
Youth-In-Action In Lebanon, New Hampshire¹

Presenter:

Cindy “Heath,”² Recreation Director

Background

For several years, community groups, local businesses, parents, social service agencies, and city officials had attempted, with little success, to involve the high-school-aged population in Lebanon, New Hampshire, in a series of safe, supervised recreational activities during the evening and weekend hours. Teen dances and drop-in hours at the community center were sparsely attended; nonalcoholic nights at local restaurants were frequented by people who had purchased or consumed alcohol prior to attending; and athletic programs reached only a small percentage of the student population.

A successful teen volunteer program, Youth-In-Action (YIA), had been operating in nearby Hanover, New Hampshire, for ten years under the leadership of a parent volunteer. This visionary parent saw the need for high-school students to use free time in a constructive and useful manner to benefit themselves and their community. The vehicle for achieving this goal was the creation of volunteer opportunities. Students had a choice in how to spend their time which was a critical element in the program’s success. They were provided with positive role models, opportunities to be responsible contributors to their communities, and a useful entry on their job resumes. Almost 50% of the students in Hanover were participating in the program.

The Lebanon Recreation Department staff and a group of parent volunteers decided to start a YIA program in Lebanon (based on the Hanover model) with the additional goal of integrating students in the

two communities through volunteer service. One major difference between the approach taken by the two communities was that in Hanover the program was basically run by a single person, whereas in Lebanon an advisory committee was used together with the resources of the Lebanon Recreation Department. Lebanon is a community of 12,000 people. The Recreation Department has a staff of 3.5 FTEs and is supported by approximately 250 volunteers.

Program Content

Objectives

The mission of the program is to reach as many high school-aged young people as possible with a diversity of opportunities to experience involvement in community service. Program objectives are:

- (1) to create a spirit of cooperation and good feeling within school communities;
- (2) to include adults in the Upper Valley community as coworkers and role models in community involvement;
- (3) to develop service activities that meet real needs (i.e., make a difference) while providing opportunities for good social interaction between peers and nonpeers;
- (4) to plant the seeds of good habits and future involvement in community service;
- (5) to work in partnership toward common goals with established community programs; and

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(6) to give young people a way to stretch, grow, learn, and discover their capacity to care about others.

total support from, the high-school principal, staff, class advisors, and interested parents prior to implementing the program.

Key Players

A committee of parent volunteers, school representatives, the recreation director, and two members from the Hanover YIA program were involved in developing the Lebanon program. Parent volunteers were solicited by advertising a series of informational meetings to describe the program, and an advisory committee was formed from interested parents willing to commit to a year of service. This advisory committee conferred with, and received

Program Planning

Weekly meetings of the advisory committee were held in July and August of 1993. As the Hanover program had been coordinated exclusively by one person, and the Lebanon program was to be coordinated by a group, the first step was to identify the organizational structure of the committee and responsibilities of committee members. Job descriptions were developed as follows:

Exhibit 36A

Youth-In-Action Interest Survey

Name: _____ Fr Soph Jr Sr Locker# _____

Street Address: _____

Town, State and Zip Code: _____

Mailing Address (if different): _____

Telephone Number: _____

Did you participate in YIA last year?
 Yes No

T-Shirt Size: Medium Large Ex-Large XX-Large

Please give us some idea of what you might be interested in volunteering for this coming school year so we can develop our program.
 Indicating interest on this sheet does not obligate you. You may be called with more details and given a chance to make a commitment if you have the time and interest.

Community Events such as

Christmas in October	Halloween Haunted House
Breakfast with Santa	Halloween Fantasy Castle
Holiday Celebration at the Mall	Opera House activities
4 th of July Celebration	Audrey Prouty Bike Ride (in July)
Crop Walk	

Youth-In-Action Fundraising Activities such as:

Car washes	short-term help, such as baby -
Benefit dinners, bake sales, etc.	sitting, and odd jobs. The amount
Ranking leaves, car work, etc.	you would be paid would be
Rent-A-Kid (your name kept on	negotiated between you and the
file and matched with people	employer)
calling in looking for reliable	Sell popcorn at games, parades

If you think your parents/guardians may be interested in helping the advisory Committee
 With any YIA projects, please let us know.

 Yes No

Other Helpful Information:
 Communication is a major problem! We will use locker notices, bulletin boards, the mail and phone calls. Unless indicated, we plan our calls between 7 a.m. and 10 p.m.

 OK not OK (let us know when we can reach you!)

Exhibit 36A (Continued)

General Events and Activities such as:

Alumni Day Celebration	Helping out in a pinch
Art Activities	Helping with children
Bicycle rodeo with LPD	Hospital
Blood Bank (help with equipment)	Kids 'n' Cops
Blood Bank (Provide childcare after school)	Make-A-Difference Day
Boxboard Recycling	Montshire Museum (overnight chaperone)
Build Low-Income Housing	Music Activities
Bulletin Board-unkeep at High School	Outdoor Work (e.g., lawns, ranking, snow shoveling)
Childcare	Peer Support
Children's Library Help	Photography
Children's Playgroups	Publicity (e.g., posters)
Chore Corps (chores for Senior Citizens)	Public Speaking about YIA
Community Dinners	Recycling (and other environmental concerns)
Community Mixer (for adults with mental retardation)	Senior Citizens
Computer Skills	Senior Citizen Fundraiser Dinner
Concession Stands	Senior Citizen Partnerships
David's House	SHARE (carry Senior Citizen bags)
Drama	Ski Lessons at Storrs Hill
Driving	Social Events (Such as BBQ for high-school students)
Earth Day Clean Up	Special Olympics
Food Drives (for local food shelves)	Sports
Fundraising for community groups	Telephoning
Gardening	Tutoring children
Good Times-Big Brother/Sister program (open to Sophs., Jrs., and Srs only)	Videotaping
Green-Up Days	Other: _____
Heavy Work	_____

- Program Coordinator*-maintain student data base, receive project requests, provide orientation for committee members, track project requests;
- PR/Communications*-send press releases, appear on radio and television talk shows;
- Record-Keeping*-take minutes at meetings, coordinate photography at YIA projects, clip media announcements about YIA;
- Telephoning Students*-contact students by phone regarding project opportunities;
- Meeting Facilitator*-keep meetings on track, provide refreshments;
- Hanover Liaison*-attend monthly network meetings, report back to Advisory Committee on project collaborations and fundraising ideas; and
- Project Coordinator*-oversee specific projects from start to finish.

In the two-year history of the program, the roles have evolved to include a volunteer program coordinator who manages the student data base,

processes project requests, and sets meeting agendas. The recreation director facilitates meetings and handles program publicity, and the remaining committee members handle all student telephoning.

The next step was to identify projects on which Lebanon students and Hanover students could collaborate as a means of beginning interaction between students from the two towns. Collaborative events included a welcome BBQ at the start of the school year, leaf raking for senior citizens, Community Mixer Dance, Community Harvest Dinner, and hazardous waste recycling.

Finally, a series of meetings with school officials were held to outline the YIA concept, request bulletin board space in the school, set up meetings with students for the first of the year, and review student and parent survey forms (see Exhibit 36A, pages 317 and 318).

Service clubs, community foundations, and the city contribute to the program. The total budget for fiscal year 1993-94 was \$2,000. Of this amount, the city portion was \$500; sponsors contributed \$1,500. Since the program is coordinated entirely by

Exhibit 36B

Good Times Program

Your First Meeting and Getting Started

Don't get discouraged if your companion or the parent(s) seem shy, hesitant, or unresponsive at first. They may have had many bad experiences in the past...it takes time to build trust!

Your first meeting with your companion will be on _____. We will all meet as a group that day, getting to know each other, playing a few games and sharing refreshments. If you don't meet the parents the same day as your companion, it is a good idea to speak to them on the phone in order to introduce yourself to them. You can then meet them in person at a later date. Let them know when you will pick up the child, what the two of you will be doing (ask permission when appropriate), where you can be reached, and when you will return. Your first meeting will be very important. It will set the tone for your relationship.

Here are some suggestions to help you get over that first hurdle:

- (1) Think about the meeting before you go. What will you say and do when meeting your companion and his or her family?
- (2) Introduce yourself to everybody. What do you enjoy doing? What is your family like? What activities are you involved in?
- (3) Explain why you are excited about being involved in Good Times.
- (4) Try to direct your conversation to your companion as much as possible right from the start. Let him or her know right away that you are a friend and that he or she is your primary interest in that home.
- (5) Try to determine common interests.
- (6) At the end of the visit, and on each following visit, set a specific time and place for your next visit. It is really important for you to know your schedule ahead of time so definite plans can be made at the end of each meeting. Call sometime during the week before your next visit to confirm the next meeting and just to chat.

Exhibit 36C

Good Times Program

Emergency Procedures

When you and your companion are together, safety is of prime importance! Here are some common sense reminders:

- (1) Always wear safety belts in the car. Do not drive the car until both of you are buckled in. Make no exceptions to this rule!
- (2) If the weather is bad or even questionable, make other plans and don't drive.
- (3) If going skating, make sure the ice has been tested and is strong. Don't go skating on a pond alone...make sure there are others besides you and your companion. Don't skate on the river.

If an accident should occur while you and your companion are together, you will first need to assess any injury. If you question your ability to treat the injury, don't take any chances! Call 911 immediately, and then call the parents. Stay with the child until the parents arrive (this may mean riding in the ambulance). During this time (if you are not injured), try to remain calm. Your companion will need you to stay centered and in control. Reassure him or her that help is on the way and that you will stay with him or her until his or her parents are there. When the parents arrive, the responsibility will shift to them, but be willing to help out (e.g., perhaps by remaining with the child while they make phone calls).

When you get home, do something to help yourself...e.g., talk it over with your parents, take a walk, take a long, hot shower, listen to music. Take care of yourself...we need you as a part of this program! Once things are under control, please call us and report the accident. Youth-In-Action assumes responsibility for you and your companion, so we will need to know ASAP about incidents such as accidents, and injuries.

Exhibit 36D**Good Times!****Introduction**

Commitment: If you're at this meeting, you've already made a commitment to this program. You are being asked to serve as a stable and mature role model for the child with whom you are matched. We know you understand the important role you will play in the life of another person.

Consistency: Contact your young companion weekly. We ask that you see him or her weekly, also. Understandably, conflicts may arise which may force you to cancel or reschedule. In such cases, be considerate of your companion and offer an explanation. If there are several weeks between meetings, you should keep in contact by phone or letter. *We stress consistency.* Promises not kept, disappointment over visits not made by a separated parent, hurt caused by casual commitments from adults—all these may be a regular part of your companion's life. Please, try not to make impossible promises. Be on time and plan activities together so they can anticipate future meetings and have a feeling of responsibility. This will encourage them to trust you, other people, and finally themselves.

One-on-one: You should spend time with your companion alone. Other sisters and brothers of your companion should only be included on special occasions, not on a regular basis. Another aspect of this to consider is involvement of your friends. Attending an occasional athletic event, concert, etc. is fine, but please remember to put your companion first. Consider your relationship with your companion an important event.

Set a good example: Remember that you are under the scrutiny of the child and the family. Everything that you do is noted, analyzed, and sometimes imitated.

Try to let your companion make his or her own decisions: Give advice sparingly. Share your growing experiences with her or him, but don't preach. Providing a good friendship is the best contribution you can make. Your relationship may produce a change in your companion, but don't become frustrated if the change isn't immediate, or if you don't even see the change. Your involvement may be planting the seeds for future growth in your companion—growth that you may not witness. And remember, change takes time.

Self-esteem: Try to accept your companion for who he or she is. When he or she begins to see that you do, he or she may open up and/or be influenced by your attitudes and behavior. A positive self-image and confidence may be lacking. Your good example and age will bring respect from your companion. He or she may talk to you as he or she could to no other adult. Listening and being patient can build a very constructive relationship between you and the child who really needs you to be a part of his or her life.

Use money sparingly: You can't buy friendship or provide the material things that your companion may lack at home. Use money sparingly during activities and buy small gifts only on birthdays and very special occasions. Learning to have fun without spending a lot of money will help the child integrate the experiences with you with those at home.

Limits: Don't be afraid to set limits. Limits can and should be set on the amount of time you will spend together, the number of phone calls from the child that will be acceptable to you, and the behavior while he or she is with you.

Involvement of the family: Even though the parents of your companion have granted permission for you to be with their child, the arrangements may nevertheless be threatening to them. The parents' reactions will be as varied as the matches. Do try to remember, however, that your relationship with the child is the most important thing. Most parents are supportive. Be courteous and tactful when speaking with them. Inform the parents where you will be taking the child and when you expect to return. Always ask their permission. As a rule, do not run errands or do favors for them as you may find yourself with more responsibility than you care to handle. Also, do not take sides in family disputes. Call us if you encounter any problems or have any concerns.

Exhibit 36D (Continued)

Parents' responsibilities: Leave to the parents the disciplining of your companion, conferring with school personnel, arrangement of medical diagnosis or treatment (except in emergency situations when the child is with you). If you feel the parents are neglecting some area of need, please talk with us about the best way of handling the situation. We will encourage parents not to use the "treat" of a visit with you as a reward or take it away as punishment. However, they may still do this, especially as your relationship becomes important to the child. Let the coordinator know if this happens often. The parents will be responsible for having the child ready when you come to pick him or her up.

Stay in contact: It is very important that we stay in touch with each other while you are involved in this program. Please call me once a week to let me know how things are going, to discuss concerns and share successes. We'll also be meeting once a month as a group (at a time to be decided upon during this meeting) so all of us, old and young, can have some fun together. If something about the relationship should be of concern to you, let our coordinator know while there is still time to straighten things out. Don't feel as though you can only call me once a week. Especially contact me if you think the parent or child is trying to terminate. This can be traumatic for the child if it is not handled properly.

volunteers, the major expenses are office supplies, food for two BBQs (beginning and end of the school year), community dinner supplies, and T-shirts for participating students.

Agencies needing volunteers contact the program coordinator with a project request, detailing the time, date, number of students needed, and description of the service required. The program coordinator contacts advisory committee members on a rotating basis, each of whom has printouts of the student survey data base detailing students' interest areas. The committee member then arranges for the appropriate number of students to volunteer. Requesting agencies are required to provide training on-site or prior to the experience as necessary (see Exhibits 36B and 36C, pages 319 and 320, respectively). Projects in this realm include recreation department sports tournaments and special events, blood bank volunteers, childcare for social service agencies, and community fund-raisers.

In addition, students and advisory committee members select projects for the entire YIA membership to participate in, such as community dinners, park decorating, clean up days, leaf raking, bulb planting, and the make-a-difference day program.

One of the more exciting programs that Youth-In-Action sponsors is the Good Times program, in which high school students are matched with elementary school students who are at risk. Youth-In-Action students take the participants bowling, to movies, sledding and spend time mentoring them when possible. Youth-In-Action funds the activities, as well as a monthly gathering for all involved. The beauty of the program is that it doesn't cost very much money. It doesn't cost

money to volunteer, and the students come away feeling that they've made a difference in their community, or in someone's life. [More details of the Good Times Program are given in Exhibit 36D, pages 321 and 322].

Youth-In-Action students also participated in planting over 3,000 daffodil and narcissus bulbs at the local hospital. The students got together with the members of Youth-In-Action from a nearby town on a Saturday morning and planted 3,000 daffodil bulbs under the direction of a volunteer landscaper from Holland. The students felt like they were contributing, and came away having been mentored by the adult leaders who worked with them.

-Recreation Director

Marketing

Getting the word out to students was accomplished by visiting directly with them in class meetings at the beginning of the school year to explain YIA and distribute a student and parent survey form and information sheet. These materials further described the goals of the program, gave students a list of youth volunteer opportunities, invited parents to become involved, and required parental permission (see Exhibit 36E, page 324) for their participation. A Welcome BBQ (with food and supplies donated by local merchants) was held for students from Lebanon and Hanover. Icebreaker games were played; small group discussions were held to outline program goals; and community service ideas were solicited from the students-all facilitated by one advisory committee member and a Hanover Youth In-Action

Exhibit 36E**Youth-In-Action Parental Permission Form**

Youth-In-Action is a program in which high school student participants donate volunteer service to the community under the direction of volunteer adults.

Participant's Name: _____

Parent/Guardian Name: _____

(please print)

(please print)

I, the parent/guardian of the above named person, give my permission for his/her participation in any and all activities of the Youth-In-Action. I do further release, absolve, indemnify, and hold harmless the organizers, sponsors and supervisors, any and all of them. In case of injury to my son or daughter, I hereby waive all claims against the organizers, the sponsors, and any of the supervisors appointed by them.

Please list any preexisting medical concerns:

I give permission for any adult supervisor to seek emergency medical attention for my child.

I give permission for my son/daughter to be photographed at YIA activities and to have these photos reproduced for public use in the promotion of YIA.

All participation in the Youth-In-Action program, and all services and manner of rendering services under the program shall be subject to the complete discretion and judgment of the program's advisors and directors.

If the participant operates a motor vehicle in the course of participation in Youth-In-Action activities, the undersigned participant and parent(s) certify that he or she is covered by a family insurance policy providing both collision and liability coverage when operating the motor vehicle. No auto insurance is provided by Youth-In-Action.

Occasions may arise when students are transported to activities by other student volunteers. I take responsibility for my son or daughter's action regarding this issue. Often, transportation provided by an adult will also be available.

While participating in YIA activities, students are prohibited from involvement with alcohol, tobacco or other controlled substances.

Lebanon High School supports the involvement of the students in YIA, but is not a sponsor or organizer of this program.

We may receive requests from other agencies for help with community projects separate from Youth-In-Action activities. Do you give permission for us to give them your student's name? Yes No

(signature of participant, date)

(signature of parent/guardian, date)

student. (Important Note: advisory committee members spent the afternoon baking hundreds of brownies, which bonded the group very nicely, and gave the house an enticing aroma for the students' arrival!)

Following the Welcome BBQ, project requests were solicited from community agencies, and students were directly telephoned by advisory committee members to solicit their involvement in various projects. Students' interest areas were determined from the completed survey forms turned in at the high school. As the community became aware of the program, students were invited to speak at service club meetings, on the radio and television, and at neighboring communities interested in starting the program. Comments like, "Youth-In-Action is the best thing that ever happened to me in high school," verified the value of the program for students.

A newsletter was developed, highlighting service projects the students had completed or in which they had taken part. It was distributed to school board, city council, supporting businesses and service clubs, students, and the media.

Measurement of Program Outcomes

The outcome of the program is determined by:

- (a) follow-up telephone calls to agencies requesting volunteers in order to verify student participation, and monitor the quality of student performance;
- (b) feedback from students sought at the opening and closing BBQs to solicit volunteer program ideas;
- (c) monthly meetings held among advisory committee members to manage communications

with students, progress on projects, and concerns that may arise in the course of carrying out a project; and

(d) monthly network meetings held with the Hanover Youth-In-Action advisory committee to plan joint projects among students.