Deepening the Focus on Social Emotional Learning (SEL) in an Evidence-Based Program: Perspectives from the Field

Karen Guskin, Christina Donald & Nicole Thomson, Wyman Center, St Louis, MO

**Introduction**

The Teen Outreach Program® (TOP®) is an evidence-based, positive youth development program for 6th – 12th graders with over 60 implementing Partners nationwide. As part of a planned revision process, and using the research base on SEL and input from the field, Wyman identified 3 objectives for deepening TOP’s SEL focus:

- explicitly address SEL in program materials
- support staff practices that are critical to building youth SEL
- design curriculum to optimize high quality facilitation and SEL

After a 2 year revision process based on research in the field and feedback from diverse stakeholders, a revised curriculum, training, and logic model were released in Fall 2017.

**Key Questions:**

- How are the revised TOP program materials impacting youth, adults and organizations?
- What lessons were learned from the process of deepening the focus on SEL in an existing evidence-based program?

**Methods**

**INTERVIEWS**

- In Spring 2018, an external consultant interviewed 26 early adopters from three Wyman Partner organizations located in Florida, Missouri, and North Carolina, serving more than 2,000 youth across eight sites.
- The organizations serve different populations of youth, deliver the program in different settings (in-school, out of school; rural, urban), and have different funding sources.
- Common themes from the interviews were identified and used to inform the development of a case study released in Fall 2018.

**SURVEYS**

In Spring 2019, 45 (76% response rate) TOP National Network Partners responded to an online stakeholder survey.

**Results**

Interviews also showed that the increased SEL emphasis was positively influencing organizations to:

- Align hiring, supervision and professional development practices more closely with SEL
- Enhance communication about the program, the skills that youth are learning, and how those skills are linked to longer term outcomes
- Advance SEL at the broader organizational level

**Surveys**

All item ratings averaged 4.00 or higher on a 5 point scale. Highly rated items:

- Lessons make strong use of the experiential learning cycle (M=4.72)
- New content areas of the curriculum are helpful (M=4.70)
- Curriculum material is effective in building youth’s SEL (M=4.70)

In addition,

- 81% agreed that the TOP logic model is an effective tool for showing how TOP achieves outcomes
- 94% agreed that the revised TOP curriculum will support teens’ SEL needs

**Lessons Learned**

1. Start with a research base
2. Clearly define your program’s SEL focus
3. Be prepared for an extensive revision process
4. Allocate sufficient time and resources to learn and adjust during the revision process
5. Engage in an ongoing learning process as new materials are rolled out and implemented

Questions? Contact: Karen Guskin: Karen.Guskin@wymancenter.org
Christina Donald: Christina.Donald@wymancenter.org
Access the full case study at: https://wymancenter.org/research-and-learning/
For more information about TOP, go to www.teenoutreachprogram.com

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