Overview of the Program

Youth MOVE Oregon (YMO) is a chapter of Youth MOVE National, a youth- and young adult-led initiative with chapters all over the country. Its goal is to improve services for youth and young adults who are involved in various systems such as mental health, juvenile justice, addictions, and child welfare. The national organization supports the development of community-based chapters throughout the country by providing a small grants program and general technical support.

YMO receives funding from SAMHSA (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration) and Oregon CCOs (Coordinated Care Organizations), and applies for federal and state funding. YMO also partners with state and county governments to connect with other youth-focused organizations. These connections expand awareness of youth services and resources while enhancing YMO’s capabilities.

YMO is taking a lead role in developing peer-led services in Oregon and beyond. YMO offers workshops, trainings, community, and drop-in centers, all provided by youth for youth. The young people who work for YMO have gained skills in curriculum development, public speaking and advocacy, grant writing, and the creation of community partnerships.

Youth MOVE Oregon has sites in Washington Coun-
The Role of Peer Support Providers

YMO’s PSPs are hired based on their life experiences, not academic achievement. Some PSPs are in high school and some are in college, but all have had experiences either in foster care, juvenile justice, mental health services, or other services.

“If you can convince us that you have useful knowledge of the systems and have passion about changing them, and helping youth not have the same negative experiences that you have, that’s really what we’re looking for.”

It is also common for PSPs to have experience using services provided by YMO; three of the current employees at the Milwaukie drop-in center participated in services and programming offered by YMO. Peer support providers receive certification in a curriculum called Intentional Peer Support that is offered throughout the state.

Whenever possible, YMO uses a “dual supervision” model to improve the skills of PSPs. Dual supervision has clinical and peer delivered components. Through a contract with the county mental health system, PSPs have access to training on the clinical aspects of their work. The peer delivered component consists of weekly coaching sessions with PSP supervisors. These sessions focus on topics like ethics and the PSP’s own self-development. Just like YMO youth, outcomes for PSP development are measured according to the Search Institute’s list of 40 key developmental assets (www.search-institute.org/research/developmental-assets). Following through on their own development allows PSPs to fully appreciate the challenges faced by YMO’s youth as they develop through the program.

Peer Support in a Drop-in Center

Youth attend the Milwaukie drop-in center to gain assistance, improve skills, or simply to find community. In addition to being a safe and welcoming place for youth, the center provides access to computers and numerous recreational activities. Youths enjoy the center’s pool table, chess games, and Wii. They can also prepare meals in the center’s small kitchen and relax by watching TV.

The center’s reputation among youth speaks for itself. Most youth learn about the center by word of mouth from their peers. The center maintains its popularity among youth without engaging in elaborate advertising campaigns.

Youth are welcomed into the center community gradually, engaging with staff and peers at their own pace. Once a youth has dropped in a couple of times, peer support providers invite the youth to sign a contract that outlines goals for youth to achieve. Youth agree to:

1. *Stay in school and be working towards graduation or getting a GED.* Continue to learn, whether through college, in other areas of life, or through the YMO leadership curriculum.

2. *Obey the law.* This includes not engaging in illegal activity outside of YMO, such as the use of illegal drugs or intentionally speeding. (The following situations are not in violation of this commitment: undocumented immigrant status, homeless and camping or sleeping on the streets, or nonviolent civil disobedience in political action.)
YMO is challenged by the high demand for youth peer-led services. Currently, the Milwaukie branch employs only four PSPs. Despite laptops and cell phones, the sheer size of Clackamas County (where the center is located) makes it difficult to reach all of the youth that would benefit. Currently, the drop-in center is open three hours a day (3 PM – 6 PM) during the week. There are no other organizations that offer similar services, despite the obvious need. This results in a limited variety of options for youth who are experiencing a crisis. They can drop in to the center during open hours or they can contact a PSP to meet with them. However, there are only four PSPs and two must be available at the center for it to be open.

Although awareness of the benefits of youth peer-led and -delivered services is beginning to spread, funding remains a challenge that limits YMO’s growth. Oftentimes, YMO’s director of peer-deliv-
Nationally, Oregon’s Youth MOVE chapters are recognized as leaders in innovation. YMO not only offers youth-delivered support, but does so in a way that is truly youth-led. Its success rests on a foundation of relationship building and respect for youth. This approach produces an atmosphere of trust in which youth are supported to pursue positive changes on their own terms.

“I don’t know if it’s just the population we’re working with, if they really need that community piece; I do know that for a lot of them, we might be the only positive thing in their life...They may not have traditional parents or grandparents, or anyone, which may be part of why they want a group; they want to build a community rather than just a one-on-one relationship. When we bring Youth MOVE to a community, we just bring the building blocks and the youth in that community make it want they need it to be.”

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