

Dare2Care Evaluation Report

Executive Summary

2016

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Purpose

The purpose of this evaluation report is to describe the extent to which the Dare2Care Pilot Program was able to produce transformative youth leaders who are progressive change agents. The report details Dare2Care's ability to 1) recruit and retain students from the target population, and 2) provide participants with a positive experience. It also describes the extent to which Dare2Care was able to develop the youth leaders' capacity to provide leadership in decreasing discrimination due to identity difference within Lakewood High School and in the community at large.

Project Background

LGBTQ youth are at an increased risk of facing discrimination, victimization, and social isolation, which can affect their mental health during their school years and beyond. (Russell, Ryan, Toomey, Diaz, and Sanchez, 2011; Button, O'Connell, & Gealt, 2012; Duncan and Hatzenbuehler 2014; Russell, Ryan, Toomey, Diaz, & Sanchez 2011). They are also at an increased risk of having suicidal thoughts and behaviors (Russell et al., 2011). Dare2Care Cleveland recognizes that these are not LGBTQ issues, but human issues, and that all humans have a role in making schools safe spaces for all students.

Dare2Care endeavored to develop four high school youth (and two adult teacher leaders) who could create transformative change in their schools and communities through education and awareness activities. The participants committed to three leadership development trips facilitated annually by the Global Youth Leadership Institute (GYLI). The participants learned about leadership and identity development across a broad range of diversity parameters including race, class, gender identity, sexual orientation, and religious affiliation. The students were charged with taking the lessons they learned from the GYLI, and formulating a plan for disseminating knowledge that 1) promotes acceptance of difference, 2) leads to change in diverse identity related conversations, and 3) establishes and sustains a prevention-based model to address LGBTQ bullying issues, both actual and perceived. The students' response to the challenge was to create a school club, Club Identity, with the hope of

engaging their peers in conversations that promote the acceptance of diversity, and reduce bullying for LGBTQ peers.

The mission of Club Identity as described by the student participants is “to create a warm, welcoming, and celebratory environment where everyone of varying identities is welcomed to come in.” The students facilitated club meetings that focused on different aspects of diversity. The students planned awareness activities within the school and also facilitated activities using the GYLI curriculum at a local leadership conference with students from 10 public, private, and parochial schools from the Cleveland area.

Evaluation Questions

1. Did we reach our target population?
2. Were participants satisfied with the initiative?
3. Did the initiative meet its intended objectives?
4. Is the initiative worth the cost?
5. Were there any unintended outcomes of the initiative?
6. What would we do the next time to improve the initiative?

Evaluation Methodology

Quantitative and qualitative data were collected for this initiative. Qualitative data were collected from the 4 CYLI student leaders, their parents, the two teacher leaders, and the two project leaders via interviews and focus groups throughout the three years of the initiative. Qualitative data were reviewed twice to provide a general picture of the experience and to identify keywords repeated in the data. The keywords were analyzed to identify themes. Reoccurring themes were then examined in light of the evaluation questions. The qualitative data provide rich descriptions of the ways in which participants experienced, and changed as a result of, the GYLI institutes, the Dare2Care initiative, and the work of creating and facilitating Club Identity.

Quantitative data was collected to provide demographic descriptions of the participants, and to gain a sense of their motivation to lead and their leadership styles. Students completed a leadership survey, a motivation survey, and a GYLI survey prior to their first GYLI Leadership trip. All four of the students were recruited as high school freshmen, and all four students identified themselves as Christian. Three of the four students are Caucasian, and one of the students is Asian. Three of the students are female. Three of the students identified as heterosexual, and one student indicated that she was unsure of her sexual orientation.

Limitations and Delimitations

A limitation of the evaluation is the inconsistency between the evaluation and focus group/interview questions to the overall purpose of the initiative. This was largely due to an abrupt change to evaluation personnel during early implementation of the pilot program, and partially to the initial evaluation design. The original evaluation plan focused more on recruitment, retention, and evaluation metrics. Once project implementation began, however, the evaluation focused on the key concerns of the project leaders and investors; how this investment changed the participants, school, and community. The focus group and exit interview questions focused on the students', teachers', and parents' experiences, how those experiences changed their views and understandings of leadership and multicultural identities, and how the participants themselves were changed as a result of the experience, but did not include strategies for measuring the impact on the participants, school, and community.

Findings

Dare2Care successfully recruited and retained four students through their respective graduations. All participants reported overall satisfaction with the experience of being involved with Dare2Care. The data provides evidence that the project did develop youth leaders who were better positioned to impact the school climate. The students expanded their own self-knowledge and general knowledge about multiple identities. They learned about their unique leadership styles and how those styles complement other leadership styles. They combined these knowledge bases to create Club Identity.

Through Club Identity the students did disseminate knowledge that 1) promoted acceptance of difference, and 2) lead change in diverse identity related conversations. The students created a safe space for exploring diversity and identity, and for addressing the problem of bullying in their school. The students' advocated on behalf of LGBTQ students and students of other identity groups, promoting awareness and acceptance of diversity, challenging their peers' use of homophobic language, and risking their own stigmatization in the process. As well, the youth participants planned and facilitated conferences that provided educational experiences to students from ten other are high schools. Students conducted 2-3 multi-school collaborative workshops (full-day) each year using the content of the GYLI curriculum that they learned on their leadership training trips. Students also conducted a mini workshop (half-day) using the GYLI curriculum. In essence, the Dare2Care experience created agency in the youth who previously felt powerless to address the bullying problem in their school. The students recounted experiences of serving as allies in the high school and greater community.

Recommendations

One recommendation for improving the ability to measure the impact of the work is to distribute a school climate survey prior to the start of Club Identity meetings and leadership conferences, and at the end of the year. This would measure the attitudes of students, teachers, and administrators around diversity, identity, tolerance, and perceptions of safety within the school, and would capture any shifts in school climate.

A second recommendation would be to analyze data throughout the entire project. Evaluation data from the first year of a project can inform implementation, data collection, and evaluation in subsequent years. Also, themes identified in early project years can be investigated further in subsequent years.

Finally, based on the participants' feedback, it is clear that there is a need for further leadership development beyond the GYLI experiences. Teacher leaders need support in transitioning from leading the students to supporting their leadership in ways that acknowledge shared power. As well, the students need more support in learning how to implement collaborative leadership to carry out the work of Club Identity.

Conclusions

This evaluation report examined the Dare2Care pilot project on two levels. First, the report detailed Dare2Care's ability to successfully recruit from the target population, retain participants throughout the initiative, and provide participants with a positive experience. The evaluation also described Dare2Care's success in developing the youth leaders' capacity to provide leadership in decreasing discrimination due to identity difference within Lakewood High School and in the community at large.

Dare2Care successfully recruited and retained students from the target population and provided them with positive experiences. Dare2Care made it possible for students and teachers to attend the GYLI experiences to help the participants understand their leadership styles, develop their leadership skills, gain a better understanding of their own identities, gain an appreciation for multicultural identity, and engage in initial planning of how to apply their learning to their school environment. Dare2Care was also successful in developing the youth leaders' capacity to disseminate knowledge that 1) promoted acceptance of difference, 2) lead change in diverse identity related conversations, and 3) established and sustained a prevention-based model to address lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) targeted bullying issues.

More importantly, Dare2Care created a group of activists who already have plans for how to continue this work as they continue on as teachers in the District, or as students on campuses and in communities across the nation.

Dare2Care
Evaluation Report
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