

Youth Gambling Awareness Program- Youth Engagement Projects

What Is Youth Gambling Awareness Program (YGAP)

The Youth Gambling Awareness Program (YGAP) is a free education and prevention initiative funded through the Ontario Ministry of Health offering free educational programming to youth aged 8 to 24, as well as adults (parents/guardians and professionals) involved in the lives of youth. Informed by protective factors contributing to youth mental health, YGAP provides a multi-faceted approach to increase knowledge and skills supporting positive youth development. YGAP aims to minimize risks associated with gambling activities by providing youth, and adults involved in youth's lives, with the most accurate and unbiased information. YGAP takes a harm reduction approach and does not make value judgments regarding gambling and gaming usage.

What Is a Youth Engagement Project?

Youth engagement projects are adult-youth partnerships creating positive change through the development of youth initiatives and promoting youth expression and community action. They are youth-driven and youth-led initiatives that provide youth with the opportunity to plan and make decisions about issues that affect them and those around them. As a result of being a part of a Youth Engagement project, youth apply knowledge and build skills, confidence, and an overall connectedness to their community.

Why Youth Engagement Projects Are Important?

Iceland is a country that has managed to bring down the rate of teens' participation in risky behaviors. Part of their upstream intervention model includes providing opportunities for youth to participate in organized activities and community involvement initiatives where youth create positive relationships with peers and adults, and build social capital. Evidence from the Icelandic model suggests that community-driven solutions and providing extracurricular activities for youth support alternatives to participation in risky behaviours (Sigfusdottir et al., 2011; Sigfúsdóttir et al., 2009). Through a Youth Engagement projects, youth will have the opportunity to work with their peers and adult allies on a cause, feel part of a group, express themselves and find a sense of purpose; all of which are protective factors for risky behaviors.

Peer-based educational programs have been successfully used in a range of contexts, including substance use, sexual risk behaviours, and HIV prevention among young people. Since peers are likely to be embedded in similar social groups and communities, they often hold greater credibility than adults because they share a common understanding of social status, peer culture and youth norms.

Why Participate in YMCA YGAP's Youth Engagement Projects?

Youth report 2 to 4 times higher rates of problem gambling compared to adults. In Ontario, about 9% of secondary school students indicate low-to-high severity gambling problem (representing about 55,000 students). When it comes to gambling awareness, youth-driven engagement initiatives provide youth with a voice to identify their priorities related to gambling and gaming education/awareness and lead community-driven initiatives to support those priorities.

In response to this need, YGAP has developed a Youth Engagement program to foster open dialogue amongst youth and ensure gambling awareness messaging is relatable and consistent with youth experiences. Through YGAP's YE project, youth are engaged through a Media Literacy Framework, in thinking critically, problem solving and creative expression. In addition to gambling/gaming awareness, the program's curriculum has a focus on developing social emotional learning competencies. The core competencies include self- management, self - awareness, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision making. The development of social-emotional learning (SEL) skills helps youth foster overall health and well-being, positive mental health, and the ability to learn, build resilience, and thrive.

Benefits to youth leaders:

- Builds community partnerships and creates connections
- Supports educators with building and implementing the Ontario curriculum
- The youth-led project fully funded and supported by YMCA YGAP
- Foster teamwork amongst youth
- Social Emotional Learning (SEL) skill development

Benefits to youth:

- Develop skills like critical thinking, problem solving, time management and communication skills
- Accumulate volunteer hours for high school youth
- Opportunity to develop and showcase real-world projects at a bigger scale (through social media/community)
- Creative expression
- Project is youth-led

YGAP Youth Engagement Program Overview

Youth between the ages of 12 and 24 are invited to take on a media project to raise awareness about gambling for their peers. For this project, a minimum of 8 hours is required preferably spread over the span of 8 weeks. However, there is flexibility with regards to time commitment and length of the project which can be determined in discussion with the youth group leader. The breakdown of sessions is as follows:

Youth Engagement Program Overview

Session 1 – Media Literacy Workshop
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	This session introduces the 5 key concepts of media literacy. It lays the foundation from which the YE program will build upon across the subsequent 8 sessions. In the YE program, youth will have the opportunity to apply, practice, and develop skills in both analyzing and creating media content.
Session 2 – Youth Engagement Overview & Gambling Awareness Workshop	
	This session provides an overview of the YE program. The youth will engage in establishing group agreements to create a comfortable environment and to ensure participants get the most out of their experience. The gambling awareness workshop will raise awareness about youth gambling relevance, risks involved with gambling, signs of program gambling, harm reduction strategies and where to find help and resources.
Session 3 – Analyzing Gambling Media	
	Participants will learn and practice analyzing and deconstructing gambling media content and ads, including public service announcements, using the Media Triangle. Youth will also receive relevant information about effective media techniques.
Session 3-6 – Creating Your Media	
	In these sessions, youth will brainstorm and decide on a project idea. Participants will work through a decision-making process to select project ideas while gaining skills in teamwork, creativity, collaboration, and overcoming obstacles. Youth will create actionable and realistic steps, including budgeting, to complete the selected project. Participants will work collaboratively to complete the media project, applying knowledge about gambling awareness and media literacy from previous sessions.
Session 7-8 – Showcase & Celebration	
	A celebration to share the accomplishments and showcase the final project.

*Each session is approximately 1 hour.