

# YMCA OF GREATER LOUISVILLE

## HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS PROGRAM FINDINGS REPORT

### 2021-2023



## PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The YMCA Healthy Relationships Program (YHRP) delivered *Love Notes* Evidence-Based Programming (LN-EBP) in its own facilities, with partnering schools, and in community organizations. The YHRP piloted two major innovations during the grant period: the use of peer facilitators and a camp model for program delivery. These innovations grew out of early setbacks and transformed the program into a model with staying power. A school partnership with an education magnet built strong peer facilitators that created rapport and a sense of community. The YMCA's strength in youth day camps led to the development of peer/adult co-facilitated *Teen Vibe Camps*.

Youth living in west and southwest Louisville are exposed to childhood trauma amid an epidemic of gun violence in the city. They not only find hope in the *Teen Vibe Camp*, but actual strategies for sharing their experiences and writing a better future. The program's focus on healthy relationship skills provides an avenue for building resilience, and youth noted its capacity to prevent violence.

Program innovations in the first two years created momentum around the YMCA *Teen Vibe Camps*, school implementation, and in young adult programs serving those most at risk for relationship challenges and early pregnancy. With school personnel interested in district-wide implementation and the YMCA using a new grant to spread camp implementation to ten additional locations in the next 3 years, this program is just getting started.

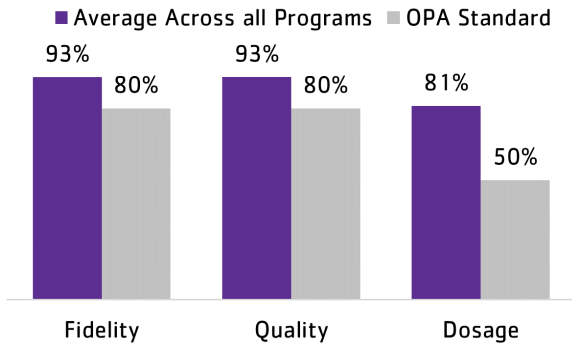
## FINDINGS

- EBP program successfully reached vulnerable youth populations, largely thanks to community partnerships.
- The Community Advisory Committee (CAC) identified key leverage points for shifting the culture around relationships in our community.
- Program innovations formed community between youth and trusted adults - with notable effect on LGBTQIA+ youth.
- Teen Vibe Camp* and peer facilitator innovations centered youth voice to create a program that teens see as their own.

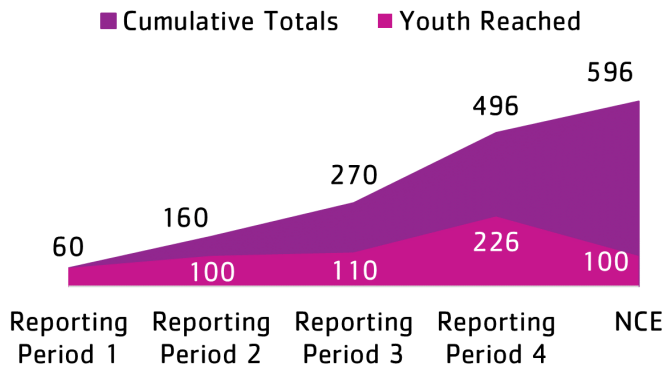
*This project was supported by the Office of Population Affairs of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The contents are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement, by OPA/OASH/HHS, or the U.S. Government.*

# PROGRAM QUALITY, REACH, AND YOUTH DEMOGRAPHICS

**Figure 1: Fidelity, Quality, and Dosage Rates Exceeded Beyond OPA Standards**

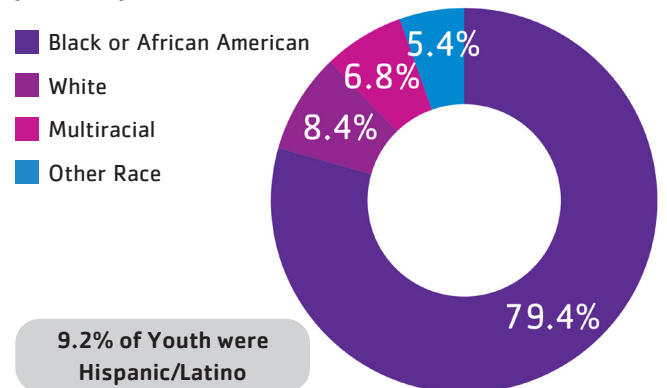


**Figure 2: Number of Youth Reached by EBP per Reporting Period**



YHRP reached its targeted demographics of teens and young adults from west and southwest Louisville, with special focus on Black youth (79.4%, **Figure 3**), Hispanic/Latino youth (9.2% overall, 16.2% of *Teen Vibe Camps*), and LGBTQIA+ youth (25%, **Figure 4**). The YHRP intentionally leveraged community partnerships to reach these demographics. Most youth were high school age (**Figure 5**), and the program was able to attract male and female participants, with 41.8% male, 52.2% female, and 4.7% non-binary or other gender.

**Figure 3: Race of Youth Participants (n=369)**



\*Note: "Other Race" includes those who marked "other race" (14) and those who indicated American Indian/Alaska Native (3), Asian (2), and Native Hawai'ian or Pacific Islander (1).

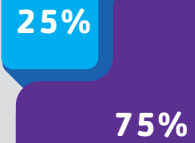


**981**  
Youth Reached  
by *Love Notes*

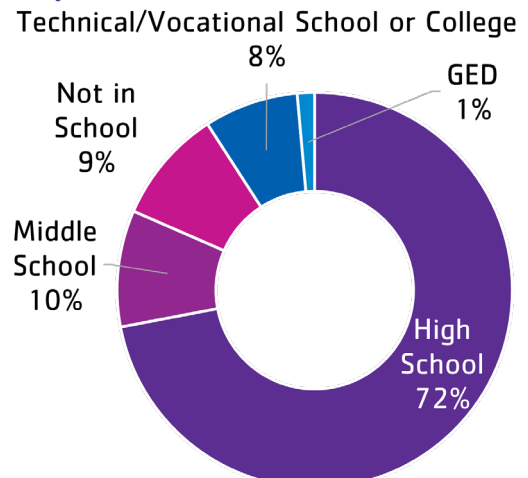
**596** Youth attended *Love Notes* EBP programs.

**385** Youth in YMCA Safe Place received life skills from *Love Notes* lessons.

**Figure 4: 25% of Youth were LGBTQIA+ (n=382)**



**Figure 5: School Status of Youth Participants (n=493)**



“Being able to have real conversations and gain levels of understanding, and being with a group of people where I feel like I can learn from them just as much as they can learn from me - I think *Love Notes* is the perfect environment for something like that.

- LN Peer Facilitator

# GROUNDED IN COMMUNITY

## Leverage Points for Systemic Change & Community-Informed Action



Systems change requires participation of diverse system actors and strategies designed to shift the way the whole community thinks and talks about relationships. The Community Advisory Committee (CAC) is a place to bring people together to identify leverage points and key stakeholders to bring to the table. The group included adult and youth representatives from the target population, such as local service providers, community partners, local government, parents/caregivers of youth, and youth that completed *Love Notes*.

The CAC envisioned a community with lower teen pregnancy and STD rates, and where healthy relationships are the norm. The group identified barriers and system gaps keeping the community from realizing the vision and agreed on five leverage points for removing these barriers and closing the gaps.

### Barriers & System Gaps

The CAC identified the following barriers:

- The Bible Belt contributes to a culture of shame and avoidance around topics of sexual health and wellbeing.
- Too little open and honest communication.
- Among youth, very little awareness of available reproductive healthcare and too little information on how to access that care.



### Leverage Points for Systems Change

Following identification of system gaps and barriers, the CAC identified five main leverage points for our grant project:

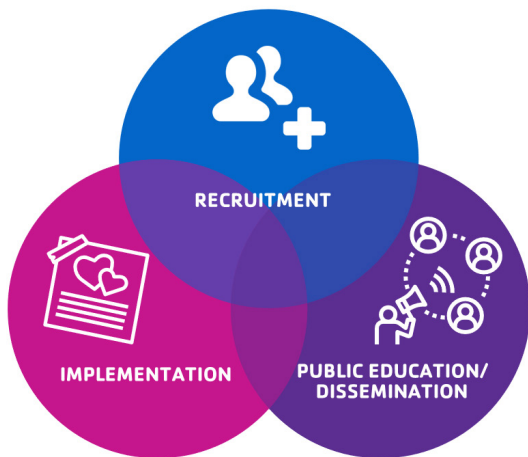
- Skills and norms for open and honest communication.
- More resources and support for parents and caregivers.
- Opportunities for youth to build trusted adult connections with positive role models.
- Knowledge of and access to youth-friendly reproductive healthcare.
- Support for youth development of positive identity and self-esteem through empowerment, opportunity, safety, and respect.

To effect change at these leverage points, the group agreed that the effort must identify a broader range of community partners.



*L/N Youth*  
**Y Teen Vibe Podcast,**  
"How to Find Genuine Love."

# PARTNERSHIPS, INFLUENCERS, & INNOVATION



The CAC identified potential partners (individuals and organizations) to recruit youth participation in the YHRP, to implement *Love Notes* at diverse venues across the target area, and to assist in a public education campaign through providing access to audiences, sharing the message, or both.

With CAC input, the YHRP team constructed a complete interactive asset map of local stakeholder organizations and individuals with attention to the role they might play.

Local artists and performers repeatedly emerged as influencers who could reach a youth audience and help empower youth voice. The use of creativity became a running theme and focus for the *Teen Vibe Camps* and the community-engaged aspects of the YHRP.

## Messaging for Change



With leverage points identified and the community system mapped, the CAC turned to considering how to frame efforts for cultural change around relationships and reproductive health.

In a series of work sessions, the CAC developed messaging to address each of the leverage points.



Facilitators shared the ideas with youth during *Teen Vibe Camps* where they developed songs, poems, podcasts, and artwork to disseminate the messages of the *Love Notes* curriculum.

Notable developments were an emphasis on the importance of trusted adults and the need to support youth self-esteem and positive identity with the hashtags *#WhosYourGo-To?* and *#ExpectRespect*.

Sharing these messages with media outlets was also important. During Dating Violence Prevention Month, the YHRP participated in several media interviews and published an op-ed. Additionally, the YHRP presented in both local and national conferences including the Office of Population Affairs Innovation Exchange, a webinar with Dibble Institute, and was featured in local news articles, RHNTC's Grantee Spotlight, and Indiana University's Alumni Magazine.

Peer facilitator Daiya spoke at the YMCA Annual Campaign Kickoff, shared her story in a YMCA community impact video, and presented locally and nationally on how the YHRP engages and empowers youth voice. Her video impact story became an easy-to-share testimonial to the power of the YHRP and is now featured on the Dibble Institute's website for the *Love Notes* program.



## Community Engagement

In an effort to help parents and caregivers develop trusting relationships marked by open and honest communication, and with an eye toward supporting youth self-esteem and positive identity, the CAC agreed to focus on resilience. The YHRP team hosted two screenings of the documentary *Resilience: The Biology of Stress and the Science of Hope* and led discussions to help parents and community members better understand the ways that childhood trauma shapes child and youth behavior as well as adult outcomes.

Trauma-informed approaches to youth require a shift from reactionary responses to problem behaviors to recognizing such behaviors as indicators of childhood stress and need for love and support. The events generate meaningful dialogue and interest in building resilience through trauma-informed approaches, with unanimous positive response from community members and parents who attend.

The focus on problem solving and communication skills in the *LN-EBP* is vital to building resilience in young people affected by violence in their romantic relationships, in their families, or in the community. As a direct result of this work and the partnerships created during the grant, the YMCA has become a resource for community response to recent episodes of gun violence. The Office of Safe and Healthy Neighborhoods (OSHN) co-sponsored the screenings and now hosts gatherings at the YMCA to process violent events as a community.



45

Community organizations collaborated with the YHRP.



To listen to the **Y Teen Vibe Podcast** and other youth-created content, scan this QR code or visit [linktr.ee/ymcalouisvilleteenvibe](https://linktr.ee/ymcalouisvilleteenvibe).

## YMCA TEEN VIBE PODCAST

For Teens, By Teens



The YHRP launched a youth-led podcast starting in September 2022, with the primary goal of empowering youth voice and disseminating concepts youth learned from *Love Notes*. **The YMCA Teen Vibe Podcast: For Teens, By Teens** now has a total of thirty-one episodes available on both Spotify and Apple Podcasts, with 227 all-time plays. Topics include black love, healthy relationships, how adults can help youth, how social media and bullying impact youth, how dating and relationships play out in youths' lives, and many more youth-led reflections on what they learn in *Love Notes*.

Black love to me means unity and strength. I feel as though our bond is quite different than any other culture, just because our history and the things that we currently go through as well. So I think the unity part is something that's really unbreakable.

Simmons College Student  
**Y Teen Vibe Podcast**,  
"What is Black Love."



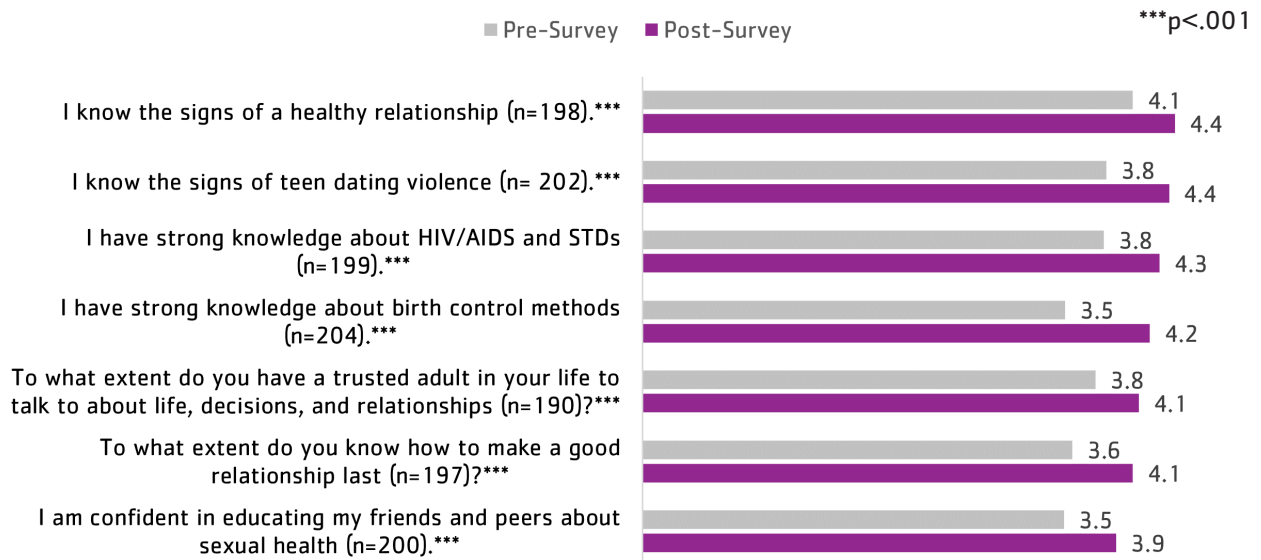
I feel like [*Love Notes*] talks about real life stuff that people deal with. It's a really good program for teenagers.

LN Youth  
**Y Teen Vibe Podcast**,  
"Ariauna and Eltuan Talk Healthy Relationships and Expectations."

# REACHING YOUTH, CLOSING GAPS

Across all implementation sites, youth demonstrate significant growth on many key learning objectives. The highest scoring items on the post-survey are knowing the signs of a healthy relationship, knowing the signs of teen dating violence, and having strong knowledge about HIV/AIDs and STDs (Figure 6).

**Figure 6: Paired Sample T-test on Youth Pre- and Post-Survey**

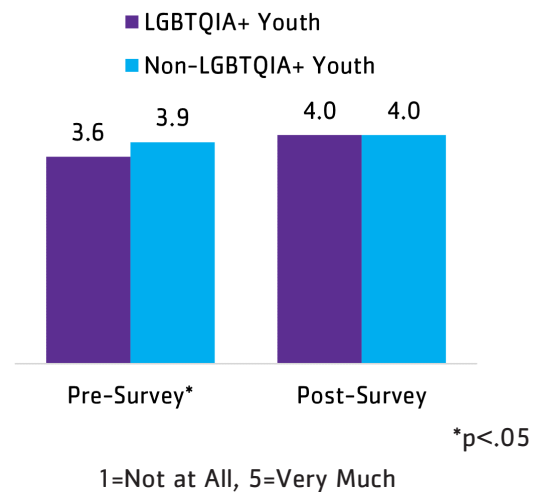
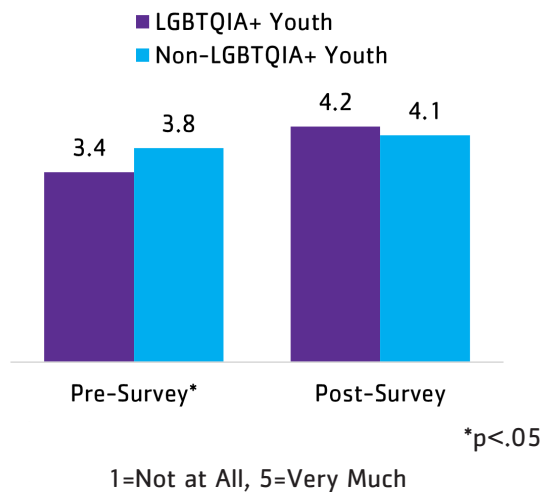


LGBTQIA+ youth comprised 25% of YHRP participants across implementation sites. They had statistically significant growth in the same areas as their non-LGBTQIA+ peers and rated the importance of receiving the *LN-EBP* more highly than their non-LGBTQIA+ peers (4.6 versus 4.3 out of 5,  $p<.05$ ).

**Figure 7: LGBTQIA+ Youth vs. Their Peers Pre- and Post-Survey Differences**

To what extent do you have a trusted adult in your life to talk to about life, decisions, and relationships?

To what extent do you know yourself and what will make you satisfied in life?



Before completing the *LN-EBP*, LGBTQIA+ youth were less likely than their non-LGBTQIA+ peers to say they had a trusted adult to whom they could talk and that they knew themselves and what would make them satisfied in life. After completing the camp, both groups of youth see significant growth, and the difference between them is no longer significant - the gap closed (Figure 7). Both of these findings address the identified leverage points of trusted adult connection and positive identity.

# PROGRAM INNOVATIONS

## PEER FACILITATORS & TEEN VIBE CAMP

The YMCA Tier 1 Teen Pregnancy Prevention grant nurtured two significant innovations for delivery of the *LN-EBP*: a peer facilitator training and implementation model and a five-day camp model that combines the curriculum with time and opportunity to process material through creative activities that empower youth voice.



**74%** of *Teen Vibe* youth said the creative activities in the Teen Tech Center improved their understanding of *Love Notes*.

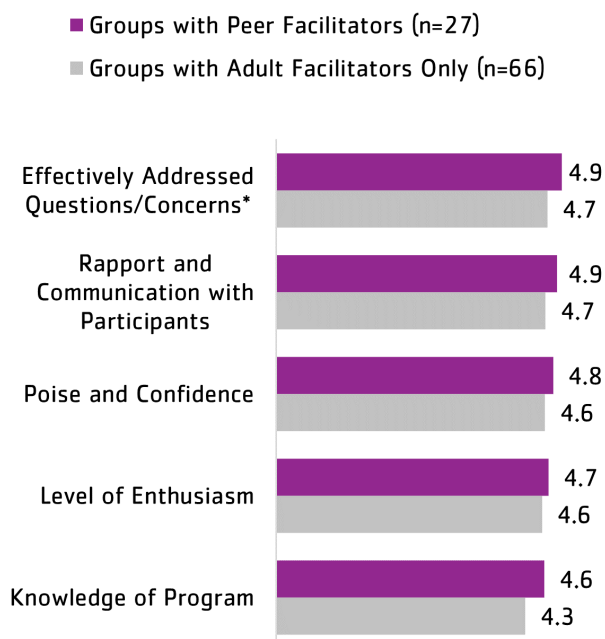
### PEER FACILITATION

Building on an existing partnership the YMCA worked with a nearby school for implementation. The school proposed use of their education career pathway magnet program to develop a peer facilitator model that would provide opportunities for students to get their field hours teaching *LN-EBP* alongside adult co-facilitators. They wanted to use the peer/adult co-facilitation model in their own school, pairing a teacher and a senior student to deliver the program to 9th grade students. The YMCA saw mutual benefit in this agreement and began implementation with a *LN-EBP* for the students in the education magnet, and followed the standard lessons with a full day training in

facilitation for those interested in becoming peer facilitators.

The YMCA recognized how the model empowered youth, and drawing on their experience using teen Counselors in Training, they contracted some of those peer facilitators to implement the program at the YMCA. Peer facilitation proved to be a great success, increasing rapport with the youth and lowering barriers to learning. In overall scores of program quality, facilitation teams that included peer facilitators out-performed groups with only adult facilitators, with average quality scores of 94% and 90%, respectively.

**Figure 8: Observed Facilitator Quality (1=Poor Quality, 5=High Quality)**



\*p<.05

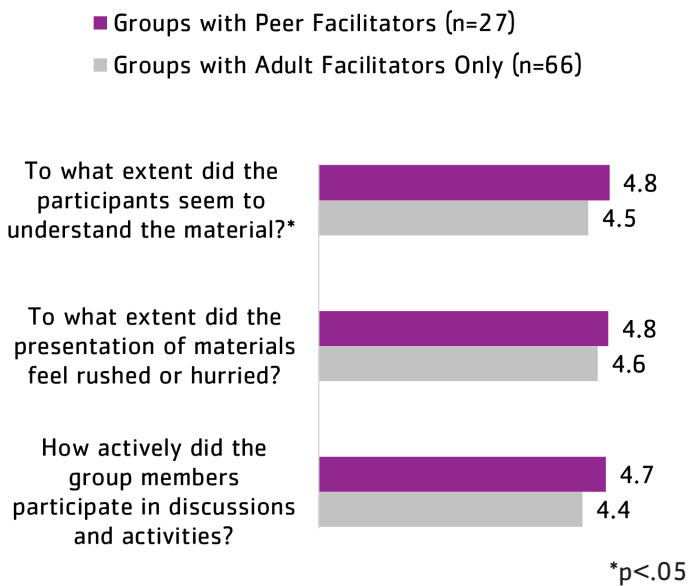
“ I think this program has really helped me come out of my shell and I’ve been able to do a lot more just in my personal life with it. I think the program has helped me build more skills.

- *LN* Peer Facilitator

In a breakdown of each quality rating item, groups with peer facilitators out-perform groups without them in a few key areas. Peer facilitator groups score statistically higher than adult-only groups in youth participant understanding of program material (4.8 versus 4.5 out of 5) (Figure 9).

In measures of facilitation qualities, peer facilitator groups out-performed adult-only groups in every category, although only the category “effectively addresses questions/concerns” is statistically significant (Figure 8).

**Figure 9: Observed Program Quality Scores (1=Poor Quality, 5=High Quality)**

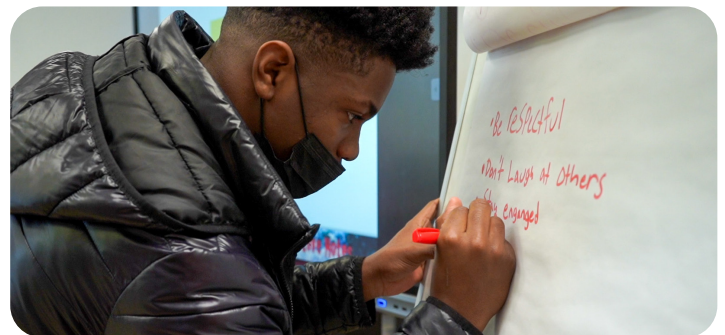


**In interviews, peer facilitators talked about how they benefited from peer facilitation:**

“Practicing what you preach” by being more accountable for applying program content to their lives and relationships. One peer facilitator noted, “there’s a difference between teaching *Love Notes* and living *Love Notes*.”

Improved communication and conflict management, being able to be more relatable and building trust with youth in the programs.

Bonded with fellow peer facilitators, youth that they taught, and adults in the program that supported them.



The peer facilitator implementation model built a stronger partnership with the nearby school, increased perceived impact of the program on youth who became facilitators, and resulted in what appears to be an even higher quality experience for youth who participate in programs delivered by peer/adult co-facilitation teams.

“ I think with the adult facilitators, I feel respected. I feel like my opinion is equal. I have never been made to feel less than. I feel that I have an equal say and that my voice is heard. In other environments I am not the oldest person, which tends to happen a lot. I feel like I’m not always listened to in the same way I am here. I really appreciate that about the staff in general and my co-facilitators, whether they’re a peer or an adult facilitator.

- LN Peer Facilitator

The love I’ve received, the support that I receive... I feel like I have formed not a team, but a family of trusted adults.

- LN Peer Facilitator



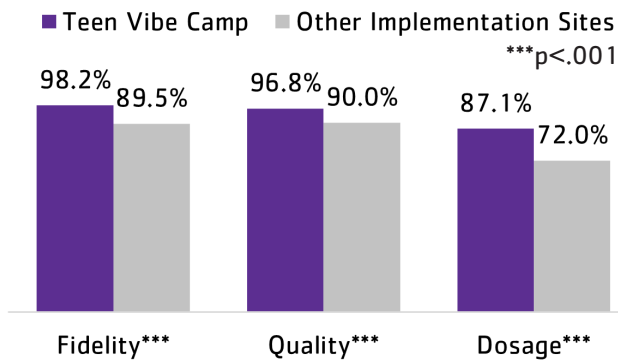
## TEEN VIBE CAMP

The YHRP began Tier 1 implementation replicating a two-day format for the *LN-EBP*'s 13 lessons. Youth and facilitators found the format difficult to manage, and the early program struggled to deliver quality, recruit youth, and retain youth for the full program. YMCA staff considered their strengths: great facilities and staff who know how to do day camps. With teens often overlooked for out of school time programs, such a model seemed like a needed resource for the community.

The *Love Notes Camp* implemented the EBP at a YMCA that hosts a Best Buy Teen Tech Center. The Y delivered EBP lessons in the morning, followed by a communal lunch, and afternoon time for youth to create passion projects in the Teen Tech Center based on the lessons of the *LN-EBP*.



**Figure 10: Teen Vibe Camp Out-Performs Other Implementation Sites**



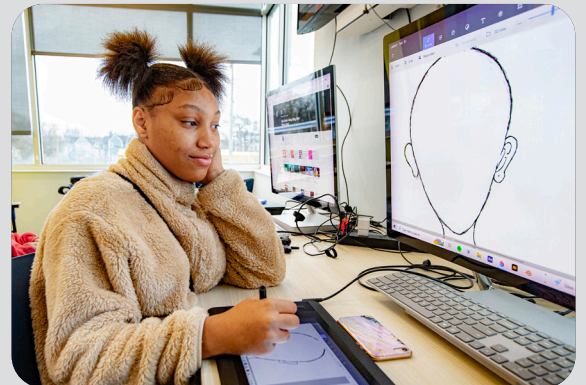
**87%** of *Teen Vibe* youth said the program was **important** or **very important**.

**82%** of youth said they were likely or very likely to **apply knowledge** they learned from the *Teen Vibe Camp*.

**79%** of youth agreed or strongly agreed that they made **positive connections** to their **peers** in the camp.

**77%** of youth agreed or strongly agreed that they made **positive connections** to **adults** in the camp.

At the first camp, youth indicated the name had to change, and they came up with the name *Teen Vibe Camp*. Youth embraced the creative opportunities to podcast, generate visual art, record music and spoken word poetry, and develop photo voice projects. The final day of camp included a fun day at the Y, which introduced the youth to resources they could use after the camp with the Y membership they earned from completing the program. *Teen Vibe* evolved to include field trips and a family night where youth engage the *LN-EBP* with a parent or caregiver. Family nights have enjoyed up to 50% engagement, and feedback from parents/caregivers is unanimously positive.



The most convincing indicator of the camp model's success is that 26 teen campers repeated the program. Most repeat campers came back two to four times, but some campers completed the program as many as five times. This suggests the need for more options for teens and confirms the success of the *Teen Vibe Camp* in engaging youth.

These innovations have been highlighted by RHNTC's Grantee Spotlight, the Innovation Exchange, Dibble Institute, and on a national level with conference presentations. The team plans to publish both innovations to Creative Commons.



## KEY TAKEAWAYS

The YMCA Healthy Relationships Program engaged a **Community Advisory Council** to identify leverage points for reducing teen pregnancy and STIs, map the system of organizations and individuals who shape the culture and context of teen relationships and youth-friendly services, and develop key messages for promoting mental models of healthy relationships and positive youth development. The CAC launched a community education effort to promote trauma-informed approaches to building resilience in children and youth.

A quality **peer facilitation** model rooted in reciprocal partnership with a neighboring high school provided a new avenue for positive youth experiences. Participating youth learn more when they facilitate *LN-EBP* for their peers and when they take responsibility for incorporating program content in their personal lives. The presence and style of peer facilitators makes the program easier for young people to understand and may increase their comfort in asking questions.

The **peer/adult co-facilitated *Teen Vibe Camp*** developed an innovative strategy for providing teens with a safe place to be during out of school time, and creative activities empowered youth voice. The repeat camper phenomenon suggests the *Teen Vibe Camp* model is meeting a need for community, an interest in talking with their peers about the challenges they face, and a desire for structured activity outside of school time.

Finally, across all implementation sites participant responses indicate an increase in knowledge from the time they start the *LN-EBP* to the time they finish the program. Teens and young adults respond positively to the opportunity to learn about and discuss healthy relationship skills and strategies, as well as warning signs of unhealthy relationships.

Lessons learned during this two-year grant continue to inform the program's growth and diffusion throughout Louisville and southern Indiana. The team is fine-tuning the peer facilitator and *Teen Vibe Camp* models to disseminate for broader use, and the YHRP continues to grow in the Greater Louisville region.



## CONTACT

To learn more about the YHRP's work, visit our website here:

[ymcalouisville.org/love-notes](http://ymcalouisville.org/love-notes)

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