

Youth Volunteer Corps
PCCD Research-based, Model Programs 4-year grant
\$230,359
Across Ages, Lions-Quest Skills for Adolescence

Effective immediately, the Youth Volunteer Corps (YVC) is the recipient of a 4-year grant from the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency (PCCD). The purpose of the grant is to implement proven programs at Beaty Middle School and Youngsville Elementary/Middle School (YEMS) aimed at reducing three specific risk factors that students in Warren County face. The targeted risk factors are:

1. The early initiation of problem behaviors
2. Lack of commitment to school
3. The availability of drugs

These risk factors were identified as serious from the Healthy Communities/Healthy Youth (HC/HY) Search Institute surveys conducted in the Warren County School District in 1998 and 2002. The impact of these programs, however, will reach far beyond the three targeted risk factors. A total of 19 risk factors including clear behavior standards, communication skills, conflict resolution, and engagement in positive free-time activities will be positively impacted by the collaborative efforts of our schools, families and communities. The overall goals of this grant is to decrease current and future use of drugs, tobacco and alcohol; improve grades and attendance; increase test scores; increase bonding to school; and increase expectations of school and social success.

As referenced above, we have chosen to work with two research-based model programs endorsed by SAMHSA for this grant. *Across Ages* is an after-school mentoring program working with 25 students from Beaty Middle School and 15 students from Youngsville Elementary/Middle School. School principals and guidance counselors will target the students most in need of the mentoring program. A letter of invitation and explanation of the program will be mailed home to the students' guardians, along with a permission form that must be returned to the school before the students can participate.

The mentors for the Across Ages program will be adults age 55 and older that will be recruited by the Retired Senior Volunteer Program (RSVP). The mentors will submit applications and be screened before they are placed with a student. Act 33 and Act 34 clearances will be completed and kept on file for each mentor. Once paired with a student, the mentors agree to spend 2 – 3 hours each week with that student participating in quality activities. Examples are working together on school projects, going fishing, spending time at the library or attending a sporting event. The mentor and mentee will decide what they would like to do together. The mentors will be provided a stipend of \$5 each week, plus a small amount of money for expenses, such as tickets to a ball game. They will also be required to attend monthly in-service meetings.

Along with the mentoring component, Across Ages also includes weekly after-school meetings with a faculty advisor, weekly community service activities and weekend events held monthly for the students, their families and their mentors to attend. The group may go bowling, attend a movie or go to a major league baseball game. Transportation from the home schools will be provided and the cost for these events will be paid for with grant funding. The YVC office will make all arrangements for the community service projects and the family events. We will also provide the necessary supervision. The teachers providing the weekly after-school programming have been identified as Jill Boehm-Sumner at Beaty and Michael Bender at YEMS. They will be paid a \$1500 stipend and will work with the students on life skills and problem solving. They have been provided a research-based curriculum recommended by Temple University and developed by the University of Illinois at Chicago.

All activities for the Across Ages program will take place after school and will be funded by the PCCD grant obtained by the Youth Volunteer Corps.

The *Lions-Quest Skills for Adolescence* model program is the second program written into the grant. This program targets Youngsville only and will be initiated throughout the 6th grade at YEMS this school year. The curriculum operates on a 3-year cycle, with years 2 and 3 being “booster” years for the students who first participated while in 6th grade. During the first year of implementation, approximately 90 YEMS students will be involved. Year two will involve 170 6th and 7th YEMS grade students, while year three will target approximately 250 6th, 7th and 8th grade students at YEMS and Youngsville Middle/Senior High School.

Lions Club International provides a flexible curriculum that will complement the current WCSD curriculum taught in the YEMS/YHS Health classes. John Victor is the current 6th and 7th grade Health teacher at YEMS. Principal Delores Berry feels that he is the ideal teacher to implement this program at YEMS. Jeff Manelick and Kay McKinney are the Health teachers at YHS that would implement the 8th grade program in years three and four of the grant. I have had positive discussions with all of them concerning this grant proposal.

During year one of the curriculum, 6th grade students cover three units: entering the teen years, building self-confidence and communication skills, and managing emotions in positive ways. Year two includes improving peer relationships, making healthy choices (substance use education) and an introduction to service learning. Service learning will allow the students to identify and target an issue or problem behavior in their school or community, then design and implement a plan to address the issue. During year three the students work on setting goals for healthy living. Health teachers would be asked to incorporate as much as they can of the Lions-Quest programming into the current WCSD curriculum requirements. It would be ideal and of greater benefit to the students to incorporate this curriculum into the health classes in Youngsville. However, the program could also be managed on an after-school or school club basis, as well.

In addition to exposure to the Health curriculum, Lions-Quest includes parent and community involvement. A School Climate Team will be established, consisting of principals, teachers, parents, community representatives and students. This team will plan activities, events and community meetings to extend the impact of the program throughout the school, home and community. As part of the Lions-Quest program, older students will also have the opportunity to partner with younger students and serve as Peer Teachers. Funding for all project supplies and special events has been written into the PCCD grant. The Youth Volunteer Corps Director will work directly with the schools and the community as a program advocate for both of the model programs in order to provide constant program leadership. In addition, a half-time coordinator will be hired by YVC to assist with the execution of these programs. All monies needed for trainings, supplies and program support will be provided by the PCCD grant. No money is requested or expected from the Warren County School District for these programs. All grant activity will be subject to the approval of the school principals and the office of the assistant superintendent. Progress and activity reports will be made to WCSD administration quarterly.

All students participating in these two programs will be given anonymous pre and post program surveys to in order to gauge success. Parent permission forms will be required. Across Ages participants will be surveyed by the faculty advisors. YEMS 6th grade students can be surveyed in either in Health class by Mr. Victor or during homeroom by homeroom teachers. Penn State University is assisting YVC with the design of the brief surveys. The Pennsylvania Youth Survey will be the model. Surveys will ask for students' current level of substance use, their knowledge of the consequences of substance use, their attitudes toward school success, and their views of community acceptance. YVC will also use the results of the previous HC/HY surveys and compare them to future results of the Pennsylvania Youth Survey, if it is administered in the Warren County School District. Guidance counselors from Beaty and Youngsville schools will also be asked to compile anonymous and confidential group reports in regards to attendance and grades.

It has been proven in schools across the country that participation in these model programs significantly decreases substance use, improves behaviors, increases attendance and test scores, and creates student bonds to the community. We expect no less in Warren County. Given that the recent HC/HY surveys show only 39% of students report resistance skills, 24% indicate a caring school climate, 29% have positive adult role models and 24% feel their communities value them, the Youth Volunteer Corps would welcome this opportunity to help make a positive difference in the lives of our students.

Penn State University will provide on-going technical support for this PCCD grant.