



Connect. Improve. Inspire.

Colorado 9to25 Youth Summit 2014 Summary and Report

Overview

The 2014 Colorado 9to25 Youth Summit (CYS) took place on October 25, 2014 at North High School in Denver, Colorado. As an action project of Colorado 9to25, the summit supports two of CO9to25's primary objectives: that all youth are connected and contributing. CYS is unique in that it is a summit based on skills and networking, and not on a particular issue. With that general focus, the summit allows any youth, regardless of their current circumstances, to participate. We call this "leadership from any chair, anywhere". After several rounds of gathering input from both youth and adults in the community, the Summit Planning Team determined that the skill of focus for 2014 would be confidence. The skill was further broken down and specified into three tiers: confidence in ones' self, confidence working in a group, and confidence speaking out in front of others. In 2013, summit participants gave strong feedback that they desired the event to be more interactive. For 2014, rather than a typical conference where participants go to several speaker sessions, the Summit Planning Team developed an educationally rigorous arts-based day of learning. Adult and youth attendees broke into small groups paired with a youth facilitator and local artist. They engaged in several learning activities that developed the skill of confidence in the three areas mentioned above. By the end of the day, the groups developed a performance or piece of art that expressed their learning, and presented it in front of others. Summit attendees and youth facilitators alike went beyond their own limitations by identifying skills they held individually, collaborating with their teams to create an original work of art, and presenting these works on a stage in front of their peers and colleagues.

Planning and Organizational Involvement

The Colorado 9to25 Youth Summit is created through a unique community collaboration. The event is planned by several local organizations, each with a shared vision of improved outcomes for Colorado

youth through Positive Youth Development. These organizations, known as convening partners, each commit one adult and one youth member to the Summit Planning Team. In some cases, convening partners committed substantial funds, grants or personnel time. The planning team met for nearly a year to create the vision for the summit and manage its execution. This year, due to budget increases in the funding for the summit, the planning team was assisted by a professional event coordinator. LaTasha Baldwin of Little Details, LLC worked with the convening partners to ensure a well-organized and smoothly executed event. This allowed the convening partners to focus on the educational integrity of the day, as well as build strong partnerships and allies to ensure participation and a desirable agenda. The summit planning is a true youth adult partnership. It consists of youth and adults each given equal decision making power. This year, convening partners included the following:

- Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment
- Colorado Department of Education
- Kaiser Permanente
- The Civic Canopy
- Project Pave
- Rise Above Colorado
- Shiloh House
- Attention Homes
- The Department of Local Affairs; Office of Homeless Youth Services
- Colorado Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Council
- Earth Force

Convening Partner representatives from each of these organizations met for three hours a month for 11 months. In addition, many members put in 3-8 hours a month on sub-committee action items. Youth members of the planning team were paid an hourly stipend for their time, and worked additional internship planning hours in the critical months leading up to the event. The structure of the community collaboration that makes up the planning team has three unique benefits:

- To ensure a relevant and well marketed event for youth across the state and for youth of various backgrounds
- To provide a deep engagement for young people involved in the planning to develop skills and make connections with peers and invested adults
- To create a strong partnership between several local organizations, which simulates the well-coordinated systems Colorado 9to25 seeks to promote within youth serving organizations

Attendance and Reach

In only its second year, the 2014 CO9to25 Youth Summit doubled its attendance from 2013. This year we had 265 adults and youth registered, with 190 in final attendance. The ratio of youth and adults was 80% to 20% with 152 youth and 38 adults from across the state of Colorado. In addition to the learning

objective of confidence as a skill, the summit sought to strengthen youth and adult partnerships among attendees. This was accomplished by youth and adult attendees being equally distributed in groups to participate in the learning and art activities. This year's summit garnered the attention of two local television news affiliates who came to the event to produce a story.

Youth attending the summit were diverse in several ways. Thanks to the reach of the convening partners, attendees included, but were not limited to:

- Gay and Lesbian
- African American
- Asian American
- Hispanic and Latino
- Physically Disabled
- Foster Youth and Youth in Transition (housing and juvenile justice system)
- Young Mothers
- Youth Community Leaders and Advocates

Additionally, the event was marketed to organizations serving homeless, runaway and juvenile corrections system youth. While interest was expressed, attendance from these populations was challenging because of regulations and requirements. A separate weekend workshop was delivered to some of these organizations and youth to compensate their challenge in attending the main event. For 2015, one of the attendance goals is to work with these organizations to make attendance more accessible.

Because Colorado 9to25 is state-wide, the summit sought to expand its reach to organizations and attendees from outside the Denver metro area. This year the summit:

- Increased attendance of groups outside the metro area using travel stipends from two groups to eleven, a 550% increase.
- Had nearly half of the attendees from more than 50 miles away.
- Secured generous grants from The Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment and the Colorado Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Council for mileage and lodging which greatly contributed to the increase of state-wide attendees
- Had attendees from Denver-metro, Pueblo, Steamboat Springs, South Routt, Crestone, Greeley, Colorado Springs and several other Colorado communities.

Other highlights of reach in attendance included:

- 71 Colorado zip codes
- 54 Colorado organizations
- 61 Colorado schools with students in attendance
- 11 Colorado school districts
- 9 Colorado counties

Outcomes and Feedback

A brief survey was conducted at the end of the event to determine the efficacy of the day and the model of an event focused on interactive skill-building. Below are results from survey questions and highlights of comments from open-answer questions.

51% of attendees agreed and 35% strongly agreed with this statement:

“After today’s summit, I feel more confident in myself, knowing what my strengths are, and the skills that I have to share with others.”

36% of attendees agreed and 49% strongly agreed with this statement:

“After the summit, I feel more confident working in a youth and adults partnership.”

38% of attendees agreed and 38% strongly agreed with this statement:

“The written, visual and performance art activities that we did at the summit increased my sense of self-confidence and ability to express myself in a group.”

49% of attendees agreed and 37% strongly agreed with this statement:

“I feel prepared with skills necessary to participate in leadership opportunities that may arise.”

When asked what we could improve for next year’s summit, the following ideas were mentioned by several attendees:

- More movement or physical activities
- Remixing of groups throughout the day or choice in the group they are placed in
- More structure to the learning activities prior to the creative components
- More exploration of how to use the learning and skills outside the summit and in life situations
- Better coordination and clearer instructions for moving around the event venue, shifts in agenda and schedule
- More training and consistency across session facilitators and their ability to lead educational activities

Summary

Many conferences and summits use the model of participants spending the majority of the day listening to speakers. Though we used this format in our first year, we used feedback to reinvent ourselves. Going into the 2014 summit, our major question was “Will participants be excited and find value in a day where they participate to learn and create, even if we can only focus on one basic skill?” Without a doubt, from survey data to the qualitative insight of observing the event and participant engagement, the answer is “yes”. Many other youth events focus on a particular population or a particular issue. Because Colorado 9to25 is state-wide and seeks to coordinate systems and improve outcomes for youth at this level, it is important that our event be an interactive learning experience relevant to all youth. Basing the day around a skill that can be used both in practical life situations and in leadership

development resonated with attendees. Furthermore, making the day one where an attendee collaborates and contributes to creating something worked well. We can now begin to refine and improve our model over the next couple of years. In 2015, creating an even stronger structure for our planning team as well as community involvement in the summit is a major goal. Continuing to increase the attendance of those outside the Denver-metro area and from diverse populations is equally critical.

One adult who brought several foster youth to the summit remarked that she had never seen her young people so engaged. She speculated that this was due to the day's focus on each attendee's assets, and the opportunity to be seen outside their usual circumstances. An old quote says "What you think I am, I think I am. What I think I am I will be." At the Colorado 9to25 Youth Summit, we think young people are tremendous resources full of incredible insight and ability, regardless of their circumstances. The summit is one way we will ensure that the youth of Colorado can be that.

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