

# Healthy Young People

## Youth Participation and Leadership

Having a voice, being able to raise concerns and having these concerns addressed are an important part of young people's wellbeing. Health outcomes can be improved when young people are active participants in decisions that affect their health and wellbeing.

Youth participation and youth leadership are also known by other terms including youth development, citizenship, youth empowerment and young people's voices. In schools it is often referred to as student voice.

Youth participation can vary from simple consultation through to full involvement in decision-making. For examples of youth participation strategies and to see how Tasmanian young people define youth participation see [Youth Matter!](#)

### Youth participation and leadership in HYP

The Healthy Young People resources and Mission steps provide an opportunity for young people to participate and take leadership in creating a health promoting school or service.

Young people are empowered and encouraged to:

- Research health information
- Identify how the environment currently supports or limits healthy behaviours
- Identify opportunities to inform and influence policy, practice and environment
- Plan, implement and evaluate strategies to make healthy choices easier.

### Why youth participation and leadership?

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. The health of young people can be improved when they have a say and have their opinion heard and valued.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.communities.tas.gov.au/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0022/37354/180933-DoC-Youth-Matter-FInal-WCAG\\_-002.pdf](https://www.communities.tas.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0022/37354/180933-DoC-Youth-Matter-FInal-WCAG_-002.pdf)

## Learning outcomes

Health promotion programs led by young people can develop practical skills in teamwork, communication and leadership. They may also lead to increased understanding of the environmental, political, physical and social aspects that affect choices and develop an understanding of social marketing approaches to health promotion.<sup>i</sup>

## Student wellbeing

Youth participation and leaderships can have significant benefits for young people's wellbeing including a positive sense of belonging, self-identity and self-esteem. Young people can develop skills, confidence and provide a unique perspective and improve outcomes for policies or programs. For more information on wellbeing see the [Tasmanian Child and Youth Wellbeing Framework<sup>2</sup>](#) and the Department of Education's [Child and Student Wellbeing Strategy<sup>3</sup>](#).

## Peer influence

The World Health Organization identifies that peers are an important part of the environment with which young people interact, thereby forming part of their attitudes, beliefs, intentions and behaviour. Young people can influence their peers in ways that other interventions cannot. Therefore, participation of young people in any form of health promotion activity is critical. In particular, peer-led interventions may be able to alter young people's perceptions of social norms or attitudes towards behaviours.<sup>ii</sup>

## Supporting youth participation and leadership

Young people need to be given opportunities to participate in the design and implementation of health promotion programs within their schools but to ensure the success and sustainability a high level of adult participation is critical.

When running the HYP Missions, it is the role of the teacher or other staff member to support and encourage young people. It is important that there is capacity and commitment to implement changes that are suggested.

## A whole school approach to youth participation and leadership

Here are some ideas to embed youth participation and leadership in your school.

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<sup>2</sup> [https://www.strongfamiliesafekids.tas.gov.au/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0023/5549/1-Tasmanian-Child-and-Youth-Wellbeing-Framework-Web.pdf](https://www.strongfamiliesafekids.tas.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0023/5549/1-Tasmanian-Child-and-Youth-Wellbeing-Framework-Web.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> [documentcentre.education.tas.gov.au/Documents/Child%20and%20Student%20Wellbeing%20Strategy.pdf](http://documentcentre.education.tas.gov.au/Documents/Child%20and%20Student%20Wellbeing%20Strategy.pdf)

## School environment

- Support student leaders to identify and implement changes to create a healthier school environment.
- Encourage student input into the design/layout of eating and recreational areas.

## School policy

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

## 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.

## Curriculum

- Regularly involve students in some decision making about their health and wellbeing learning priorities and this information is used in health and wellbeing planning
- Enable students to practice and develop leadership skills.

## 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.
- Promote student attendance at events and forums run by outside organisations to build leadership skills and participation opportunities for students.

For more information see the Youth Network of Tasmania's [Youth Participation and Leadership Organisation Resource](#)<sup>4</sup> and [SYC's guide to consulting with young people](#)<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> 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.

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

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<sup>4</sup> [www.ynot.org.au/sites/default/files/ynot/Final%20-%20Youth%20Leadership%20-%20Organisation%20Resource.pdf](http://www.ynot.org.au/sites/default/files/ynot/Final%20-%20Youth%20Leadership%20-%20Organisation%20Resource.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> [www.ynot.org.au/sites/default/files/ynot/FINAL%20SYC%20Top%20Ten%20Tips%20Pamphlet.pdf](http://www.ynot.org.au/sites/default/files/ynot/FINAL%20SYC%20Top%20Ten%20Tips%20Pamphlet.pdf)