parents to better understand their teens (Insight Interview). Many groups were hesitant to communicate with me due to being reprimanded in the media due to negative stigma around teen outreach groups.

The main issue with the current approach to teen outreach is that it is either fun or a learning experience rather than both. My goal is to show a way where something can be fun as well as teach lessons that are valuable. What most groups are failing to realize is that simply giving youth and teens a place that is safe and has good peers makes a big difference in how they make choices. The groups that teens hang out with have the greatest impact on what they do in the future (Ciranka par. 6). My approach is unique as I am integrating fun with learning which is something that groups are attempting to do but faltering on as they lack the insight of being closely linked to the teen demographic and getting intel from those who are attending or have attended these teen outreach groups.

Section 2: Emotional Intelligence

- Does the project I am doing indicate awareness of self and awareness of others? Do my project consider the emotional intelligence of the audience?
- Is it valuable to others?

I have acknowledged that I lack the experience of knowing the business side of keeping a teen outreach group growing and my main concern is making sure that the teens' issues are being addressed. This includes their priority of it being fun as well as it being educational. My idea is taking teens in for a "sleepover prom" which would allow teens to have a safe and more affordable place to hang out and have that "prom" type experience for those who could not necessarily afford it but also having the whole experience lead into a bonfire at night which teaches teens about life skills. This takes both the fun part of a dance and makes it also applicable to life skills and showing teens they do not need risky behavior to have fun.

In an anonymous interview I did with an employee of NuView Recovery, she discussed the consequences of youth and teens not being taught about the dangers of peer pressure early on. She deals with a lot of teens and young adults in her program that are stuck in the world of "body-brokering" which essentially is paying people to stay in the cycle of addiction and recovery by paying people to do large amounts of drugs and then apply for an intensive inpatient detox. While in this detox, they run their insurance which makes the company money. Once the patient graduates the program they are paid on average \$4,000 and then encouraged to repeat this process. They also hire some of these people to market to others they know and get a bonus for recruiting. These criminals are convincing teens and young adults with nowhere to go and usually a past of drug use to continue this cycle for profit (Anonymous Informant 1). There is a documentary on this process as well as more information comes out and more people are willing to reveal this system. This movie is called Body Brokers and sheds more light on the multi billion dollar industry of taking underprivileged youth and trapping them in a life of drugs and

crime. In most cases the only way people get out of this life is by overdose according to a NuView employee (2021 Personal Communication). The value that these teen outreach groups can play on someone's life by keeping them out of situations like this can completely change their trajectory and just might save their life.

Section 3: Creative Thinking

I did not entirely create my own framework, but developed on systems that are already in place and put in improvement upon talking to teens and multiple groups which I think will make teen outreach group activities more effective and appealing to the teens they are trying to reach. My approach is unique in the fact that it takes the priority of teens which is to have fun and be cool and combines it with the purpose of teen outreach groups which is to teach teens skills and help them in life by giving them a safe environment.

Section 4: Your Innovative Solution

I created the framework somewhat from my own experience of not being able to afford to go to prom, but always wanting to. I also knew a lot of my peers thought that prom was overrated and I wanted to create the same type of experience that was not so tied to school or limited to people at your school as well. All grades would be welcome which is not the case at a school prom. Prom dress drives are also fairly common so students could come and wear one of the group's dresses or suits for the night if they could not afford it. Having multiple types of music would make it more inclusive. I talked to ex-students at Saugus High school who did not go to prom and the main reasons were pricing and tackiness of music and style. By including styles of music like EDM, R&B or rap, combined with the dress and suit drive, this would

prompt more students to go. After the dance portion which would already get teens in the door by appealing to their complaints and not being restricted by school traditions, I propose a supervised sleepover in the facility. After the dance, a bonfire type setting (depending on location and fire code) could prompt discussion on life skills. Leaders of the group and supervisors could reflect on the fun night that was had without drugs or alcohol and in a responsible way, showing that being responsible does not have to feel like a burden or a punishment, but could actually be fulfilling. This is different from other activities that groups are currently having because there is little time for reflection after. Having teens away from their family for a whole night can also lead to more opportunities for them to open up about things going on at home or problems they are dealing with in a way that does not feel forced to a limited time.

Section 5: Results

The benefits to the stakeholders varies but overall the teens and outreach group which mostly worked with me (Insight Mental Health Recovery) will be to help teens have a better future by keeping them away from risky behaviors. Insight will benefit from this type of event and research by being able to get more teens to come to the event and reach more teens in a way that they will enjoy. Ultimately these teen outreach groups want to help teens and my approach will help them accomplish this. The teens themselves are another stakeholder as they are the ones attending groups. They will benefit by having a safe and affordable place to have fun and also learn things that will help them in the future while not feeling dorky or coming off as needy for going to these events. These events will help them feel more included rather than outcasted for relying on teen outreach groups for help.

I have submitted this plan to the Insight group and have not yet gotten a response, but upon talking to residents at NuView recovery, they think that events like this would have kept them out of trouble more and they wished they had learned more skills and had better influences growing up. I have learned more from this project about the life following failed teens in the teen outreach system than I thought I would and have realized more than ever how important they are. Teens rely on groups like these for their sense of belonging and to not get as many teens in them as possible is unfortunate and should be helped if possible.

Section 6: Different Approaches

Ideally, I can always make improvements to this approach after events are held. More improvements can always be made until every teen that needs these programs is reached. In the future, I could plan a variety of events and get more expertise on how they play out. The result was as I had hoped so far. The teens who would be benefiting from these events seem excited by the idea and would like to attend similar events. This was my goal, to have teens see teen outreach events as fun and cool rather than embarrassing. I would love to get more involved in teen outreach programs and am actually developing a nonprofit organization that involves teaching teens and young adults about different hobbies in order to give them a creative outlet and to focus energy on a skill.

Section 7: Conclusion

- Write the conclusion of your paper and include (1) what you learned (2) who benefited and (3) what skills you acquired.

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I have learned more than ever how important effective teen outreach programs are. These groups have the power to make a long lasting impact on teens and even save their lives. I take so much for granted that I have had the privilege to do so much when some teens are struggling to have a group of friends not pushing them into crime or struggling to find a place to live. I have become very passionate for the stakeholders I have tried to benefit in making this project. I have made lifelong friends that have told me that teens will benefit from my activity ideas prompting me to begin developing my own non profit organization. As much as I hope this project has benefited teens and outreach groups by giving them well researched and coached ideas, it has also given me another purpose. I have acquired the skill of empathy for these teen groups that need help and an insight on how to go about touchy situations that people do not always feel comfortable talking about. I have learned a skill for being someone that people can talk to and having empathy for them no matter the background. I have met people from all walks of life through this project and have learned so much from them that I did not anticipate.

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