



Transcript: Centering Youth Voices & Prioritizing Youth Engagement with PATCH (Providers and Teens Connecting for Health)

Presenter: Erica Koepsel, MA
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JEN WINSLOW: Welcome, everyone. We're just going to let folks have a minute to get into the room, and we'll start in just a moment. Well, good afternoon and welcome, everyone, to today's webinar, Centering Youth Voices and Prioritizing Youth Engagement with PATCH-- Providers and Teens Connecting for Health-- with our presenter, Erica Koepsel. This webinar is co-sponsored by the Great Lakes MHTTC and SAMHSA.

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Certificates of attendance will be sent out via email to all who attended the session in full. This can take up to two weeks, and please be mindful that sometimes those can land in your junk and spam folders. The recording and presentation materials will be available within the next week on the Great Lakes MHTTC website.



I welcome our presenter, Erica Koepsel. Erica is the director of youth engagement. With the Master of Arts in gender and women's studies from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and experience as a sexual health educator for diverse groups of youth in Topeka, Kansas and Minneapolis, Minnesota. Erica Koepsel joined the PATCH team in 2015 to continue her passion for improving health education for adolescents and young adults.

In her current role with PATCH, she enjoys combining her background in health education with advocacy, while also working with teen educators to promote open and honest communication about tough topics. Thanks again, everyone, for being here, and I'll turn it over to you, Erica.

ERICA KOEPESEL: Awesome-- hi, everybody. Thank you so much for having me. I am delighted to be here to launch what is a webinar series in partnership between PATCH and mental health technology transfer centers. Today specifically, we're going to talk about centering youth voices and prioritizing youth engagement really as a foundation for all the sessions that are going to come up after this.

So that's kind of our focus for throughout the school year, once a month we'll be touching in on a variety of things related to this. As Jen kindly said, I'm Erica. I use she/her pronouns, and I'm the director of youth engagement. So to kind of set the foundation, I'm going to start by just telling you what PATCH is.

It stands for providers and teens communicating for health, and our mission is to improve adolescent health and well being alongside and in true partnership with youth. So we've been doing this work. We're based in Madison, Wisconsin, and I'll talk a little bit about our regional spread later on.

But we've been doing this work since 2010, and I joined the team in 2015. So I'm also going to talk a lot today about this partnership with youth peace-- that's really why we are here and partnering on this webinar series. Our vision as an organization is a supportive environment in which all youth are healthy, connected, and thriving.

So to us, those three words, healthy, connected, and thriving, means that youth are able to reach their optimal health, safety, and well-being. Youth have strong connections to their community, to peers, and trusted adults, and they're in communication with those. We are ultimately a communication program at heart.



And, youth have the knowledge, skills, and opportunities to flourish into adulthood, and for us, a lot of that is the health related things, so mental health and sexual health. But also, just like, accessing health care, so I hope that all of you in your field are going to find the ways we partner with you in those fields really helpful. So we specifically do this work through implementation of the PATCH model for youth engagement.

This model utilizes youth driven programming that is centered on strong and meaningful youth adult partnerships. I'm going to spend the second half of the day primarily on those two things in this youth model for youth engagement. But, we also integrate key components of employment, education, and empowerment.

Those three Es is what we call them for the PATCH program. The combination of all those things is how we kind of set ourselves apart from some other youth programming or youth work, whether it be jobs that you might have as teens, or whether it is clubs and things that they're involved in.

So I think one of our teens years ago said it best, though, as far as the work that we do. So managing our own health care, like driving a car, is an important part of becoming adult. At the end of the day, it's just making sure we're physically and mentally well so that we can do so many amazing things in life.

We consider the work we're doing here at PATCH to be somewhat a adulthood preparation subject, and our goal is, like we said, for youth to be thriving, for them to have the knowledge, skills, and confidence they need so that they can keep themselves healthy and well as an adult and prepare for adulthood. So how do we do that? We have two main programs here in Wisconsin that I'm going to summarize for context, and we'll talk even more in a little bit.

So all of our youth programming is fairly similar in that PATCH is a job. So I said that they're employed, that means we hire youth. They actually have to apply, go through an interview process, and then, if they are hired, they are trained and onboarded like they would in any job.

So that's our employment feature of those three Es. All of our youth also are going through regular education. So once they finish their training, which most of our Wisconsin youth were trained in August, right at the beginning of the school year, right before the school year started, and will continue with our program through May. So September through May, they're going through



these enrichment sessions two times a month, which is their education component.

So they are diving deep into a variety of health topics. Some of them are mental health and stigma or harm reduction related to alcohol use and substance use. But then, they're also going to learn financial literacy and how to use insurance and all kinds of things. And so they're getting this education to be able to be their healthiest selves, but also to be seen as leaders in their community and to connect to other young people with information and content.

And then the empowerment piece, so that third E, is really the output of the teen's work and why they are hired. So the teen educators do meet in person for all of those things. They're typically aged 14 to 18, so high school students for the most part. And their job is to conduct two workshops in their communities.

So PATCH for providers is a 90 minute teen facilitated professional development workshop in which our trained teen educators share with health care providers youth insights into the concerns, preferences, and reality that impact their health and health care experiences. So the goal of that is really to improve the quality of care for youth when they are seeking health care services.

If you have seen a PATCH for providers workshop, that is wonderful. If you haven't, there's probably a way we can connect you with one happening in your community or one happening virtually, because I think that would be a really great add on to this webinar series. Like I said, it's 90 minutes, so it wouldn't fit in this lunch and learn style, but can be a really powerful way to hear the youth voices in a really formal workshop, professional development space.

Youth will be joining us on future webinars, though, so you'll get pieces of that. The other workshop that they do is the PATCH for teens workshop. So teen educators go into community centers, classrooms, youth groups, other clubs, whatever that might look like, and they are empowering their peers to become responsible managers of their own health and health care. We think it's really important for youth to start learning to do this on their own so that they can become a healthy adult.

That's kind of our teen educator program, and if you've worked with PATCH, there's a chance that you've worked with teen educators. And if you haven't, welcome to the team. The second program that we run that currently only



exists in Wisconsin is the youth advocacy fellowship. So our youth advocates range in age from 12 through 21, so it's a broader age span really spanning adolescence a little bit better than the teen educator side.

It follows the same employment and education structure that the teen educator programs do, but they are statewide, and so they're often meeting virtually across the state in teams around 10 to 15 youth. Instead of workshops, they are actually engaging in community advocacy projects and offering consulting sessions. So the community advocacy projects are actually part of their learning series.

They are learning the skills to be an advocate, completing a needs assessment, choosing issues for advocacy, identifying and connecting with local leaders, holding people accountable by writing letters to their legislators or to their City Board or their superintendent, depending on the level of community at which they are defining.

Are they working in cities in schools at the state level? They're basically creating a plan to create change in their community, and they're supported on the way to do that. And then what I think is really cool is they're also involved in consulting sessions.

So professionals, like you all, perhaps, say we are working on this project, we need youth voice. We don't readily have young people at the table to engage with this, so we bring our youth advocates and they talk about things that might be billboard campaigns and how to reach youth audience and what that looks like.

They also look at curricula and have had people deliver curricula to them, and they give feedback on what worked and what didn't work, and how to make it more youth friendly. They talk about wellness policy improvements in ways that schools can better meet their needs as teens. So we found that when youth are allowed to consult as a team, so these youth work together in their own space with their trusted adult site coordinator, where they feel safe and comfortable, their feedback is more authentic and their true passions shine through.

And it is more valuable for the people who are participating in the consulting getting youth feedback. So it's kind of our youth advocacy fellowship in a nutshell both run school year, and you'll probably hear from some teen educators and advocates throughout the year. I like to put this up.



It's a cute visual of what PATCH does. The mission and vision is slightly updated here, but I show this to show that PATCH is doing work in really all these different levels. So we're working in health care systems. We're trying to do some policy change in the background.

We also recognize home communities and schools are huge-- they really impact the experiences that young people are having. And so we like to highlight that we're working in all these spheres and fields in case you want to partner with us in one of these. And I guess, mental health being a huge part of that, whether that's in schools, in communities, in systems, all of those things.

So I mentioned that in Wisconsin we have both programs running. So our teen educator programs right now in Wisconsin are in Milwaukee, Madison, Lacrosse, Green Bay, and Wausau. They then are serving a broader community around them.

So we've kind of aligned ourselves with the public health regions in the state. I will also say the passion educator model has been replicated out of the state. So we have a team running in Buffalo, New York. And we have a team currently running-- training their first set of teen educators in Denver, Colorado.

And so this PATCH teen educator model and the youth advocacy fellowship have been replicated in other communities and really try to be community driven so that people can take this work with youth and the youth engagement and apply it to the work they're doing. Our youth fellowships, as I said, are statewide, and right now we actually have three in the state of Wisconsin-- one focused on social emotional health, one focused on sexual health, and then one general health and wellness.

And really the whole purpose is that we can meet youth where they're at and have this combination of in-person and virtual experiences, so we can really authentically bring youth voice to the table and partner with people across the state and across the nation in a variety of adolescent health fields. I think that's a good broad overview of PATCH. I'm always happy to chat more, but y'all are here for the youth engagement, so I would love to talk more about our PATCH model for youth engagement.

So I'm going to take a step back. Now that you understand a bit more about what the PATCH program does, I'd like to spend more time talking about how we work with youth and define youth engagement. So this is a definition I really love. It's from act for youth, and it is youth engagement is when young



people are involved in responsible, challenging actions to create positive social change. And this happens through the development of meaningful youth adult partnerships.

We love this definition, and I love this definition because it really highlights that youth are doing meaningful work in their communities with things that are meaningful to them and empowering to them and others. And then, it's alongside adults with whom they have meaningful relationships. So prioritizing, really, those two pieces of the youth driven programming and empowerment and youth adult partnerships that I mentioned early on.

And before we go forward, I also want to pause and just make sure we're on the same page about youth engagement, or at least so you know where I'm coming from and where PATCH is coming from. So often, when I go out in the world and say, we are a youth program that is doing work in adolescent health, a lot of people assume that that means youth are running everything and that as adults, we are just here behind the scenes as support.

And in reality, we have found sometimes that these over permissive practices lead to youth getting stuck or not feeling as though they were able to create any change or impact. I recently gave a presentation similar to this alongside a young person in 30 minutes-- we didn't have the time to pull them in. But, that young person, in response to this, said, yeah, sometimes I feel like my school club is that way.

I have this club. I'm excited. I want to create change, and we're stuck a lot of the times. We don't know where to go, and our youth advisor is not super involved.

So that might be something to consider if you work with clubs or things if you're doing school-based care. So that's the permissive side. On the other hand, I think many of us know this over controlling end of the spectrum may result in youth showing up or in participation if it's required, but it doesn't necessarily lead to the empowerment or growth of the young person.

So at PATCH, we aim for this middle part here, which is maybe not surprising-- responsible youth engagement where youth are involved in some decision making, but they also have structure and guidance at every point of the process. We set expectations for youth to complete for their job. But we also don't let them fail and we work together to set those appropriate expectations.



And again, like I said, the fact that it's a job allows us to hold them accountable in a way that some other structures don't, necessarily. So as you probably saw in the last-- as I described this youth engagement approach, responsible youth engagement, youth-adult partnerships are at the center of everything we do at all that we do. So our youth are hired, trained, and supervised by a local professional that is specifically trained in PATCH's model for youth engagement.

This person, the site coordinator-- so I was site coordinator for seven years until I moved into this position-- they are developing a close relationship with the youth. They are offering vulnerability and being a true adult human in the world, while also setting clear boundaries that are good for the young person and the staff. They are partnering with the youth in community change efforts, and they are working side by side with transparency.

They're being real about what it means to run a program or a nonprofit with the teens who are also participating in that programming. And we have found that it is so, so important to ensure any consistent adult with whom they can grow with over time. That consistency allows them to know who to reach out to when there's a problem.

It allows them to work on setting goals together and moving forward together. And it shows an investment in the teens growth, and therefore, the teen then is more likely to invest in the program. We also know the site coordinator thing, to be a one trusted adult, can be really hard.

Many of you are probably that for youth in the spheres in which you work, and we know that's a big job. And so we pay well and we invest in these critical positions and in the workforce development of them I think, too, it's really important, I think, as I'm looking back at the slides, that the offering vulnerability can be really important to youth-adult partnership because we often are asking youth to share their stories to people and are able to be out there.

But as adults, were so used to saying, and we can't share that part of ourselves because it's not appropriate. And we have found ways to show that it is OK to be vulnerable with young people in a way that is productive and healthy for everybody, as long as those boundaries are created as well. So I think that's an important part to highlight.

And then, youth-driven programming, that was one of the other bolded words early on when I talked about what PATCH does. So at PATCH, we like to call



ourselves specifically a youth-driven program. As you saw on previous slides, youth are not given free reign of the program.

But instead, they are working with the guidance of a trusted adult leader towards really clear impact, towards meaningful impact in their community. They are encouraged to bring their own creativity, insight, and ideas for the program and program improvement. And they participate in a lot of shared decision making and are held accountable for their success.

So to me and for us, I think this model creates a feedback loop. We have trusted relationships with young people. We can have honest real world conversations that can then impact our work and their experiences, and we make change to improve programming as a result of the things they're telling us. So for some examples in our work, I think-- so for the job structure that youth undergo, they go through a robust, but generous interview.

For many of them, it's the first time they're interviewing and it might be the first job they ever have. So it's a generous interview and hiring process. I already said once hired, they're trained, supervised, paid, and held accountable for their work.

It is different than any other job that they may have as teens because our positions are set up to see them thrive. We set high expectations. We pay them for their time. And we work with them to make sure that the program is meeting their unique needs and meeting them where they're at.

So the structure is there, but we can tweak it to allow for each youth to succeed. So the partnership that each youth has with their coordinator is going to vary and the support they need to be actively involved might vary based on transportation barriers or methods of communication or access to tech at home. And so while we've allowed ourselves to structure, because we're hearing from youth things that are not working, we can meet them where they're at to meet their needs.

And then the other part I think that's worth mentioning, or the other example is their training and enrichment topics. So it's part of their workforce development. They have to go through training. They have to go through ongoing education.

And early in the year, we try to pick topics that are important to teens and important to their work that we hope is going to interest them. And then as the year goes on, we are able to better bring in other ideas based on things that



teens have come up with or things that they've told us might be of interest to them. So it allows us to set, once again, a foundation that meets their needs immediately in an engaging way.

And then, it allows us to show them that we're listening as we bring in these topics and things that are of interest to them and new to them. It really means that they're gifted a space to explore new concepts, feel this power of mentorship and inclusion, and engage in self exploration while fostering healthy relationships with other young people. And learning how to create change.

So impact on youth, that's often what we're asking and what we're trying to do. The work we do has impact on both the youth and our statewide or community wide adolescent health efforts. From the young people, PATCH has given me so much confidence in public speaking, a new and unique community of friends, opportunities in the public health world, insight, knowledge, compassion, and so many other things I'll never be able to put into words. It's made me my best self.

And then another teen, this is our program director's favorite quote, is sometimes I sit back and think, wow, I must be part of something really cool. Or like, wow, I'm part of this, I must be really cool. And they are cool.

And we're here because we also think the model provides the structure and meaningful connections and meaningful impact that can go a really long way to helping them feel engaged and heard and empowered. So I think that's where I want to leave it-- 30 minutes is a short bit of time.

But really today's a teaser to kind of get you excited to learn from the youth themselves about why does youth-adult partnership work? How can you form partnerships with young people? What does it mean to run youth-driven programming or youth-driven connections in the places in which you work?

So these are upcoming sessions. We have the dates and some of the teens lined up. So teen perspectives on youth engagement and adolescent health spaces, that'll be a panel of youth. Learning from the field, so how to involve youth and family and school mental health, which I know many of you are trying to do. So we're hoping to have a youth and adult co-present on that.

The teens are going to lead you through an interactive activity in January about how to start helping them take control of their own health care. And then, we are going to really go into this adulthood preparation topic of



transition age youth and what providers might be forgetting. So I will say none of these are recorded.

They're all going to be live. We like to respect that youth change and sometimes the thing they say out loud, they don't always want to live on the internet forever. So this is recorded to get you all excited and to come join us, but make sure you save the date and times for these upcoming webinars and then more. And I know the mental health technology Transfer Center folks are going to give you the information that you need to move forward there.

So stay in touch. My contact information is here. I'm going to show up to all of the webinars, this program here. I'm going to be making sure that the teens are ready to go to meet you where you are at.

And I'll leave this slide up, I guess, and take any questions that might be out there and lingering. I'm just so excited to be on this journey with you all.

JEN WINSLOW: Thanks Erica. We do have a question. Will you be expanding this program outside of Wisconsin?

ERICA KOEPEL: I would love to. So all of our application sites have expanded based on community-- well, let's start at community level. So we at PATCH are not necessarily going out and saying, we are going to throw a dart at a map and say we're starting a new PATCH program here.

But, we meet people through things like this, we partner with [INAUDIBLE] who are best practice in the association of maternal and child health programs innovation hub, I think is the right word. And so if people are interested in PATCH and having teen educators, we figure out a way to get the program to them.

We train them. And then, we actually do ongoing coaching to make sure that they are supported and ready to do the program in a way that best fits their teens and serves their teens, but also fits their community. So I don't necessarily have funding to say, yes, let's go.

And, if anybody is interested, reach out to me. I would love to share with you our PATCH startup guide. And then, talk about what it could mean and look like and even identify sources of funding, because honestly, I think funding is all of our hardest pieces of that. But, I would love to see PATCH expand and



grow. It has been truly a pleasure to see each community take it and make it their own, while still prioritizing its use engagement approach.

JEN WINSLOW: That's great. We have not a question, but a comment. Mary says, I'm excited to learn more about this program. I honestly feel that youth are tired of adults talking at them regarding these topics and will be more open to other youth teaching them.

ERICA KOEPESEL: Yes, I love that. And honestly, a lot of that informal education-- so our peer to peer session is really fun, it's teens in front of other teens. But one of the things we've never figured out how to measure is this ripple effect. Like, if we are empowering youth and working with youth together so that those youth can go out and start having informal conversations and change the stigma and change the game, they're doing it and they're eager to do it.

They just kind of need the support and structure and partnership with a key adult in the community to do that, whether it's a paid position or whether it's a position in which they are shown in other ways that their voices matter. Yeah, yay, I'm excited as well to get to work with you through this, and hope it results in something cool.

JEN WINSLOW: Yeah, well, thanks again. I put some of those upcoming sessions into the chat. As I said, that registration will be coming. So please keep an eye out on our events calendar. You'll be emailed when those are open as well.

And I put contact info into the chat as well. You will be automatically redirected to a very short survey. Like I said in the beginning, we would be very appreciative if you could fill that out. And we hope to see you at future sessions. Erica, is that all you have today?

ERICA KOEPESEL: I think that's it. Thank you so much for joining. I'll stick around in case anybody has any more questions with these last few minutes. Sorry for speeding through that. I promise we'll take up all the time in future ones. I know the teens are going to be so excited to chat with you all.

JEN WINSLOW: That's great. OK, well have a good day, everyone. Thank you for joining us.