

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### BACKGROUND

The Media-Smart Youth (MSY) Program, sponsored by the *Eunice Kennedy Shriver* National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD), teaches middle school-aged youth about the complex media world and how it can influence their health—particularly with respect to nutrition and physical activity. The NICHD funded the following 10 grantees to implement the MSY Program between January and June 2013:

1. Alice Aycock Poe Center for Health Education (Raleigh, NC)
2. Alkebu-lan Village (Detroit, MI)
3. Boys & Girls Clubs of El Paso (El Paso, TX)
4. Communities In Schools of Greenville (Greenville, SC)
5. Coordinated Child Care of Pinellas, Inc. (Pinellas County, FL)
6. EmPoWER Somerset (Somerville, NJ)
7. Girls Inc. of Southwestern Connecticut (Waterbury, CT)
8. Kid Power, Inc. (Washington, DC)
9. School-Community Health Alliance of Michigan (statewide)
10. YWCA El Paso del Norte Region (El Paso, TX)

### APPROACH

To learn about grantees' experiences implementing the MSY Program, we conducted telephone interviews with grantee program coordinators and facilitators in May 2013. We also analyzed each organization's implementation experiences based on the information they included in their final grant reports. The aim of these investigations is for future MSY Programs to build on lessons learned from the 2013 grantees.

### KEY FINDINGS

Based on the findings from the interviews and final reports, we developed a vignette for each of the 10 grantees. These grantee vignettes offer an in-depth, narrative exploration to supplement evaluation data collected. The vignettes are available in the complete report. Below we offer highlights from the findings.

***The MSY Program can be adapted to diverse settings.*** The MSY Program, offered in a variety of settings, gave grantee organizations the flexibility to adapt the program to their particular youth population, program setting, and available community resources.

***The MSY Program allows flexibility according to youth interest, space available, and time constraints.*** The MSY Program allows varying levels of instructors to facilitate the program with no requirements for how, or how long, to implement the entire program or a stand-alone MSY lesson. Individual facilitators adapted, shortened, and/or rearranged the activities of each lesson as they saw fit. MSY Program staff also adapted the program according to middle school students'

interests and level of engagement, and adjusted the program to match the number of students who participated during any one lesson, the age of participants, and the physical space and time available.

***Partnership building is one key factor to successful MSY Program implementation and sustainability.*** Securing partnerships with other community agencies and gaining buy-in from community stakeholders were key factors in successfully implementing the MSY Program. In addition to learning about health, nutrition, and media, some grantees mentioned that the program offers career exploration opportunities for youth when media professionals serve as partners. Grantees who recruited media partners to support the *Big Production* or who took field trips to locations like radio stations and grocery stores reported that these activities were successful and helped to sustain interest in the program.

***MSY Program lessons translated into elevated levels of awareness and behavior changes in places outside the program setting.*** What youth learned through the MSY Program about nutrition, physical activity, and living a healthy lifestyle extended to their personal food choices and levels of physical activity at home, school, and elsewhere.

***The most popular MSY activities involved physical, hands-on, and self-directed activities.*** MSY Program youth across the board most enjoyed “moving and doing” and self-initiated activities. This was clearly exhibited during the interactive physical activity games, hands-on snack preparation, and the development of the *Big Production*. The program offered youth the opportunity to be innovative and to learn about media by creating their own materials and through interactive, hands-on experiences.

***The least popular MSY activities involved lessons that reminded youth of academics.*** MSY Program youth across the board least enjoyed any activity that mimicked school, such as filling out the pre- and post-curriculum assessment surveys, engaging in Q&A discussions, reviewing talking points and statistics, writing on worksheets and logs/blogs, and examining technical nutrition information.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE MSY PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION**

Grantees recommended the following practices when implementing the MSY Program:

### **Youth Participant Recruitment**

- Determine how the MSY Program will compete with other after-school activities in the community.
- Recruit youth already enrolled in established after-school programs.
- Use video clips from the MSY Program curriculum DVD when presenting it to potential partners and youth participants.
- Distribute parent permission forms with the MSY Program registration/enrollment forms.

### **Staff Training**

- Train staff members sufficiently so that they embrace the MSY Program.
- Recruit individuals with experience teaching youth.

- Engage at least two adults for each program session, such as a facilitator and a helper.
- Observe the implementation of the program at another site, if possible.

### Program Implementation

- Consider integrating the MSY Program into the normal school day or into regularly established after-school activities.
- Allow additional time for administering the pre- and post-curriculum assessment surveys and creating the *Big Production*. Consider extending the program to 12 instead of 10 total lessons or expand the length of other lessons during the program.
- Tie MSY lessons into existing programming.
- Offer incentives to sustain MSY Program attendance, such as a raffle.
- Adapt to any number of circumstances. For example, tailor *Action Breaks* to match participants' ages and maturity levels and engage older teens to guide younger participants.
- Involve and engage parents/guardians as much as possible.

### Partners

- Establish partnerships for the *Big Production*—such as with drama schools, television/radio stations, production companies, and community businesses and gardens—at the outset of the program to incorporate partners throughout the curriculum.
- Borrow media production equipment and facilities for MSY Program activities from partners.

### Field Trips

- Organize field trip logistics at the start of the MSY Program.
- Lower transportation costs by walking to and from field trips and seeking bus discounts.

### Lesson Preparation

- Recognize that the prep time each week, including making handouts and shopping for materials and food, can take up to 3 hours for every lesson.
- Modify snacks according to the budget, access to certain foods and facilities, and preparation time available.
- Identify ways to tailor the MSY curriculum to make it relevant and interesting to the unique adolescent developmental stage as well as to today's tweens and teens.
- Focus most of the lessons on fun, interactive, and hands-on activities that encourage middle school youth to move.

### Promoting the Program Products

- Take plenty of photographs of MSY youth engaging in MSY activities as well as of materials they develop during the program.
- Find venues to showcase the *Big Production* and other MSY activities if permission can be secured, such as on YouTube, Facebook pages, and morning announcements at schools.