



FLASH

NETWORK

APRIL 26, 2021

Envisioning Youth-Led Action for Sexual Health Equity: Founding and Development of a Diverse Sexual and Gender Minority Youth Organization

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Background: In Florida, sexual and gender minority (SGM) youth endure a range of health challenges. These include reduced condom use, more common alcohol and illicit drug use, and younger sexual debuts. Community action among SGM youth is health-protective, strengthening social bonds and self-efficacy. Youth-led action could contribute toward stemming local health inequities. But even where SGM youth perspectives are included in intervention and study design, their ideas can be marginalized without strong adult allyship. As a step toward surmounting these obstacles, we describe the initial conception of FLASH: the Florida Adolescent/Young Adult Sexual Health Network, a decentralized youth-designed program grounded in principles of design justice.

Methods: The FLASH Network's aims and change-making strategies were conceived via a participatory logic-modeling technique, foregrounding the insights of youth representatives in an accessible, collaborative manner. Potential programmatic strategies were contributed by a standing Youth Advisory Council (YAC; $N = 8$) representing SGM youth from 5 counties, in a virtual September 2020 workshop. Using *If; Then* prompts to establish implicit causal program logic, SGM youth-elicited strategies were tied to outreach and advocacy objectives, which were then organized thematically by a facilitator in a draft prospectus. Transactional validity was enhanced via a member-checking stage with YAC members, who approved the FLASH Network prospectus. The initial YAC-led program design was funded by Florida State University (FSU).

Results and Outcomes: The FLASH Network's founding YAC identified 7 change-making strategies to bridge youth-centered planning with formal systems of power: engaging local policymakers; holding open forums on urgent issues; supporting hyperlocal service referrals; facilitating anonymous sexual health inquiries; forging opportunities for peer mentorship; training caregivers as allies. Launching in early 2021, initial advocacy content will focus on awareness raising around sex ed curricula inclusive of SGM lives and identities, and hyperlocal service linkage for SGM youth in Florida. Activating the network effects of sustained advocacy, the FLASH Network will aid academic and government partners, codesigning research representative of SGM youth perspectives, and connecting underserved SGM youth to local pilot and demonstration projects responsive to their needs.

Conclusions: The ongoing development of the FLASH Network highlights the acceptability of collective organizing among SGM youth. In addition, the identification of key health challenges within the state and strategies designed by youth to mitigate them is possible within an environment centered on youth perspectives and facilitated by adult allyship. Looking to the future, the FLASH Network is positioned to collaborate with likeminded partners, challenge the structures of traditional organizations, and positively impact other SGM youth in Florida.

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