

Suggestions for using a community youth web site to improve one's youth work or ministry.

OVERVIEW

This program is to be used to help a youth worker design, establish, and operate a web site to collect data from students over the Internet. The purpose of collecting data through the web site is to provide information for the youth worker to exegete the meaning of the current culture in which they serve. In order to establish an attractive web site, inviting to youth, the format is a youth news site. The web site includes current events, school sports scores, and other news to entice students to the site. The site's focus is to ask questions on current issues, using polls and surveys for collecting data. The students who provide answers to the polls and surveys remain anonymous in order to provide more accurate data. The results of the data is readily made available to the students.

The Internet offers an avenue of access into teenage students' lives that few media have yet been able to do. Students are avid, able users of the Internet. Chat rooms are a favorite among student Internet users; many have themes that fit the teen lifestyle and enable them to speak to other students of like minds. There are other types of web sites that also attract students to their web site. In short, volumes of students are communicating with other students and adults on the Internet. Key to understanding this phenomenon is realizing that a student can divulge thoughts and feelings to people and remain anonymous. The subjects that students want to discuss can be shared with others without face-to-face judgment or condemnation.

Thus, the Internet can be useful for listening to what students think and feel about certain life issues. The Internet is a resource that can be used to collect data on students without their being inhibited to share private matters.

PROGRAM GOALS

The overarching goal of this program is for a youth worker to be able to collect data that is useful for his or her knowledge of the current youth culture and to use that knowledge to better serve the community. Therefore, the community page is not overtly Christian. The information to be obtained may help Christians minister effectively, but it does not address any known need of the student users when they log onto the page. Other goals follows in specific headings:

COMMUNITY SERVICE

The data collected can be shared with other community organizations that serve the growth and health of students. Examples of such organizations include Alcoholics Anonymous for teens, the YMCA, school guidance counselors, and other clubs and help groups. Sharing data with these groups also allows youth workers to build relationships with and gain insight into other influential organizations with whom students interact. Building rapport with these groups forms mutual resources of help and intercession when problems arise in students' lives. Community goals for the students can be discussed on common ground through these relationships that the data kindles.

YOUTH MINISTRY

* The data of the web site is gathered from students of the specific schools in which the youth ministry targets. This is so the data has greater capabilities of application in the youth settings in which it will be used.

* The youth worker refines skills in exegeting the youth culture.

* The data may to be used to involve students to "know the times" in which they live, in order to live wise, discerning lives and enhance their own ministry.

* The data can be used to inform adults of the lifestyle and views of students in their community. This information can be used strategically when para-church youth ministry organizations, such as Young Life, seek to build monetary support from members of the community. Youth leaders in this situation will be able to speak knowledgeably about current trends in the youth culture that help build concern and trust among possible supporters for the ministry.

* This data may be a tool for involving specific students in a youth ministry who desire to design and maintain the youth site. It can create service opportunities for the students in a field that may interest them as well as help them to explore their own gifts which God has given them.

IMPLICATIONS

The need for current information on the youth culture is ever increasing, as a particular youth culture becomes outdated within three years. The Community Youth Web Site is not only current, but it is also relevant to a youth minister's particular sphere of influence.

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