

PEER LEADERSHIP PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

WHAT ARE PEER LEADERSHIP PROGRAMS?

The challenges of the future are unquestionably great ones, bringing widespread recognition of the need for effective leaders in all sectors of society. Although all people have some leadership potential, the skills necessary to be leaders do not necessarily emerge in the natural course of one's life. Institutions that provide services to youth have unique opportunities to foster leadership in young people by creating programs that provide opportunities for leadership development.

The rationale for youth leadership development is threefold:

- to provide opportunities for students with leadership potential to develop, refine, and practice those skills
- to enable students to experience their power to effect change by exercising leadership in their environment through formal and informal interventions
- to create future societal leaders

There are a wide variety of programs to develop peer leadership in the educational community. While the primary purpose of some programs is to build general leadership ability in youth, others exist within a particular context or program focus, such as the prevention of risk behaviors or the improvement of school climate. While some programs stress the development of leadership in the individual student, others recognize the importance of group processes and achievement as primary. Despite these differences, all peer programs generally share the underlying principle that peers exert a powerful influence on the development of the attitudes and behaviors of one another.

Peer leadership programs empower students to create positive change in their environments, are student-led, and thrive within communities that value and support the program in word and action. These programs provide potential student leaders with opportunities to refine and build upon their leadership skills, gain new knowledge, develop new attitudes, and gain experiential practice in their role as leaders.

In order to prepare students to be tomorrow's leaders, peer leadership programs require a strong focus on the leadership development process – the recruitment, education and training, and skill development of student leaders – and a lesser focus on the results of their efforts. Although peer leaders are powerful catalysts for change in their schools and communities, leadership development has lasting societal benefits that extend far beyond the immediate projects peer leaders plan and implement (Boccia, 1997).

GOALS OF PEER LEADERSHIP

At the earliest planning phases, program goals should be established that reflect the potential immediate and long-term benefits that can be derived from peer leadership. Immediate benefits for school communities include utilizing the powerful and effective resource of peer education and leadership to effect change in targeted areas of the school community, such as violence, bullying, name-calling and other negative behaviors that impede the educational process for many students. Leadership programs also have long-term benefits for youth and society in general by giving students the skills to become future leaders in education, business, government, and community. Program goals affirm the value of leadership by providing opportunities for students to develop and

practice their skills as leaders.

An initial planning process, which includes the development of overall program goals and processes for student recruitment, training, and program implementation, is central to the success of peer leadership programs. A lack of clear goals and objectives has been cited as one of the key reasons why peer education programs fail (Walker and Avis, 1999).

Although there are variations in program models and the contexts within which they exist, the following are general goals that promote success and are characteristic of exemplary peer leadership programs:

- to provide students with opportunities to develop and practice leadership and social action skills in order to become catalysts for change;
- to provide a forum where young people feel safe to learn about and discuss important issues;
- to provide students with opportunities to develop awareness and understanding of community issues, problems, and resources;
- to use positive peer influence to promote a healthy, supportive, and respectful educational environment;
- to develop social responsibility in youth with opportunities to provide community service and model pro-social behavior;
- to increase young people's self-esteem, as well as critical thinking and problem-solving abilities through opportunities for real-life application in the school and community;
- to provide opportunities for the development of student-led programs to educate peers about relevant issues that impact the school climate.

COMPONENTS OF SUCCESSFUL PROGRAMS

1. Clearly defined goals and objectives

The sustainability of peer leadership programs often depends on the ability of students and staff to demonstrate that they have met and/or exceeded program goals and objectives. In developing program goals, consideration should be given to establishing a process to evaluate progress and demonstrate accomplishments. Peer leaders should have the opportunity to be involved in the development of programmatic goals (i.e. what they hope to accomplish and how). The ongoing educational and skill development processes and service activities of peer leaders should be designed in relation to the established goals of the program.

2. A context or area of focus

Peer leadership programs are most successful in accomplishing their goals when the program exists within a particular context or area of focus within which youth can develop and practice leadership skills. An identified community need that is of concern to youth can provide potential peer leaders with opportunities to engage in the leadership process as social change agents. The context of the program provides opportunities for students to experience their abilities to create positive change, while developing skills that will be of benefit to them in the future.

3. Broad support from the school community

Peer leaders' ability to create positive change in their environment is fostered by the presence of support from the many constituencies that comprise the school community. This support should include administrators, faculty, staff, parents, students, and other community members. Support can

include resources, such as time, space, and funding, and non-material support, including the dissemination of information about the program benefits and accomplishments. Support for the program is strengthened and sustained by keeping decision-makers informed of the activities, needs, and benefits of the program.

4. Consistent, committed adult leadership

Adult peer leadership coordinators are key to the success of the program. Coordinators should volunteer or be recruited, based on a high level of interest in student development and in the particular area of focus of the peer leadership program. Although many schools and youth organizations delegate this role to a new faculty or staff member, successful programs encourage staff self-selection by providing initial information, support, and adequate compensation in order to communicate recognition of the importance of the coordinator position. The coordinator provides consistency, commitment, leadership, and guidance necessary to the success of the peer leadership program, so careful consideration should be given to the selection of a staff person or persons to fill this role.

5. An integrated educational process

Students develop leadership skills in a process that occurs over time. The potential benefits of peer influence are maximized by providing a structured, educational approach that includes opportunities for skill development and practical application. A recommended starting place for this process is an initial training program that provides both opportunities for students to develop understanding of the issues and leadership skills. The initial training can introduce the concept of teamwork, as peer leaders become a group working together to accomplish common goals. The initial training is followed by an ongoing educational process, as peer leaders meet to continue learning, practicing skills, and planning programs. This process is essential, and the approach should engage students by being interactive and action and/or games-oriented.

6. Student-led program and activities

Students develop and practice leadership skills as they learn the tasks associated with administration of the peer leadership program. Program success is promoted by establishing and clearly articulating levels of student autonomy, extending the responsibility of students to all aspects of the program, including public relations, fundraising, program planning, logistical arrangements, and administrative duties, such as attendance and record-keeping. Although initial goals and objectives may have been established by a steering committee, it is important for peer leaders to have opportunities to set their own goals for the delivery of peer projects and programs in their schools and communities.

7. Opportunities for reflection and ongoing evaluation of efforts

Providing opportunities for youth to reflect on their experiences as peer leaders and to evaluate their progress individually and as a group strengthens the process of leadership development. Establishing measurable program goals and developing a process to evaluate progress are important elements. Peer leaders' learning can be enhanced through opportunities for reflection through journaling activities. Journals enable peer leaders to explore relevant questions relating to program content that may have been raised in small and large group discussions. Establishing a regular process where peer leaders, participants, and coordinators can share both positive and constructive feedback enhances leadership skills. Written evaluations should be developed in conjunction with program goals for the purpose of gathering data about the success in accomplishing those goals.

WHO ARE POTENTIAL PEER LEADERS?

School leadership opportunities are often made available to a small group of select students who already hold traditional positions of leadership in their schools. Although these positional student leaders may be able to influence a portion of the student population, there are many groups of students with whom they have little, if any, influence. Students from different cliques or social groups may even intentionally choose opposing behaviors to those promoted by “typical” student leaders.

Whether student leaders are nominated, self-selected, or recruited, the composition of the group should be developed through a thoughtful process. Based on an exploration and understanding of the true qualities of leadership, schools and youth organizations should strive to include diverse groups of students who are representative of all groups in the school and community. Many of those students who reside closer to the fringes of school culture, who do not join clubs, play sports, or inhabit the mainstream of school life, demonstrate an ability to influence the thinking and actions of many peers in their social circles. Because leadership skills are developed through the program’s educational process, it is more important to identify the potential for these skills in students, than to link leadership potential to demonstrated academic or athletic achievement. Students who have demonstrated ability to influence their peers through negative behaviors, such as bullying or harassing their peers, should not be automatically excluded from leadership opportunities. If so-called “negative” leaders are successful in changing their own attitudes and behaviors, they can become powerful agents for change in the school.

Effective leadership skills include:

- the ability to influence others;
- the ability to encourage others to establish and achieve goals;
- empathy toward the experiences and ideas of others;
- a sense of purpose or direction and a vision

for the group;

- a willingness to take risks in the face of challenges.

Peer leadership programs that include diverse groups of students have the potential to create widespread institutional change and communicate the value of a school community where differences are accepted and respected. Bullying, harassment, and hate behaviors affect all members of the school community, and peer leadership programs that incorporate the experiences and perspectives of all student groups hold promise for creating widespread institutional change.

RESEARCH ON PEER LEADERSHIP PROGRAMS

Because of the great number of variables, quantitative evaluation of peer leadership programs can be challenging. Abundant anecdotal evidence is available from students directly involved in these programs, from cohort groups, and from adult members of schools and communities. When the components that promote program success are present, anecdotal evidence about the efficacy and benefits of peer leadership programs is overwhelmingly positive. The following comments from school leaders are typical:

“Not only is the message these students spread positive and constructive in and of itself, but those who have received the training gain a self-awareness and confidence in all their activities. They have truly become leaders” (High School Coordinator of Student Affairs).

“I think there have been changes and sometimes they’re hard to quantify, but we have a lot of new groups in the school . . . We have kids who are working together on a project . . . who would not have been working together three years ago. So, it’s funneling the energies toward something positive. And meanwhile, you’re creating an atmosphere for kids to get to know each other and to

WHAT STUDENTS HAVE TO SAY ABOUT PEER LEADERSHIP

“We can each make a difference. With honest communication, teamwork, understanding, perseverance, and initiative, coupled with resources and organized support, a leader can direct others toward positive change. A true leader inspires and encourages others to embrace all challenges eagerly as opportunities for personal growth and positive change.”

– Sukanya Lahiri¹, non-traditional student leader,
Winchester, Massachusetts

“Now I feel like I could stick up for myself and others more so that there is less prejudice in our school. We can help each other out when someone is being picked on and say something like, ‘Hey, that’s not cool.’”

– participant in a workshop for 9th graders conducted by
A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE® Institute Peer Trainers

“By listening to my classmates, I learned about myself and my prejudices. I have work to do.”

– high school student participant in the BRIDGES
School Inter-Ethnic Relations Program

Adults need to realize that adolescents are not just kids – they are the future. They are people with ideas and minds of their own who can accomplish great things if given the chance. That chance is what adults can provide; the chance to make a responsible decision or the chance for their voice to be heard can spark leadership skills that lie dormant in an adolescent.

– from Megan’s Essay²

appreciate each other’s differences . . . “
(Middle School Principal).

Current research bears out this positive anecdotal evidence by demonstrating the power and ability of student leaders to influence the behaviors and attitudes of their peers. In a study of Chicago area children who participated in a violence prevention program created and led by teens, participants were found to be significantly less prone to and less supportive of violence than the study’s control group (Sheehan et al., 1999). The control group demonstrated an increase in the development of both attitudes and behaviors associated with violence and aggression. The school-aged children who participated in this peer-led mentoring program avoided an increase in attitudes that support violence and demonstrated a decreased tendency in developing aggressive behaviors. The study, which assessed the effectiveness of peer-

mentoring in modifying the attitudes and behaviors of pre-adolescents, empowered teens by giving them independence in designing and presenting the activities and lessons they taught.

A strong peer leadership program has the potential to create an environment where peers can maximize their abilities to create change and, by taking action, can have a measurable impact on school climate and peer relationships. Studies have confirmed these positive benefits, including the mastery of knowledge and skills to intervene on behalf of other students and the willingness of peer leaders to actually intervene (Stevens et al., 2000). Additional studies have indicated that comprehensive peer-led conflict resolution programs have resulted in a decreased number of fights and less physical violence in general, increased cooperation among students, improvements in classroom climate, and lower rates of suspension (Peterson and Sciba, 2000).

¹ Author of The development of nontraditional student leadership. In *Students Taking the Lead: The Challenges and Rewards of Empowering Students in Schools*, edited by Judith A. Boccia, No. 4, Summer 1997. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

² van Linden, J.A. and Fertman, C.I. (1998). Megan’s essay. In *Youth Leadership: A Guide to Understanding Leadership Development in Adolescence*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Research designed to measure effectiveness of peer leadership programs has not been consistently positive, however. A number of studies failed to establish statistically significant changes in student attitudes and behaviors. The *National Study of Delinquency Prevention in Schools*, published in 2000, suggests that if interventions that have the potential to work are shown to be ineffective, it is likely that flawed implementation is a large part of the reason. This finding adds strength to the rationale for providing adequate initial planning time to establish goals, identify program coordinators, and build support across the school or community. According to the study, the success of program implementation is improved by the presence of the following indicators (Gottfredson et al., 2000):

- extensive and high quality training
- program supervision
- administrative support
- integration of program activities into regular curricula
- use of implementation manuals
- local planning, local implementation, and use of relevant local information

GUIDELINES FOR IMPLEMENTING A PEER LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

Initial Planning: the Steering Committee

The decision to initiate a peer leadership program benefits from a process that involves a representative cross-section of the community of the school or youth organization. It is recommended that interested individuals form a planning group, referred to here as a *steering committee*, that includes administrators, educators, staff, parents, students, and other community members. The steering committee should include the involvement of diverse groups of students from the earliest stages of planning.

Particular tasks to be completed by the steering committee include:

- conducting an assessment of the

organizational climate,

- assessing the organization's needs,
- establishing initial program goals,
- exploring program models, and
- developing processes for the identification of a program coordinator(s) and student participants.

Throughout the school year, the steering committee can continue to meet periodically to provide support and resources to the program, assist with tasks such as fundraising and recruitment and selection of potential peer leaders, and provide advocacy and general assistance in addressing challenges or concerns that may arise.

Conducting a Needs Assessment

Identifying a peer leadership program model that has a good fit with an organization is facilitated by conducting a needs assessment. Information can be gathered through written forms or surveys, through focus group discussions, and by ongoing discussion among steering committee members who contribute their own unique perspectives regarding the experiences and needs of young people in the school and community. The involvement of students in the assessment process promotes greater accuracy and relevance in the findings and conclusions of the needs assessment.

Establishing Initial Program Goals and Objectives

Following the gathering and compilation of information through a needs assessment, the steering committee should establish a set of initial goals and expectations for the peer leadership program. It is important at this stage of the planning process to develop consensus about the roles and activities of peer leaders, the desired outcomes for both peer leaders and the community, and the structure for the program. Program goals should reflect the underlying purpose of peer leadership, which is to provide opportunities for youth to practice leadership

skills, model pro-social behavior, engage in community service, and experience their abilities to be change agents in their schools and communities.

Some important questions to consider include the following:

Will the program address a particular community need or focus on one particular content area?

What do we hope to accomplish by implementing a peer leadership program?

Will peer leaders form an established extracurricular program that requires meeting time before or after school hours?

Will peer leaders participate in a credit-bearing leadership class during school hours that requires a formal curriculum?

Will peer leaders be involved in designing, planning, and leading programs or projects for younger children?

Will the primary expectation for peer leaders be one-on-one interventions and responses to a particular issue, such as bullying or name-calling?

Will the emphasis of the program be on student development, student delivery of services, or both?

Exploring Options and Selecting a Program Model

Section IV of this guide, *Peer Leadership Programs*, provides a general description of peer leadership program models and specific programmatic and contact information for some peer leadership programs currently operating at schools and youth organizations across the U.S. Coordinators of these programs can provide additional information and resources that will be

useful in selecting, establishing, restructuring, or promoting the continuation of a peer leadership program. A program model should be selected based on identified needs, program goals, and climate and structure of the school or organization.

Securing Necessary Resources and Building a Coalition of Support

Peer leadership program models vary greatly in terms of cost, resources, and time requirements. Often programs require certain start-up costs that decrease over time, including an initial training program, often conducted by an outside sponsoring agency. Additional costs can include program materials or manuals, stipends for coordinators, and material costs for supplies, such as chart paper, markers, and occasional refreshments.

In addition to financial resources, peer leadership programs require resources of time and space for training, meetings, and program activities, and human resources from the school or youth service organization. The ultimate success of peer leaders in bringing about positive change rests largely on the level of support they enjoy from the various constituencies that comprise their school and community environment. Peer leaders who are working to intervene in incidents of name-calling or bullying in their schools are far more effective when they know they can depend on the support of teachers and administrators. Peer leaders expected to mediate conflicts between peers require support that recognizes the value of these efforts in improving the school climate for all students. Peer leaders planning programs or classroom presentations require the support of school staff who recognize the educational value of peer leaders' efforts in the context of the curriculum.

The building of broad-based support for the activities of peer leaders requires a conscious and deliberate plan that is promoted by ongoing communication of strong support from the administration. Support is also strengthened by having peer leaders to give members of the school community information about the program and having them experience some of the

activities of the peer leadership program. Initial presentations at faculty or staff meetings and presentations for Boards of Education or community boards help to build support for the program.

Identifying Program Coordinator

An effective peer leadership coordinator is a key element of a successful program. The coordinator must understand and be able to balance organizational oversight of the program and guide students through a process where these elements become peer-led and peer-directed. Because these programs are designed to promote the learning and practice of leadership skills, peer leaders benefit from having responsibility for all aspects of the program. Key responsibilities of a program coordinator are delegating, confirming that tasks are underway, providing feedback and suggestions, and guiding students to learn from both their successes and failures.

Important tasks for a peer leadership coordinator include:

- empowering, coaching, and being an advocate for young people;
- modeling respect and pro-social behavior and attitudes;
- valuing, validating, and providing feedback to peer leaders;
- leading a process that teaches both content and skills;
- being aware of important issues facing youth.

The inclination to “assign” the role of peer leadership coordinator to a new staff person whose time is not yet over-committed is not always the best way to proceed. A more open selection process will facilitate identifying a coordinator who possesses a level of motivation and commitment needed to promote program success. The coordinator’s position is a challenging one with multiple responsibilities; the school or sponsoring organization can communicate its recognition of the importance of this role and demonstrate commitment to the

program by providing adequate compensation, that can include stipends, recognition, and other benefits.

Determining a Process for Selection or Recruitment of Peer Leaders

Program organizers should develop a process to interest and involve students able to bring a variety of perspectives and exercise influence with their peers. Beginning with a balance that reflects differences in gender, religion, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and different abilities, peer leader groups should also include non-traditional leaders from many social groups, neighborhoods, and communities. Including potential leaders who represent all groups in the school or community will contribute to the program’s ability to influence the greatest number of students.

Schools and youth service organizations can use one or a combination of the following processes to identify potential peer leaders:

Self-selection – Some practitioners believe it is essential that potential peer leaders volunteer for participation in leadership programs. Self-selection indicates that participating students have a high level of commitment to the goals and objectives of the program, an important factor in the success of their future efforts. To create a process where students can choose to be part of the program, it is helpful to provide an information session for all students that includes information on the goals, purposes, and expectations of the program. For example, student information sessions for ADL’s **A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE® Institute Peer Training Program** include information about the origins of the program, the program’s structure, expectations, and level of commitment required, and an opportunity to participate in a “taste” of the program, generally an interactive exercise that explores the cultural knowledge of the group. Students who are interested in participating in the program can sign up as they leave the information session. This process provides

the school with a list of interested students who have a beginning knowledge of the program.

Selection of peer leaders solely through self-selection can sometimes fail to involve those students who have potential or existing skills, but may not be involved in traditional leadership positions. Active recruitment may be necessary to assemble a group that is representative of all students, and therefore able to influence the greatest number of students.

Recruitment – Potential peer leaders can be recruited for the program, based on recommendations from steering committee members, staff, guidance counselors, teachers, or administrators. After a list of potential peer leaders is identified, invitations to participate in the program can be distributed.

Recruitment promotes the development of a diverse group of peer leaders who perceive their selection as a special distinction. It should be recognized, however, that adults may occasionally miss informal leaders or exclude so-called “negative” leaders who have the potential to positively influence many other youth.

Expanding the Role of an Existing Group – Many schools and youth organizations have existing groups of students that could benefit from the opportunity to expand their leadership roles with their peers. These groups have the benefit of having had previous opportunities to develop and experience a sense of teamwork and the power of working together to accomplish common goals. Expanding the role of an existing student group requires a consideration of the demographics of the students currently involved, their expectations for involvement in the program, and their willingness to open the program to additional students with non-traditional leadership skills.

Application Process – Whether students self-select, are invited or recruited, it can be helpful to establish a basic application process that provides an opportunity for program organizers to learn about students’ interests, motivation, and abilities and to provide interested students with an opportunity to reflect on their rationale for becoming involved in the program. The application process can include a brief written form that asks students to write a paragraph about why they are interested in being part of the program. Although peer leaders do not have to be at the top of their classes academically, participating students do need to be on sound academic ground. Securing the written recommendation of a faculty member can also be beneficial to the application and selection process. Lastly, the steering committee or other planning group may want to schedule brief interviews with potential peer leaders. These components of an application process will provide information that can be of assistance in identifying peer leadership program participants.

Creating a Proposed Structure for the Program

Most peer leadership program models provide helpful guidelines, resource materials, and some technical assistance from people who have experience implementing the model. Many programs also provide a suggested structure for program implementation. Other programs include detailed manuals that provide resources, activities, meeting agendas, and other useful materials. Schools and youth organizations typically select a program and adapt it to their own organizational needs and structure.

The Learning of Content and Skills

Key to the leadership development process is providing varied opportunities for peer leaders to learn both content and skills. As advisor to the program, the peer leadership coordinator should have an understanding of requisite leadership

skills and make available opportunities for mastery. Because mastery is gained through a cyclical process that includes observation, participation, practice, presentation, and evaluation, peer leaders should have repeated opportunities to practice skills.

The learning of the program content should occur concurrently within this skill development process. The success of the program can be hindered by the assumption that, based on peer leaders' personal experiences and commitment, they come to the program with an adequate understanding of the particular issue the program is addressing. For example, peer leaders who are interested in intervening in incidents of name-calling and prejudice, and who lack an informed understanding of the development of stereotypical thinking, may undermine their efforts by inadvertently laughing at an insensitive joke or a stereotypical remark. It is unfair to expect students to be effective leaders and peer educators before providing them with varied opportunities to explore, reflect on, and gain understanding about the content of the program.

Feedback and Evaluation

The framework for peer leadership program implementation should include a feedback process to facilitate peer leaders' skill development and a means to evaluate the extent to which peer leadership activities are successful in accomplishing program goals.

Evaluation can include written forms and focus group sessions or other group discussions, scheduled at regular intervals. Evaluations can gather feedback from peer leaders about participation in the program and from peer groups about the impact of participating in activities led by peer leaders. The most useful written evaluations are a combination of open-ended and multiple-choice questions. Open-ended questions provide helpful detailed information that can assist in future program planning, and multiple choice questions can provide data that can be quantified to measure program impact and success.

Logistical Considerations

The planning process should establish the time,

length, location, and frequency of peer leadership meetings and a discussion of logistical considerations, including the scheduling of initial training sessions for peer leaders and peer leadership coordinators.

Initial Training

Many peer leadership program models begin with an initial training program for participants. Occasionally, separate training is provided for peer leadership coordinators that combines opportunities to learn about the content of the program with skill development and program implementation strategies. Although peer leadership programs can be launched without initial training, initial training programs are highly recommended. These programs provide intensive experiences that build teamwork and reinforce peer leaders' commitment, motivation, and understanding of key issues. The initial training can unify a diverse group of students around the students' interest in accomplishing common goals.

Peer Leadership Meetings

Following an initial training program, peer leaders typically attend regularly-scheduled meetings, that provide them with continuing opportunities to learn content, develop and practice skills, set goals, and engage in the necessary action planning to implement programs and projects.

The nature of peer leadership is that the program is peer-led. Opportunities for students to lead, direct, and create programs, with the guidance and assistance of the program coordinator, should be inherent from the program's beginnings.

Committees to Fulfill Responsibilities

One suggested strategy that promotes this process is developing peer-led committees to oversee the tasks necessary for program implementation. Peer leaders volunteer for membership on the committees of their choice for an agreed-upon time period. Committee

participation can rotate, so that all peer leaders gain expertise in the variety of tasks necessary to successfully engage in social action.

Suggestions for possible committees include:

- **Public Relations** – drafting articles for the school newspaper or newsletter about the program, arranging for school-wide announcements about program activities, creating promotional materials, such as flyers and posters;
- **Administration** – chairing meetings, taking attendance, and following up with absent peer leaders; compiling program evaluation information and providing feedback to whole group; organizing permission slips and other necessary forms;
- **Fundraising** – planning and coordinating events to raise funds for special projects, meeting refreshments, peer leader T-shirts, field trips, etc.; and
- **Special Events** – assuming responsibility for specific details of forthcoming programs or projects, including arranging sites, preparing materials, drafting requests, and generating thank you letters.

Peer-Directed Goals and Activities

The program goals developed as part of the initial planning process should describe specific outcomes expected for participating peer leaders and for the school or community. Once the program is underway, peer leaders should have opportunities to be involved in setting their own programmatic goals relating to the delivery of programs and projects. Peer leaders' abilities are strengthened as peers engage in action planning activities to develop and accomplish specific action steps of a project. Action planning should include developing a project timetable and budget, identifying and delegating tasks, considering resources and potential obstacles, and creating the content or activities of the project.

Opportunities to Practice Leadership Skills

As their leadership skills develop, peer leaders benefit from opportunities to practice these skills in real-life settings. Schools and youth organizations should make opportunities available for students to exercise leadership that correspond to students' skill level.

Initial opportunities can assist in building a coalition of support from the various constituencies of the school and community. Presenting brief information sessions for faculty, staff, or school or community boards provides opportunities for students to share why they wanted to become peer leaders, what they hope to accomplish, and how. A student-led interactive exercise, such as an icebreaker activity, can be a positive experience for adults whose support contributes to the overall success of the program.

Ongoing opportunities for peer leader programs include assembly programs, activities presented during non-academic days, conference presentations, special events, campaigns, or displays. Peer leaders need ongoing opportunities to deliver programs in order to develop leadership skills and become change agents in their schools and communities.

MEASURING SUCCESS

Demonstrating positive outcomes and documenting proven strategies are important for maintaining support for the program, planning future programs, and improving existing interventions. Members of leadership programs created to address bullying or name-calling, for example, benefit from the encouragement of knowing that their efforts are succeeding in lessening the number of incidents that occur on a daily basis. Measuring the success of peer leadership programs and interventions is a challenging task, however, even for practitioners in the field. There are many ever-changing variables within school communities that are

Each time a man stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope, and crossing each other from a million different centers of energy and daring, those ripples build a current that can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance.

– Robert F. Kennedy

often difficult to predict and that affect school climate and intergroup relations.

A process that attempts to measure these outcomes can include written surveys and group discussions. Some peer leadership program materials include sample evaluation forms. If sample forms are unavailable, peer leaders may be able to enlist the assistance of a local community college or university. College-level Sociology classes often include introductory content on data collection and analysis, and Sociology students may be willing to develop questionnaires or evaluation forms as class projects. Using the topic of bullying as an example, peer leaders may want to develop written surveys that gather information from students at various intervals on the frequency of bullying experiences and peer attitudes toward these incidents. These surveys might gather data on the number of incidents witnessed in the past day or week, how students responded, how fellow peers responded, and other thoughts the students had about the incidents.

Written evaluations can be distributed at the conclusion of peer-led programs with an optional second evaluation to be completed at a selected future interval, such as one, three, or six months following participation in a peer leadership program. Forums that bring together groups of teachers, students, or staff to

provide feedback to peer leaders can also be planned.

BEING A LEADER OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM

Learning content and skills and planning formal interventions are ongoing processes that require time to yield results. Schools or community organizations that commit the time, energy, and resources to developing and supporting this process will find leadership development has the potential to produce positive change in powerful and immediate ways. As peer leaders, students are simultaneously solidifying their own knowledge and skills while also helping to disseminate these concepts to the wider school community. Even early in the process, peer leaders begin to influence their peers through informal, one-on-one interactions and interventions.

Peer leadership opportunities give a voice to young people by involving them as leaders in school reform efforts, by creating school and community environments that promote student success. Peer leaders

take their leadership roles seriously, modeling pro-social behavior which includes their willingness to challenge intolerant attitudes and behaviors of their peers.

“To walk through school with the attitude that I have to tune out what other people are saying is really the wrong attitude to go through school with. I’m trying to teach my peers not to ignore other students’ differences, but rather to see them and accept them and then move on so they can see what’s inside someone, because it’s only then that you really get to know somebody.”

– High school peer leader

The process that begins with peer leaders' initial commitment and training, can produce the motivation, willingness, and courage to intervene, and as researcher Sonia Sharp writes, even these initial challenges that take a relatively simple form can be effective in positively shaping the culture and climate of a school or community (Sharp, 1996). It is unrealistic, however, for educators and youth service professionals to expect peer leadership programs to accomplish such change single-handedly. Dr. Helen Cowie, international expert on bullying and peer intervention, cautions that peer interventions "should not be used as a quick-fix solution to behavioral problems, but as one of a range of

complementary initiatives to promote positive behavior" (Cowie, 2000). Within this context, peer leadership has a key role, both in developing leaders for the future and in providing opportunities for the development of these skills through practical application in the everyday lives of youth. Over time, the countless acts of courage and leadership, the willingness to question and challenge intolerance, and the hands extended in friendship and support create educational and social environments of respect, acceptance, inclusiveness, and cooperation, and it is in this climate that young people experience success.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

The following bibliography is a sampling of the many materials available on the topic of youth leadership. The resources outlined should prove particularly useful to those educators who are implementing peer leadership programs in their schools or youth service agencies. Many titles are available through public and university libraries or can be ordered through local or online booksellers.

Boccia, J.A., ed. (1997). *Students Taking the Lead: The Challenges and Rewards of Empowering Youth in Schools.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

This book offers suggestions for the broad integration of leadership training and opportunities into school programs. Using case studies from student leadership programs around the country, this book examines ways that students can play a key role in discouraging prejudice and discrimination in their schools.

Bonds, M., and Stoker, S. (2000). *Bully-Proofing Your School: A Comprehensive Approach for Middle Schools.* Longmont, CO: Sopris West.

This curriculum for grades 6-8 includes appropriate lessons for the classroom to help students distinguish "bullying" from disagreement and teasing and to help them effectively respond to bullying when it does occur.

Garrity, C., Jens, K., Porter, W., Sager, N., and

Short-Camilli, C. (2000). *Bully-proofing Your Elementary School, 2d ed.* Longmont, CO: Sopris West.

This book includes a step-by-step guide for teachers who want to implement and maintain a bully-proofing program in their elementary schools. The book covers staff training, student instruction, victim support, intervention methods, and development of a caring climate.

Greenberg, S. (1999). *The Jump Start Leadership Workbook: Ignite Your Ability to Lead & Succeed.* Van Nuys, CA: Jump Start Programs.

This workbook includes exercises that help youth practice important skills to achieve success. Topics include accomplishing goals, managing time, taking risks, and overcoming adversity.

Greenberg, S. (1999). *The Jump Start Leadership Workbook Volume 2: Leading Others.* Van Nuys, CA: Jump Start Programs.

This workbook helps youth learn ways to sharpen their leadership skills and influence others in positive ways.

Karnes, F.A., and Bean, S.M. (1995). *Leadership for Students: A Practical Guide for Ages 8-18.* Waco, TX: Prufrock Press.

This book, which includes learning activities, a step-by-step guide, and advice for moving into leadership roles, emphasizes the development of leadership in a variety of settings.

MacGregor, M.G. (1997). *Leadership 101: Developing Leadership Skills for Resilient Youth (Facilitator's Guide and Student Workbook).* www.youthleadership.com.

This facilitator's guide includes 18 activities on defining leadership, qualities of leaders, power and influence, team building, communication and listening, respecting diversity, risk taking, and creative thinking. The accompanying student workbook includes handouts and opportunities for reflective writing.

MacGregor, M.G. (1999). *Designing Student Leadership Programs: Transforming the Leadership Potential of Youth.* www.youthleadership.com.

This facilitator's guide and comprehensive workbook is designed to help middle and high school instructors educate youth on the concepts of leadership.

The Mosaic Youth Center Board of Directors with J. Griffin-Wiesner. (2001). *Step by Step! A Young Person's Guide to Positive Community Change.* Minneapolis, MN: Search Institute.

This step-by-step guide to improving communities stresses the importance of youth

leadership.

Schwartz, M.K., Axtman, K.M., and Freeman, F.H., eds. (1998). *Leadership Education: A Source Book of Courses and Programs.* Greensboro, NC: Center for Creative Leadership.

This source book presents selected descriptions of 230 leadership courses and programs drawn from a survey of colleges, universities, professional organizations, training organizations, and other sites.

Sturkie, J., and Gibson, V. (1992). *The Peer Helper's Pocketbook.* San Jose, CA: Resource Publications, Inc.

This guide includes information on peer helping, counseling tips, basic communication skills, as well as a referral guide.

Sturkie, J., and Hanson, C. (1992). *Leadership Skills for Peer Group Facilitators.* San Jose, CA: Resource Publications, Inc.

This guidebook outlines the skills needed for successful group leadership, including setting up groups, understanding the stages of growth within a group, communicating effectively, and empowering a group to accomplish its goals. Suggested solutions for dealing with common problems are included.

van Linden, J.A., and Fertman, C.I. (1998). *Youth Leadership: A Guide to Understanding Leadership in Adolescents.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

This book outlines the major stages of youth leadership development – awareness, growth and activity, and mastery – and includes practical strategies for developing leadership skills through practical experiences.