

Kari Robideau:

Thank you for tuning in to the University of Minnesota Extension Center for Youth Development Podcast series. My name is Kari Robideau, and this podcast will describe a youth program that is building a culture of health. To do this today, I have three guests joining me, Joshua Kukowski, Joyce Strand, and Katie-Anne Berhansel. Hello to all of you.

Joshua Kukowski:

Hey, good morning.

Joyce Strand-Vosler:

Hello.

Katie-Anne Berhansel:

Hello.

Kari Robideau:

Hey, there they are. Now before we jump into our topic of Culture of Health, would you all please introduce yourself and tell us who you are, where you are, and what brought you to the Culture of Health project?

Joshua Kukowski:

Hello, my name is Joshua Kukowski. I live and work in Moorhead, Minnesota, which is in northwest Minnesota bordering on Fargo, North Dakota. I've been with the University of Minnesota Extension Center for Youth Development for just over five years in this role as an extension educator. What brought me to this project, and you'll hear about this later, is really how youth are at the forefront of making all the changes. I'm most excited when you're talking about building a culture of health is how youth are going to be the ones that are driving this work, and making real impactful changes.

Joyce Strand-Vosler:

Yeah, my name is Joyce Strand-Vosler, and I'm a program coordinator in St. Paul, Minnesota. It's urban area, so I'm doing a lot of organizing of afterschool programming, community club 4-H programs, and the content really varies. We have a big STEM initiative, but the culture of health is really exciting work for our Frogtown/Rondo community. We have the largest urban farm in the nation, and so it's a really good fit.

Katie-Anne Berhansel:

Thank you. I'm Katie-Anne Berhansel, and I am a 4-H program coordinator out of Chippewa County, so I live and work in Montevideo, Minnesota, basically three hours straight west of the cities. Mylin is the community that we're focusing on in this initiative, and that is on one of the edges of our county. I have been with Extension for just over a year and a half now, and I work with our 4-H programs in our county, so really we're always working with youth to develop their potential, and then working with adult partners and the community to support them in providing positive opportunities for growth. So when this opportunity came about, it was just another option to look into to provide them.

Kari Robideau:

Thank you Katie-Anne, and I'm going to have you continue with us here as you've all referred to the Culture of Health programming. Can you tell us more what is this, and give us the description of what it is, and how the project came to be?

Katie-Anne Berhansel:

Sure, so really building a culture of health is anything we can do to improve a person's quality of life. Our three Minnesota communities of Frogtown, Mylin and Moorhead were able to attend the National Youth Summit for Healthy Living in Washington, DC in February. One of the main goals was to define and then develop health action plans for each of our communities. The plan identifies the need, and how the youth leadership will address that need in cooperation with adult partners, youth in their communities, and any other partner organizations. Really the opportunity became available to us when two Extension Centers partnered to apply for the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation grant. That's where it began.

Kari Robideau:

Okay, and Joshua, there are a number of partnerships that were created that Katie-Anne just referred to, can you tell us a little bit more?

Joshua Kukowski:

Yeah, Katie referred to a couple of them right now, this is a really complex project really designed to do a lot of different things. At its core, obviously, is to make a change in the local community where they're led by the kids. However, to put all this together, we talk about Robert Wood Johnson, they're a very large nonprofit. If you know Johnson & Johnson, they're from that part of it too, and they care about creating a culture of health. Imagine if we talked about health in the same way we talked about other things that we talk about a lot.

Joshua Kukowski:

Really the United States spends a tremendous amount of money on health, and get not the results that correspond to that, and I think they're trying to really address that issue through a culture of health. We talk about Cooperative Extension, we're everywhere. We are in almost every county across the United States in our systems. We're based as a land grant university, both tribal and old land grant universities, and we're in based in every county. So you think about creating a culture of health with our capacity of being in every community, you talk about 4H as having the kids and having the volunteer infrastructure in place, so we have that there.

Joshua Kukowski:

And then bringing Family Development along from family. Most Cooperative Extensions have different centers that they focus on. Ours, like I said, I work for the Center for Youth Development thinking about... but bringing together our colleagues from a different center from across the nations is forcing us to really think differently about health, and nutrition, and about families, and about communities. It's actually really neat to see how these things are all coming together. If you can imagine a bunch of streams, Robert Wood Johnson, Cooperative Extension, 4-H, Family Development, all coming together to form this to kind of focus on a culture of health.

Kari Robideau:

The two of you have described the philosophy or definition of what the culture of health is, and the partnerships that have been crucial to making it happen. Let's hear what is going on, what is the programming? Joyce, I'm going to have you start. There are three sites that have been doing this programming. Joyce, you're in Frogtown, you mentioned that a little bit earlier, could you describe for us what is happening there?

Joyce Strand-Vosler:

Yeah. In the Frogtown community, we're, as the grant calls, innovators, and then Mylin is like a implementer, and then Morehead's the planner. So we're all in different stages really in where the work's at, and Frogtown being the innovators, they have already had a strong presence in the Frogtown/Rondo community. What we're doing is we're really adding that youth voice piece to the community partnership, the strong community partnership that's there.

Joyce Strand-Vosler:

We are working with the Urban Farm and Garden Alliance in Frogtown community, Family Development, and FNAP. They have identified young people that are the center of what we want to do. [Khalia Lanier 00:07:39], she is a youth that had been working with the Garden Alliance, and went to Washington, DC, and then Kathleen [Gagalye 00:07:50], who has been a long-time 4Her in our Big Urban Woods 4H club, also went to Washington DC, so those two youth have now been at the table, and they're working on their action plan.

Joyce Strand-Vosler:

They've decided that they want to do a community dinner this summer, and inviting other young people to come along and talk about the culture of health in their community. Khalia is very interested in mental health, and the state of their neighborhood, and how mental health is affecting their community. There's lots of disparities being a neighborhood that is primarily people of color. Yeah, there's inequity there, so she wants to bring more resources around that issue. At this dinner, in addition to her talking about mental health, we would have resources from NAMI and some other nonprofits that are working in that community.

Joyce Strand-Vosler:

And then Kathleen Gagalye is interested in the Native culture, and bringing the gardening medicine piece into the neighborhood. Reconnecting with the land is pretty important, so that's what she'll be talking about in the... They're also organizing more youth to be planners in that community dinner, and trying to identify other topics that they would want to bring to the table. They will be teaching other young people in the gardens that are already established.

Joyce Strand-Vosler:

There's a children's garden that has weekly programming, and so that will be one recruiting area, and then Kathleen is going to be teaching at the Freedom School that's in Rondo, and she is working with the healing garden's, I don't know, a designer I guess, and instructor here at the University of Minnesota, so we'll have some expertise in the Native culture. That's really exciting that it's only been like a few months, and these kids, young people, have already made more partnerships, and are taking lead, so it's really exciting.

Kari Robideau:

Yeah, I mean as you're describing that, what a powerful event for these young people to be able to have their voice represented and that it's their voice, they're planning it, they're the ones behind what the message will be during that dinner.

Joyce Strand-Vosler:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Kari Robideau:

Thank you for sharing that, and I look forward to hearing how that goes. When is that dinner planned for?

Joyce Strand-Vosler:

It's going to be in July, one of the Fridays in July, just figuring out what dates work best. When you have a lot of partners the scheduling gets a little tricky, so we're just figuring that out. But yeah, it should be in the next couple of weeks here that we have the exact date.

Kari Robideau:

Great. I look forward to hearing the impacts those young people make in that innovators project that you have.

Joyce Strand-Vosler:

Thanks.

Kari Robideau:

Next we're going to hear from Katie-Anne in Mylin.

Katie-Anne Berhansel:

Absolutely. As Joyce said, Mylin is considered the implementer community, so we are in the stages of really getting the plan going. Jawaiy and Matthew are the youth who attended the conference with us and came up with hundreds of fabulous ideas. Narrowing it down was one of those projects that they were tasked with along with Ann and Steve, who are our volunteers who came with to the conference as well.

Katie-Anne Berhansel:

Jawaiy and Matthew really want to focus on the physical inactivity and obesity that they're seeing in their community in Mylin. Mylin is a small town, rural area, population of around 370, and really a farming community along with a large Micronesian community, so a really rich, diverse mix there. What Jawaiy and Matthew were noticing was just a change in culture, and looking at that inactivity that's happening amongst their community, as well as getting everyone out to do it together.

Katie-Anne Berhansel:

One idea that they have planned is to host a five o'clock walk, where they would literally start at a door, knock on a neighbor's door, ask them to join them, and go around the town. They would plan this, it

could be 5:00 PM, 5:00 AM, so they could go either way with this. During these walks, they really want to take time to have everyone get to know each other, so it could be really informal or they've talked about planning some formal discussions where they could bring in someone to talk about healthy food or what to cook, so some type of discussion that you can have while they're doing the walk. As I said, really getting to know each other is what they would like to focus on.

Katie-Anne Berhansel:

Volleyball is huge to the Micronesian culture, especially these youth, and they are really active in volleyball, basketball, and they'd like to host some tournaments in their local community center gym, or outdoors would be ideal for them. Getting something going to create that space in the park would be a big deal for them as well. Again, all to get more activity, and get everyone out and about doing it together.

Katie-Anne Berhansel:

They have a lot of ideas, and as we sat around the table last week talking, the youth are at the table, the community adults, we have SNAP-Ed, we have our Extension Centers with Family Development and Youth Development, and just lots of good ideas going forth and a lot of excitement from our youth to get that started. They're looking at that, also identifying other youth in the community that are excited to go along with them, and then some more of the adult partners. We're ready to start, especially now that the weather has turned.

Kari Robideau:

You're ready to implement.

Katie-Anne Berhansel:

Yes, absolutely.

Kari Robideau:

Yeah, The five o'clock walk, and volleyball, and all around the idea of getting to know others better.

Katie-Anne Berhansel:

Yes.

Kari Robideau:

When do you anticipate this happening in your community?

Katie-Anne Berhansel:

That, yet to be determined, and as they've talked, it could be kind of an informal start, so whenever the weather looked like it was nice enough to get people out, they would begin and then identify some of those formal discussions that will happen along the way as well.

Kari Robideau:

Thank you for sharing that.

Katie-Anne Berhansel:

Yes.

Kari Robideau:

We will now move on to Morehead, Joshua's there, and you have the planning stage of this.

Joshua Kukowski:

What that really means is we get more time to learn from all the good things that are doing in Frogtown, and Mylin, and across the nation, so we have a little bit more time to get started on a project, and that's what we're doing. We're actually just getting started. The Morehead's project has not been defined just yet, but it's getting closer to being defined. We have brought youth together, and what they wanted to do is they wanted to bring more youth, and the kids actually asked, they wanted to bring the adults together to hear what they had to say too, which is kind of an interesting dynamic. So we're looking forward to bringing the kids together.

Joshua Kukowski:

But some of the things that we're working with right now are we're working with the Somali population in this community, in Morehead. Morehead is a very dynamic community, like all the communities you've heard about, and one of the new arrivals to our area has been a Somali population, a Somali group. They are really trying to advocate, but at the same time also navigate some of the challenges living in this community can bring, and any new arrival to any community faces.

Joshua Kukowski:

What we're doing is we're listening to hear exactly what they want to do and how they define a culture of health, but I have a suspicion it's going to nest around understanding between larger communities and the Somali community that we're working with. I just have that hunch that that's probably where we're going. I will just say to be determined.

Kari Robideau:

All right. Well, we will stay tuned. And your timeline?

Joshua Kukowski:

We have 18 months I think, and I'm not sure when that 18 months began, so look for something by the end of this year.

Kari Robideau:

Right. Well, as I said, I would be thrilled to do a podcast again with the three of you, and have the young people involved share how this all panned out. In the meantime, I'm really curious about some of the data and the methods behind this project. How did you decide the innovators, the implementers, the planners. Joyce, could you tell us a little bit about those data and methods that informed the decisions on how you're doing this work?

Joyce Strand-Vosler:

Yeah, I think one thing that was really awesome about the young people going to Washington DC was they were learning that health disparity, it's not just an individual choice, really. It's not about somebody

just making good decisions. It's really there's multiple levels of how the culture of health affects a community. So looking at policy is a big part of that, and that means not just government policy, but even institutional. Yeah, there's many things that... and I think the young people are really blown away by that.

Joyce Strand-Vosler:

They also learned this tool called the County Health Ranking. It's a website that you can put in your county ZIP code, and you can see data of what your community's looking like. I'm just going to kind of walk through and try to chat as I go through the website here so you guys can kind of get an idea. The website is www.countyhealthranking.org, brings you to the first page.

Joyce Strand-Vosler:

It says Health Where We Live, and then you're going to click on the tab that says Explore Health Rankings, and then go to Find County Rankings. There's a search box there that you can type in your county. I'm doing that right now. I typed in Ramsey County, and it shows the ranking of 87 counties in Minnesota, and Ramsey County is 68, and then it breaks down overall quality of life, health behaviors, clinical care, social and economic factors, physical environment, and then there's sub categories.

Joyce Strand-Vosler:

It shows different areas where the county does well, and then also there's the red line where you're not doing so well. With our young people and Frogtown/Rondo, it was interesting because the Health County Rankings didn't exactly show mental health or culture come up as an indicator in that area. But I think it's because Ramsey County is so big that some of that data can get lost. Just having conversations based on that data helped us sort it through, and I think it was like a starting point really for us to-

Kari Robideau:

Thank you, Joyce. One last question for all of you to weigh in on. What is your hope for this project? You all have a specific project that you've described to us, and that it has a process and a place that you're getting to, what's next?

Joshua Kukowski:

For me, two things. One thing that comes to mind that I remember taking away, the impact you make at a local level, like in your family, is small. The impacts you make at your workplace are bigger, but still small. The impacts you make at maybe your school, your institution, are big, but still not... But the impact when you talk about making policies, that's where a lot of real change happens. I think one of the things we're really trying to encourage youth to think is to think that you can really make changes that really make a difference. To me that's really exciting as well.

Joshua Kukowski:

The other thing I just take away, when I thought of the word health, I think of diabetes and bike paths. And now I'm thinking broadly about what health is, and I'm really encouraged about that. So [inaudible 00:20:44] that's for me.

Katie-Anne Berhansel:

I would echo Joshua as well. My hope is that the youth gain leadership and see the big piece that they can play in making a difference in policy nationwide as well starting out with a town of 370 people. They've also mentioned this in Mylin as being a small community. So yes, they can literally walk the entire town, but this could be taken to larger communities then, and smaller areas or neighborhoods could replicate the same process. That's where they've talked about taking this at this point, as well as the overall goal of getting everyone to know each other in the town.

Joyce Strand-Vosler:

Yeah, and I think I'm excited that the young people are seeing the younger people in their community, and wanting to influence them. Also, taking leadership and modeling that leadership, and learning these new pathways connecting with partners. It's really exciting when you're not the one that's doing all of the work, that it's the community, and that change is what's going to make this stuff sustainable, and have that larger impact. I think that's super exciting.

Kari Robideau:

It is exciting work, and I want to thank the three of you for sharing today how using innovation, implementation, and planning by youth, with youth voice, supported by adults is helping to form a culture of health in all of your communities and will affect others in years to come, so thanks for joining me today.

Joyce Strand-Vosler:

Yes, thank you.

Katie-Anne Berhansel:

Thank you.

Kari Robideau:

For more information on youth/adult partnerships and youth leadership, please visit our website at www.extension.umn.edu/youth. You are going to discover other research, training, and events that we offer, and you'll also find information on our Minnesota 4H program if you aren't part of it already. Please also look at our Youth Development insight blog, where you can read and comment on topics covered by our colleagues there. That is going to wrap up our podcast today. My name is Kari Robideau here today with Joshua, Joyce, and Katie-Anne. From the University of Minnesota Extension Center for Youth Development, please tune in again soon.