

TSET Better Health Podcast Transcript

Episode 17: YAHL: Youth Action for Health Leadership

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Summary: The Youth Action for Health Leadership, part of TSET's Healthy Youth Initiative, inspires and incentivizes young people to become advocates for public health. Jessica Davis, TSET Assistant Director of Programs, and Caryle Hausbeck, Senior Program Manager at Rescue Agency, give us an inside look at this innovative approach to youth engagement and generational impact.

[Theme music]

[0:15]

James Tyree: Hello and welcome to the TSET Better Health Podcast. This is James Tyree, a health communication consultant at TSET.

Cate Howell: And this is podcast writer and producer Cate Howell.

With school starting up soon, we thought now would be a great time to talk about a new program rolling out next month. It's a key component of the TSET Healthy Youth Initiative, a multi-phase series of programs dedicated to improving health outcomes in Oklahoma youth. The initiative's first phase launched in August 2020 with media campaigns that speak directly to teens in ways they can relate. One education campaign is called Behind the Haze, which speaks to teens about vaping, another is Down and Dirty, an anti-tobacco series that spoke directly to Oklahoma's youth in rural areas. And a third campaign debuted earlier this year called Swap Up, which shows teens how they can easily swap food and drink choices for healthier ones.

J. Tyree: I love those campaigns, Cate. You know, the TSET Healthy Youth Initiative also includes My Life My Quit, a text-based tobacco cessation program for young people ages 13 to 17 that launched in Oklahoma last fall, and it's wonderful for helping teens quit tobacco and vaping.

But now there is a new phase of the initiative called YAHL, which stands for Youth Action for Health Leadership. Just like Behind the Haze, Down and Dirty and Swap Up, YAHL is a collaboration between TSET and Rescue, a behavior-change marketing agency. But YAHL is different because it partners with existing school clubs to teach and empower high school students to become public health advocates through trainings, curriculum and scholarships. Our first guest, Jessica Davis, TSET Assistant Director of Programs, tells us more.

[02:15]

[Uplifting synth and piano music ("[Game of Life](#)" by Peter McIsaac Music)]

Jessica Davis: YAHL actually stands for Youth Action for Health Leadership, and that is TSET's newest statewide youth-led health initiative that's funded by TSET. This initiative provides youth with a platform to create measurable impact in Oklahoma by promoting health behaviors.

J. Tyree: Jessica Davis has been with TSET for eight years, working primarily with the TSET Healthy Living Program up until her recent promotion. She says YAHL is exciting because it focuses on youth in fun, interactive and best of all, meaningful ways.

J. Davis: The YAHL program actually partners with schools or clubs such as like your local boys and girls clubs and youth advisory boards and other types of community organizations that have high school students as members. So we're talking grades 9th through 12th to work directly on public health activities that make it easier for youth to live healthy, active, and tobacco free lifestyles.

J. Tyree: There are other programs across the country that take a similar approach, but this one is unique in a few ways.

J. Davis: So YAHL is focused on recruiting pre-existing youth teams rather than building brand new youth teams across Oklahoma. So what that means is like clubs like 4-H, Too Much To Lose, maybe Students Against Destructive Decisions, et cetera, can still work on meeting the goals of those groups while adding in another layer of work related to reducing tobacco use and obesity and across Oklahoma. Oftentimes we find that youth actually only have time to participate in one or maybe two youth clubs due to time restraints. But because we knew that this was a barrier ahead of time, we wanted to ensure that the work of YAHL would not necessarily replace the great work of existing youth teams, but instead it would actually complement the work. So that is probably one of the most unique characteristics I would say about this group.

J. Tyree: What results from this approach is a collaborative partnership between leaders in public health, education and youth. All involved have an opportunity to listen to each other and create lasting change, which is the core of TSET's mission.

J. Davis: I think the biggest thing is the voices and actions of youth are powerful and impactful, which is one of the reasons why the YAHL program was created. I'm really excited to see the program grow and getting youth involved in helping make decisions that quite frankly, impact them decisions like school, health and wellness. What types of meals would they like to see served within their cafeteria? What would they eat and what types of physical activity opportunities would they even like to engage in? It's important for youth to have seats at the table in order to make those decisions. And YAHL kind of creates that platform for them to be invested in those decisions and to be heard.

[05:42]

J. Tyree: TSET and Rescue are now inviting Oklahoma school groups to participate in Youth Action for Health Leadership by the start of the fall 2021 semester expecting great success. You can learn more about the program and how to get involved by visiting yahlok.org,

spelled Y-A-H-L-O-K.org. Proven strategies of creative promotion, engagement and community partnerships are foundational to TSET's method of improving health outcomes for all Oklahomans.

C. Howell: Exactly. But how are those strategies executed when it comes to YAHL? Here with more detail is Carlye Hausbeck with Rescue Agency, TSET's main collaborator on this project.

[06:36]

[Funky bass music ("[UX Blip Blip](#)" by Tiny Music)]

Carlye Hausbeck: My name is Carlye Hausbeck. I am a senior program manager at Rescue Agency. I oversee multiple youth engagement and policy programs spanning across multiple states. Originally my background is in social work with a macro policy focus. So here at Rescue, I'm able to apply my skillset to deliver states and clients with award-winning youth programs that empower high school age teens to cultivate real change in their communities.

C. Howell: Rescue Agency is based in California, but Youth Action for Health Leadership is a uniquely Oklahoma program designed to address Oklahoma youth and Oklahoma issues.

C. Hausbeck: Students in Oklahoma are at an increased risk for using tobacco products and obesity compared to national averages. The smoking rate in Oklahoma is 12.5% for high school students compared to a national average of 5.8%. So YAHL is really aiming to make a difference with that.

The program works by partnering with high schools and organizations that work with high school students. So once we have a partner, the YAHL teams come to these schools and organizations to have an interactive training with students and teach them about important issues and how they can make a difference. After the training, students are equipped with the knowledge to talk to their peers, other citizens and leaders in their community about tobacco control, nutrition and physical activity to build support and really make a positive impact. The YAHL team works directly with the students to make sure that they feel competent and prepared to participate in, in all of the YAHL activities.

C. Howell: So that's an overview of how it works, but how did it get started?

C. Hausbeck: Honestly I think the story starts way back when with Rescue's model. So Rescue has a youth engagement and policy model designed and proven to engage youth and make lasting policy change. So Rescue's model is called Evolvment, and Rescue has been implementing this model for over 10 years, basically since the company's existence. So our youth engagement model was actually recognized by the CDC's best practice guide for youth engagement and tobacco control as well.

Fast forward to kind of Rescue's partnership with TSET. Rescue has been working with TSET for many years and has been super great partners. Throughout the years, it became more and more evident that the youth work and improving the health of our

future was really critical. TSET, really being at the forefront and a leader in health improvement for Oklahoma, recognized the efforts of Rescue and had seen the work that Rescue had done historically with our partnership, and really together, we came together to partner and create YAHL to better the health of Oklahoma's youth, and also, you know, really provide youth with this leadership opportunity to be the ones to cultivate the change for themselves.

- C. Howell: That opportunity for youth to participate in the process and become change-makers in their own communities and in their own way is a key part of what makes this program stand out from others like it. It gives students a way to become part of the policy process in real ways and cultivate real-world skills in public health, advocacy and organization. But it also provides tangible, monetary incentives, which are also important to building the students' futures.
- C. Hausbeck: The students are able to have really practical leadership and professional skills that they can take with them for the rest of their lives, and they're also able to make this really lasting impact in their community. It's not just something that they're going to participate in for their four high school years or their teen years. They're really going to be able to implement this for a long time. So for example, students aren't just trained on the dangers of vaping or tobacco use. They're also taught how to make a difference so that their peers, loved ones, siblings, future generations are not harmed by these dangerous products. So they'll learn ways to overcome Big Tobacco tactics and how to practically implement policies that can make a difference, and then the policy change can last for generations really impacting Oklahomans' lives forever. So the YAHL members will gain transferable skills, but also continuously make an impact in their communities, which I think is really unique in terms of extracurricular activities for students. In addition, you know, students have the opportunity to earn points and can get scholarships, so we really want to make sure that there's tangible rewards for students.
- C. Howell: But it's not just the students who benefit. Partners and collaborators stand to gain a lot from participating in the program as well.
- C. Hausbeck: Our program is different in the sense that there's tangible benefits for our partners as well. Schools or organizations that partner with YAHL can earn up to \$2,000 for their club or organization just by being an active contributing partner. So this is really cool because we value our partners' time and we want to show them just, you know, just how much we appreciate them and we know that they spend effort and also making this a successful program. So we encourage anyone that could be interested in being a partner to head to yahlok.org and apply just because it's an awesome opportunity for partners to also be rewarded.
- J. Tyree: This win-win approach to community engagement is a great way to implement a new program and to create the lasting wellness change that TSET and other public health advocates really strive for. Youth Action for Health Leadership not only provides constructive activity and benefits for youth, but also opens up active collaboration between youth and adults in ways that encourage feedback and new ideas.

C. Howell: The YAHL program is ambitious with many moving parts, but it's exactly what Oklahoma needs right now, and TSET and Rescue Agency have put together a solid plan to accomplish the program's objectives.

C. Hausbeck: One of our first goals is to train 1,000 students to become YAHL members this year. So we are hoping to train a thousand YAHL members who are actively working towards health goals in there in tobacco control and physical activity and nutrition in the state and in their communities. So our strategy to accomplish this goal really begins with our partnerships. We're hoping to have 40 school or organization partners throughout the entire state, and that really helps us get our foot in the door to different communities and students, student bodies, to help recruit and train all of our YAHL members.

We work with our advisors to build student interest and encourage them to be YAHL members. So we do a lot of work on the ground to really engage the student body and make sure that they're excited about the program. So we'll come to the schools or the organizations and teach them about what YAHL is. We then set up a training date and a time for students to participate in our three hour interactive training. At the training, the students will learn all the skills that they need to know to become a really effective YAHL member. So it's the only thing that's required of our students in YAHL is to come to this training so that they're prepared and they'll be given a number of opportunities following the training.

Long-term, you know, our goal is to really make an impact hopefully through policy change and in the tobacco control and physical activity and nutrition realm. So first we will accomplish this by training the youth and educating them about the issues, but also providing them with the opportunity to educate others in their community. Then the youth will be able to educate and advocate for specific policy initiatives that combat tobacco use, Big Tobacco tactics and implement physical activity and nutrition in people's lives. It's a multi-step kind of landscape, but it does hopefully have a long-term impact for the state of Oklahoma.

[14:50]

[Upbeat pop music ("[Sunshine Smile](#)" by LATG Music)]

C. Howell: The youth are the future, and Youth Action for Health Leadership is determined to help generate the next influential leaders in the field of public health in Oklahoma through hands-on training and personal connection. The impact has the potential to build lasting relationships and improvement in health outcomes for the entire state.

C. Hausbeck: The youth will be able to speak to these issues for the duration of their lives, and they'll also be educated about public health policy in a way that I think a lot of young people just don't have the opportunity to understand how tobacco control policies really impact them or make a difference or how having certain nutritional standards at their schools set them up for success in the term. First of all, having that education and awareness at a young age will be crucial for them in their futures, but also being an active and engaged citizen as they become young adults and into their adulthood just sets the

foundation for them to be engaged in their state's policies and also these specific initiatives, these issues, and be mindful of their environment in terms of health and tobacco control.

This is the first year of the program, so we're super excited to kick it off the ground. We're super excited to be in Oklahoma schools and organizations this fall training youth. Anyone that is interested, go check out the website, Y-A-H-L-O-K.org (yahlok.org) and learn more or even apply or send it to someone that you know that might be interested because we are ready to hit the ground running and excited to work with youth that are also ready to make a difference.

[16:45]

J. Tyree: Once again, the website for YAHL is Y-A-H-L-O-K.org. There, you'll find all kinds of information about how it works and opportunities to join as a partner. And if you would like more information about the TSET Healthy Youth Initiative or any of our programs, please visit the TSET website at tset.ok.gov.

C. Howell: While you're there, you can check out the Better Health podcast page at tset.ok.gov/podcast for our episode archive and full transcripts. Follow us on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) at @OklahomaTSET for updates.

J. Tyree: Thank you for joining us for this episode. Until next time, this is James Tyree –

C. Howell: And Cate Howell –

J. Tyree: Wishing you peace –

C. Howell: – and Better Health.

[Theme music]

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