

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

WHAT IS THE EMERGING LEADERS CLUB?

The Emerging Leaders Club was established in 2013 as an integral component of our multi-pronged and yearlong drug prevention programming. The purpose of the Emerging Leaders Club is two-fold. First, we seek to educate students on leadership skills through lessons that are taught after school by many different instructors, some from our school staff and some from our community. Beyond the leadership education of students, we also lead them in weekend volunteering activities in our community, and invite the community to our school for luncheons with our students and rehearsals of our musical groups. Our ultimate goal is for our students to take the theoretical lessons on leadership taught in after school sessions and put them into action as they volunteer their time and talents at a variety of community agencies.

THE HISTORY OF THE EMERGING LEADERS CLUB

It starts with YES . . .

During the summer of 2013, three graduates of our school died tragically from drug overdoses or violence associated with drug sales. The impact on our community and school was profound. Everyone was asking the same questions as school commenced in the fall of 2012: Why is this happening? What can we do to stop this?

Our answer to these questions came in a moment of inspiration during one of our summer brainstorming sessions. We knew we had taught our kids to Just Say No, but we realized that maybe we hadn't done a good job of teaching our kids what to

do after saying no. In short, we had never taught them to say YES. We talked about the good, healthy, positive, life-affirming things that make a life full satisfying. Repeatedly, the idea of community linkage and service were mentioned as answers to the question, to what should young people say YES? Maybe, just maybe, leading our students in this direction—into service—could strengthen their immunity to the lure and darkness of drugs.

This was the beginning of our YES Fest, which ultimately led to our Emerging Leaders Club.

“I SAID YES!”

Our YES Fest is a week-long celebration that culminates in a one day program that features speakers and a Volunteer Festival in our gymnasium. Students spend time in both parts of the program, first listening to a speaker who reminds them of the importance of just saying no, and then to a speaker who challenges them to say YES to community service. After the speakers, students then travel to our gymnasium and visit the nearly 60 tables that are set up and manned with representatives from community agencies that need our students to become volunteers.

THE COMMUNITY SAYS YES

For our Volunteer Festival, we wanted to bring the community into our school in a huge way. We wanted a festival atmosphere in our gymnasium where many tables featuring volunteer agencies from our community would be set up. We wanted music and enthusiasm to prevail in this part of the YES Fest. We wanted to move away from the sadness of the loss of our graduates and move into the good feelings of our community helpers. We needed a list—a list of volunteer agencies, health facilities and drug counseling centers. And so, we brainstormed at a stakeholders meeting with each person mentioning a place that should be invited. Stakeholders suggested names of people who were in positions of power who would be on board

with our YES Fest. Gradually, we compiled a list of about 60 places we wanted to invite. Over several weeks, we made our contacts. We sent them invitations to our event. The invitation described our inspiration for the event and the fact that they and their organization were an essential part of the entire day. We told them that we could not do it without their help. It was overwhelming the enthusiasm with which these people responded to our invitations. Not only were they willing to attend, they were thrilled to be asked. It turns out that they were trying to figure out a way to be involved with the school for a long time. This invitation was something for which they had been hoping!!

COMMUNITY AGENCIES THAT SAID YES:

Akron Children's Hospital

Al Anon

Alta Behavioral Clinic

American Cancer Society

Angels for Animals

Animal Charities

Beatitude House

Belmont Pines

Big Brothers/Big Sisters

Boardman Fire Department

Boardman Police Department

Boardman Township Park

Mahoning County Board of Health

Butler Art Museum

Canfield Driver's Examination

Coalition for Drug Free Mahoning County

Comprehensive Psychology

Dorothy Day House

Easter Seals
Friends of Fido
Friends of the Public Library
Mahoning County Green Team
Habitat for Humanity
Help Hotline
Hospice of Mahoning County
Junior Achievement
Legacy Animal Rescue
Boardman Traveling Library
Mahoning County Democratic Party
Mahoning County Republican Party
Mahoning County Safe Communities
Mahoning County Dog Warden
Making Kids Count
Meridian Community Care
Mill Creek Park
Neil Kennedy Recovery
New Lease on Life Animal Rescue
Oh Wow! Children's Museum
Paw Platoon
Purple Cat
Pig Iron Press
The Rescue Mission of Youngstown
Reading Radio of Goodwill
Red Cross
Rich Center for Autism
Salvation Army
Second Harvest Food Bank

Shepherd of the Valley Nursing Home
Sojourner's House
St. Vincent DePaul
St. Elizabeth's Hospital
Travco
The United Way
The YMCA
Youngstown Neighborhood Development Corporation
Youngstown Reading Radio
Youngstown State University
YSUscape

AFTER THE YES FEST

One lesson we learned after our first YES Fest was that students may sign up to volunteer at the Volunteer Festival, but the follow-through was lacking. Several discussions with students revealed that many of them were somewhat intimidated by the idea of going to volunteer alone. With that information, we decided to make volunteering a priority by scheduling volunteer opportunities each month and going as a large group—students, teachers, and administrators working side by side.

THUS, The Emerging Leaders Club was created.

HOW DOES THE EMERGING LEADERS CLUB WORK?

Each month, students have a minimum of two Emerging Leaders Club activities. First, there is a lesson planned, and this lesson will illuminate an aspect of leadership for study. The instructors for this lesson vary each month. Some months, the instructor will be a teacher or other staff member who has a passion for leadership. In other months, outside speakers who specialize in spiritual or leadership topics will instruct our students. Near the conclusion of the meeting, a

speaker from an outside community agency will speak to the members about an upcoming volunteer event planned for the club.

For example, in the October meeting, a staff member taught a leadership lesson on courage. For about 30 minutes, the students explored the meaning of courage and its connection to leadership. Then, several community members from the animal rescue network came in and did a presentation on the urgent need for volunteers to help our furry friends. They brought two adoptable, rescue dogs, and created interest in and enthusiasm for getting involved as an animal rescue volunteer locally. As a follow-up activity the next weekend, students and staff participated in an animal rescue volunteer activity that involved walking shelter dogs and cleaning their cages. In another month, the students had a leadership lesson on initiative, which was followed by a presentation on the issue of hunger in our community. The following weekend, students and staff went to a local food bank and helped to package food for the hungry.

EVERY MONTH, A NEW THEME (Examples . . .)

MONTH	LEADERSHIP LESSON	VOLUNTEER ACTIVITY
September	Knowledge	United Way Day of Caring (cleaning up blight in the city)
October	Courage	Dogs Day Out (walking dogs/cleaning cages)
November	Initiative	Feed the Hungry (packaging food at pantry)
December	Generosity	Spirit of Giving (collecting gifts for Salvation Army)
January	Loyalty	Casino Day (playing cards at nursing home)
February	Integrity	For the Kids (delivering Valentines to children's hospital)

March	Dependability	Spring Cleaning (cleaning up township park)
April	Decisiveness	Making a Home (working on a home for Habitat for Humanity)
May	Endurance	Finish the Race (working 5K for area agency)

PARTNERING WITH GREENBRIAR ASSISTED LIVING

In an effort to make a connection with the growing elderly population in our community, Emerging Leaders made a directed decision to partner with Greenbriar Assisted Living Center. On multiple occasions, students went to Greenbriar's facilities to participate in activities with the residents. These activities included a casino day, multiple bingo games, as well as lunch which the leaders and the residents completed together.

While there, through conversations with the residents, we came to find out that some wanted to visit Boardman High School to see our Emerging Leaders in their environment. We were able to orchestrate visits on two occasions last year. Once a group of residents came for a special lunch served in our cafeteria by our staff with the help of our Emerging Leaders. The residents were seated at a special table with our leaders to eat lunch and visit. Dessert was provided that day by our students in our Foods classes. On another occasion, the residents visited our school to watch many of our Emerging Leaders perform in a dress rehearsal with our choirs.

This November, we will begin again with a representative coming to Boardman High School to present information on Greenbriar and its Assisted Living facility as well

as on volunteer opportunities. We will once again plan visits to their facility as well as their visits to the high school.

PARTNERING WITH COMPANIES

Emerging Leaders was looking for a means to have t-shirts made for the students to wear into the community while volunteering. We felt that it was important for our students to be easily identified as part of our group. Instead of the Emerging Leaders reaching into their own pockets to cover this cost, we turned to the kindness of a local business leader and his company. Compco Industries was our t-shirt support last school year. In fact, the leader of their company has come into to speak to our students regarding leadership in the community. This illustrated to students the full circle that being dedicated to one's community can and should take.

WHAT'S SO GREAT ABOUT EMERGING LEADERS?

There are many aspects to Emerging Leaders that make the club valuable. Obviously, the leadership classes are relevant for our students. However, beyond that, the linkages created by this group are many. The linkage between our school and the community is the first essential relationship built by this club. The community needs our students, and our students need this community. For the community, our students become the new generation of volunteers that are vital for their continued success. For our students, the community becomes more of a home, the place where students feel connected and a sense of belonging.

In addition to this linkage, there is another linkage that is essential—that of students to staff. Because staff attend and teach some of the leadership classes, as well as participate in the volunteering activities, students and staff form an important link to each other because of the shared experiences. After you have cleaned up blight in

a city neighborhood next to a person all day, you feel a bond with them because of that experience. Students and staff get that experience each and every month. The bonds are significant for staff and students.

CONCLUSION

We would love the opportunity to share our Emerging Leaders Club with other school boards in the hope that it can be duplicated and impact the lives of students and communities all over the state.