



WASHINGTON STATE  
UNIVERSITY  
EXTENSION



## YOUTH ADVOCATES FOR HEALTH

### YA4-H!

#### BY THE NUMBERS

Teen Teachers reported overall increases in healthy eating behaviors:

- 100% reported increased effective communication skills/abilities.
- 91% reported possessing teaching skills and abilities.
- 71% reported eating more vegetables.
- 71% reported eating more whole grains.
- 57% reported drinking more water.
- 57% reported eating fewer snack foods like chips, cookies, and candy.

### 2015

#### ISSUE

Despite research showing the benefits of healthy eating, obesity and overweight status in children and adolescents has tripled nationally in the past 30 years. In Washington, 11% of youth ages 10 to 17 are obese, and only 28% of youth this age participate in vigorous physical activity for 20 minutes daily (Levi, Segal, Laurent and Kohn; 2012). Among youth in grades 8 through 12, only 25% reported eating five or more fruits or vegetables per day, and in grades 6 through 12 less than one-half of the youth reported 60 minutes of exercise 5 or more days a week (Washington State Healthy Youth Survey; 2008).

#### RESPONSE

Washington State University Extension *Youth Advocates for Health* (YA4-H!) is a statewide effort to address the developmental risk factor of obesity among children and youth. The primary mission of YA4-H! is to promote healthy eating behaviors in children and adolescents 8 to 18 years old. Other goals include promoting positive youth development in teens (as teen teachers) (Balsano et al.; 2009; Catalano et al.; 2004; ) and building healthy youth-adult partnerships (Handy & Rodgers; 2011; Lee & Murdock; 2001; Libby et al.; 2005; Zeldin et al.; 2005; Mellanby et al.; 2000).

Four Washington counties (Spokane, Kittitas, King, and Pacific/Wahkiakum) participated, with county educators, staff, volunteers, and teen teachers in the initial statewide training. County groups then recruited additional teen teachers; secured local sites; and continued to train, practice, and prepare teen teachers to deliver the nutrition program to younger youth. Participating teens received stipends at the end of the program.

YA4-H! teen teachers delivered the *Choose Health: Food, Fun and Fitness* (CHFFF) nutrition program to youth ages 8 to 12. The Teens-as-Teachers (TAT) program was an additional resource for the teen teachers.

YA4-H! included six phases of (voluntary) evaluation including teen teacher pre-implementation and post-implementation surveys and interviews, program recipient end-of-lesson surveys, and program staff/volunteer surveys.

Future program development will include streamlining survey methodology/activities; increasing program monitoring and technical assistance between staff/volunteers; developing teen teacher recruitment and retention plans; developing a statewide marketing plan to help secure appropriate program sites; securing additional funding for teen teacher incentives, recruitment and marketing efforts; and providing multicultural food alternatives for CHFFF lessons.



## QUOTES

“The more I learn about the CHFFF curriculum and the more I learn about health and nutrition in general, the more I can apply it to my own life and see the results myself.”

“Our adult partner has helped a lot, like making sure that we know how to deal with different kinds of kids and different kinds of situations.”

“At the last school, a girl came to 5 out of the 6 lessons that we taught. Every week she’d come back and talk about how she used what she learned. ... It was pretty cool that we made that much of an impact.”

## TEAMS & RESOURCES

<http://ext100.wsu.edu/2015/02/12/ya4-h-resources-and-team>

## IMPACTS

Before implementing the program, teen teachers consistently reported being unsure of their knowledge, skills, and abilities to teach younger youth. However, post-implementation results showed a pattern of improved health knowledge, self-perception, and increased skills/abilities such as communicating with others and public speaking. Post-implementation data also show that teen teachers reported increases in positive youth development constructs (e.g., pro-social values, future orientation, contribution to others).

Participants also consistently reported that because of their YA4-H! experience, they view themselves as leaders, mentors, and people who can help others. Analysis of the program shows that teen teachers’ levels of comfort, confidence, and teaching skills increased after the full program.

Pre- and post-survey results, interviews, open-ended comments, observations, and notes illustrated increases in health knowledge and healthy eating behaviors among participating teens and younger youth such as reading nutrition labels and engaging in more physical activity on a regular basis. We found that teen teachers and younger youth demonstrated increases in health/nutrition awareness, skills such as food preparation, and increased motivation and desire to eat healthy.

Evaluation revealed emerging aspects of both positive youth development and youth-adult partnership frameworks. Teen teachers and participating adults consistently reported that the initial statewide training was a key component, and the CHFFF curriculum and TAT materials were considered highly useful resources.

The YA4-H! pilot program demonstrated initial success in achieving its mission and targeted goals. We found, overall, that when youth are trained, given a stipend for their involvement, and provided a high level of support, structure, and organization to teach younger youth, they gain important developmental benefits (Lee and Murdock 2001).



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