

YouthACT Team Profile



YouthACT Youth M.O.V.E. MN

Youth: Sasha Fursman and Brian Renfroe

Adult Partner: Deborah Cavitt

Supporting Organization Contact: Deborah Saxhaug

Supporting Organization: Minnesota Association for Children's Mental Health (MACMH)

Introductions

Youth

My name is Sasha Fursman. I am 18 years old and live in Minnesota. I work at Minnesota Association for Children's Mental Health (MACMH) as the youth coordinator and event/conference support. I am currently attending Hamline University and pursuing a political science degree. I have been involved with MACMH since I was 14 years old. Starting as a volunteer, I moved my way up to becoming a full-time staff member. I hosted several events to support youth involvement beyond Youth M.O.V.E. and YouthACT. The most successful one was a transgender clothing exchange fair, with over 150 people who attended. My strengths are in leadership and community development. My mission with Youth M.O.V.E. and MACMH is to provide mental health education and information to students and youth.

My name is Brian Renfroe, and I am 21 years old and live in Minnesota. I work for the Bloomington School District as a bus para-professional. I spend mornings and afternoons with students providing them with accommodations to make their way to school. I have been involved with Youth M.O.V.E. since it started in 2013. My strengths are also in leadership and community development. My mission is to provide resources and help those with mental health disorders understand their disability and the rights they have to access and education.

Adult Partner

My name is Deborah Cavitt, and I am a project director at Minnesota Association for Children's Mental Health (MACMH) and an advisor for Youth M.O.V.E. and YouthACT projects. I got involved in this work through both professional practice and personal experience as a parent of a son who has a mental health diagnosis. I have a master's degree in human service with addiction and mental health counseling certifications. At MACMH, I do presentations for professionals and parents, am a grant writer, and an advocate for families of children and youth with mental health disorders. I was a teacher for over twenty years and also worked as a substance abuse prevention specialist.

My mission is MACMH's mission—to promote positive mental health for all infants, children, adolescents, and their families through education and advocacy. We believe in youth and family driven systems of care, in which family voices are heard by stakeholders working to improve services for youth and families. Our short-term goals are to improve our knowledge and capacity for the training and technical assistance from the YouthACT staff at NCWD/Youth. Our long-term

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goals are to educate and engage more youth throughout the state of Minnesota through our materials developed through the YouthACT project.

Supporting Organization and Contact

My name is Deborah Saxhaug, and I am the organization contact and Executive Director for Minnesota Association for Children's Mental Health (MACMH). MACMH is a statewide non-profit whose mission is to promote positive mental health for all infants, children, adolescents and their families. Our work is focused around the goals listed below.

- Educate the public to remove the stigma and barriers associated with children's mental health disorders.
- Educate families about the multiple systems that serve children with these disorders and help them navigate these complex systems.
- Provide opportunities for parents and caregivers to develop the skills required to effectively care for and advocate for their children.
- Inform and educate professionals about children's mental health.
- Advocate for the timely and appropriate delivery of services to children with mental health disorders.
- Provide programs and advocate for services that meet the unique needs of parents from culturally specific communities.
- Identify and address major barriers and gaps in services.

We got involved with YouthACT to nationalize our efforts and gain resources to federal support. YouthACT also allows us to establish more credibility, increase our peer network, and become more versed in policies and rights. Our short-term goal is to gain more members at our upcoming fundraiser, and our long-term goals are to become well-rooted into the community and establish more community-based partnerships.

Activities

One of the activities our team did was exhibiting at the Ramsey County Mental Health Resource Fair. We talked about Youth M.O.V.E., including what we do and how to join. We also developed a Youth M.O.V.E Starter Pack, which is available through our website and is a 40-page packet that addresses topics such as how to start a local chapter, how to start a peer support group, national resources, laws and mandatory reporting, information on social networking, marketing to new members, etc.

Our team is most excited about our upcoming work in the schools with Ramsey County and Winona County, MN. We will be presenting to three different schools at six different times about Mental Health 101, self-care, peer support, and some mental health first aid. We began this at the end of September 2016 and have already developed the curriculum. Because of our overall work as a YouthACT team, we have been able to implement our education-based services to schools and have had national/federal support in receiving and developing resources.

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Peer Network

Our peer network has twenty students, ages 12-23, who are all from the Metro Twin Cities area. All are in school or are young working professionals. The majority of our network is African American, Somali, and Hispanic. Instead of expending recruiting resources to build a peer network from scratch, we found that using MACMH's contacts was very useful. We utilized the active list of parent advocates in MACMH's network to connect to those parents' youth, who are generally interested in building their advocacy skills and engaging with the Supporting Organization's activities. This has made our supporting organization a great fit as our partner and ally. Our network was started prior to joining YouthACT, but since then we have added seven new members. Our peer network worked with us to develop the Youth M.O.V.E. Starter Pack and the curriculum for our upcoming high school trainings.

Tips

To develop a peer network, we recommend being active at community events like resource fairs and school shows to reach other youth. Our advice for youth and adults learning how to work together as partners is to treat each other as equals and have a co-worker relationship, rather than one being an "advisor" to the other. This allows the youth and adult to be on the same level.

TIPS FOR YOUTH VOICE

Our advice to youth about exercising youth voice is to

- use social media to get others your age involved,
- interview other youth about what they think is important to them so that youth can develop programs around it, and
- always include an artistic component in your outreach, since it is so vital to youth engagement.

For help and advice, talk to organizations and businesses in the area for support, see what local government in your area can do to help, and see if local schools and universities can get involved somehow in your work. Our team finds it most helpful to get advice, support, and resources through MACMH, our supporting organization. "They have the most helpful advocacy resources for us to use," Sasha says.

Reflection

Opportunities like YouthACT are important because they introduce and advocate for youth-adult partnerships, provide federal and national support to local initiatives, and provide a supportive community to be a part of.

Since joining YouthACT, Sasha says, "I have learned that me and most of my peers want to do something but don't know what, how, when, or where. Having a support system enables you to take your ideas into action. YouthACT has taught me that if you want systemic change that it has to start from you and your goals and intuitions."

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Youth voice and positive mental health are important to our adult partner. Deb says, “I have provided training for youth leaders and sought funding for sustaining the Youth M.O.V.E. group.” She is always actively involved in YouthACT calls, attended all of the Youth M.O.V.E. monthly meetings, and participated in all Youth M.O.V.E. activities.

Looking Forward

Following YouthACT, we plan to continue community organizing and providing trainings to educational institutions on mental health. We already have over \$20,000 in grant funding for September 2016-January 2017 to keep doing so and are establishing a relationship with Ramsey County for continuing annual funding. We will continue to be present at local mental health awareness events, including National Alliance for Mental Illness (NAMI) walks and school fairs.

Our team plans to continue practicing leadership skills by presenting at schools so we will develop public speaking skills along with organization and development skills. We will continue to empower our peer network to act as a board to guide our decision-making process for school and community events.

The Youth M.O.V.E. group, which is also a Youth M.O.V.E. chapter connected to Youth M.O.V.E. National, will continue following YouthACT. MACMH plans to continue to promote youth voice and youth development and leadership, including having MACMH employees Deb Cavitt and Sasha Fursman dedicate their time to the Youth M.O.V.E. group and program development. MACMH has agreed to fund Youth M.O.V.E. into the future and to support our local trainings. To learn more about Youth M.O.V.E. National, go to <http://www.youthmovenational.org>.