

Case Study: Honolulu YMCA YPAR

Who:

Honolulu, Hawaii is located on the island of Oahu, which is the second smallest Hawaiian Island. Winward is a neighborhood in the city of Honolulu. In the Winward neighborhood, the YMCA is a place where community members can volunteer and connect with others. One program the Winward YMCA puts on for teenagers is Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR). The YMCA Youth Program Director, Mr. David, and his team involved 14 youth ages 11-17 to participate in a YPAR project to learn about and design a plan to address an issue that leads to poor health and well-being for community members.

The Battle:

The climate of Oahu and much of Hawaii is warm and tropical, so many plants there – decorative ones and food crops – grow to be big, green, and healthy. Also, Hawaiian culture promotes healthy eating. Therefore, grocery stores and restaurant menus include many tropical fruits and vegetables for people to enjoy. Even with plenty of fresh and locally-produced fruits and vegetables, youth working on the YPAR project in the Winward neighborhood thought it was hard for some people to get healthy food to eat. They found out that all the students at the nearby Waimanalo School receive free or reduced-price lunches. If the school did not serve healthy food, many students may not get to eat the fruits and vegetables they need. The YPAR project youth remembered a beautiful and bountiful garden at Waimanalo School. At that time, the garden did not have caretakers, so it did not produce any food. The youth saw the need for a plan to keep up the garden over time.



Youth from YMCA and the community volunteered to make and maintain the garden.

Raise Awareness and Engage Others:

The youth and YMCA staff worked together to talk with staff at Waimanalo School. It was important to them to involve teachers and administrators in the garden work for two reasons. First, the garden is the school's property. Second, the school would need to support students and teachers to maintain the garden after the YPAR project ended. The Vice Principal at Waimanalo School was a participant in Winward YMCA youth programs when he was young,

and one of the teachers had worked there previously. The Vice Principal and teacher were strong supporters of the YPAR garden project.

The YPAR project team also wanted to include other youth from the neighborhood and school in their work. It was important to involve other youth to split up the garden work. Also, the other youth volunteered in the garden and learned how fun gardening and gardens can be.

Make Your Plan:

First, the youth planned to involve the Vice Principal and a teacher by talking with them about their project. To prepare for this meeting, the youth planned to research about other local gardens and laws or rules that support community gardens. Then, the youth planned to involve other students by doing a survey at school. The survey would include questions about healthy eating, access to fruits and vegetables, benefits of gardening, community, native Hawaiian plants, and recycling.

All the small steps to make and maintain a garden – weeding, planting, watering, harvesting – are a lot of work. So, the youth leaders planned to involve enough people to spread out the work. They shared the survey results with the Vice Principal and teacher and got the support they needed. They scheduled two days to work in the garden over the summer. They invited other youth and adults from the school and community to help. When school started again in fall, the YPAR project team planned to teach younger students about healthy eating and gardening. The last part of their plan was to give fruits and vegetables from the garden to food service staff members for school meals.

Implement Your Plan:

The plan to involve school staff in the project was a huge success. With the school's permission, the youth hosted two work days over the summer. The work days were so successful that youth added a third garden event to celebrate their work and bring volunteers together. When school started, the school took back responsibility for the garden and promised to continue to care for it. Three large harvests took place during the school year. School food service used the fresh produce in many new healthy menu options.

Evaluate Your Plan:

One of the youths' goals was to restore the school garden. During the work days, youth saw how the garden changed from a wild nature space to an organized and productive garden. The youth also wanted to make more fruits and vegetables available to students at school. The youth leaders achieved this goal when three different large harvests occurred. Students harvested limes and other fruit, kale, and sweet potatoes from the garden. The school food service staff used the produce to make smoothies, baked sweet potatoes, sweet potato poi, and sweet potato turnovers. The YPAR youth leaders could follow up on students' responses to the new menu items with a survey about how much people liked them. The results of this survey could tell the school what to plant in the garden in the next year.

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- “YPAR- Winward YMCA Teen Garden,” (2016). Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/notes/windward-ymca/ypar-windward-ymca-teen-garden/1261145043957496/>
- “Youth Participatory Action Research,” (2018). Retrieved from <https://snaped.fns.usda.gov/success-stories/youth-participatory-action-research-ypar>
- “2017 Annual Report YMCA of Honolulu,” (2017). Retrieved from: <https://www.ymcahonolulu.org/assets/content/about/annual-report/2017-Annual-Report.pdf?1531186918>.



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