

PYTA Youth Leadership Study Results

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Karter Blake, Youth Organizer is a 23-year-old man of trans experience. He is a vocalist, public speaker, facilitator, and LGBTQ activist. Karter is heavily involved with The Theater Offensive. He is a True Colors Troupe alum, a current member of the True Colors Studio and serves as one of three coordinators for the True Colors Leadership & Inclusion Council. Karter also served as a youth leader and Board member at the Boston Alliance of GBLT Youth (BAGLY) for two years. In 2012 he was honored by BAGLY and the Massachusetts Transgender Political Coalition (MTPC) with an award for Youth Activism. He was recently hired as BAGLY's Queer Activist College Organizer. Karter's passion for social justice is fueled by the famous Audre Lorde quote "When I dare to be powerful, to use my strength in service of my vision, then it becomes less and less important whether I am afraid."

Acknowledgements

The 98 amazing youth who contributed to this data

Participating PYTA programs

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Pride Youth Theater Alliance Youth Leadership Study

PURPOSE

The Pride Youth Theater Alliance (PYTA) was formed to support LGBT youth theater across North America. The Theater Offensive (TTO) is the host site of the PYTA. The 3 questions that informed and created this study were: What if The Theater Offensive: OUT in Your Neighborhood employed one queer youth activist in Boston to connect with peers throughout the PYTA, develop a tool through which youth can share their concerns and desires, and generate a plan to engage more young people in Alliance leadership? What experiences have PYTA participant youth had with youth leadership? And how do they envision youth leadership in PYTA?

METHODS

Participants and Procedure

This study used a mixed methods approach whereby participants completed a survey consisting of multiple choice questions and open-ended responses. Recruitment for the study and data collection lasted from October 23-November 30, 2013. All data were confidential and no participant identifiers were collected.

Our goal was to engage at least 50 current youth participants and alumni from diverse backgrounds and geographical areas within PYTA to complete the survey. Youth were recruited from the following cities: Toronto, Ontario, Canada: Orlando, FL: Chicago, IL: Lexington, KY: New Orleans, LA: Boston, MA: Omaha, NE: New York, NY: Youngstown, OH: Pittsburg, PA and Madison, WI. Each of these cities has a program that is a member of PYTA. We received responses from 98 youth representing 11 programs from PYTA, of which 87 youth completed the entire survey. For the purposes of this study, we report data from all youth whether or not they completed the entire survey.

Measures

The survey collected data on the following domains that are described in greater detail in the summary of results:

- Demographics
- Youth's past and current experiences with leadership
- Experiences with decision-making with adults and peers
- Perceived issues of importance for LGBTQ youth
- Desired positions of involvement within PYTA
- Perceived challenges to youth leadership in PYTA, and the benefits of youth leadership in PYTA
- Brainstorm of skills and trainings that need to be developed to help youth become leaders within PYTA

SUMMARY

The following pages include a summary of all data collected in the study. This report is best viewed in full color.

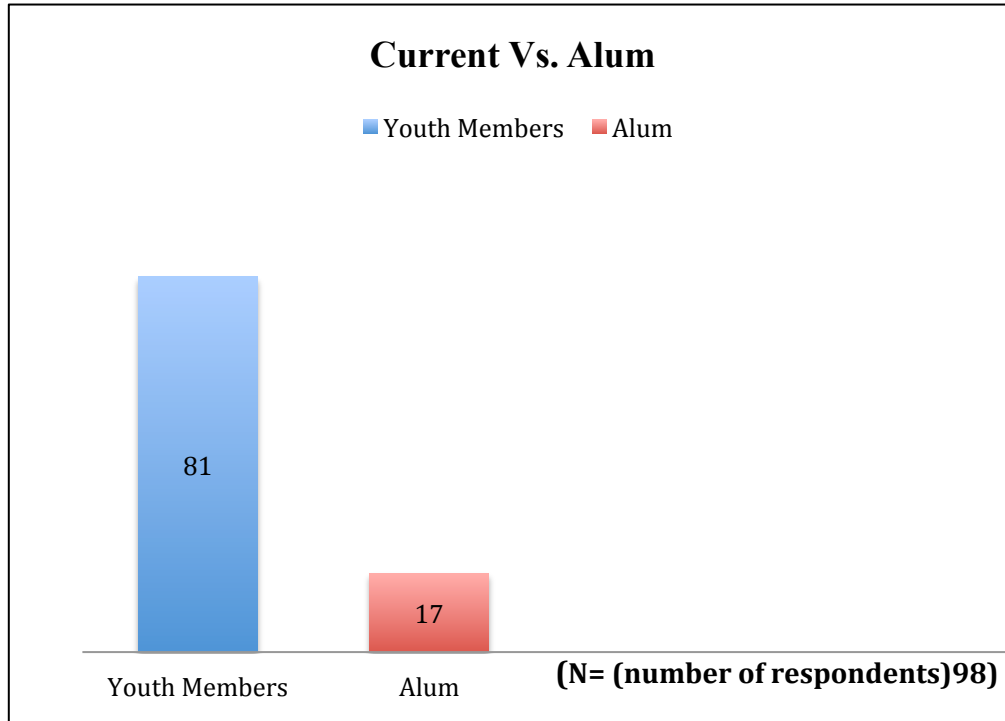
NOTE TO PYTA MEMBERS

If you are on the staff of a PYTA program and choose to share the details of this report with your youth, please help to maintain the confidentiality of the data by not asking youth to identify what they contributed to the study.

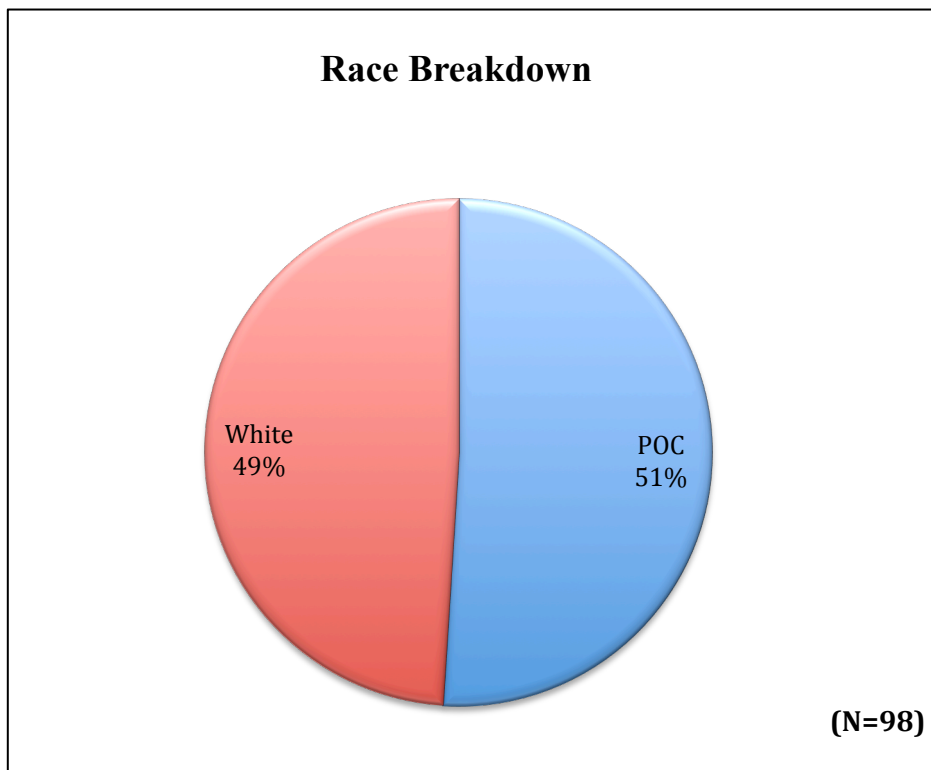
The report found that youth have had access to training and a variety of leadership roles and structures. However, in previous experiences there have been significant barriers that prohibited full participation. Despite this, youth are very interested in decision-making in PYTA but they need to know more about the alliance in order to understand how they can contribute.

DEMOGRAPHICS

The participants in this sample reflected a diverse array of identities and levels of experience. We focused in on age, race, sexual orientation and gender identity. The results of which are summarized in the following charts.



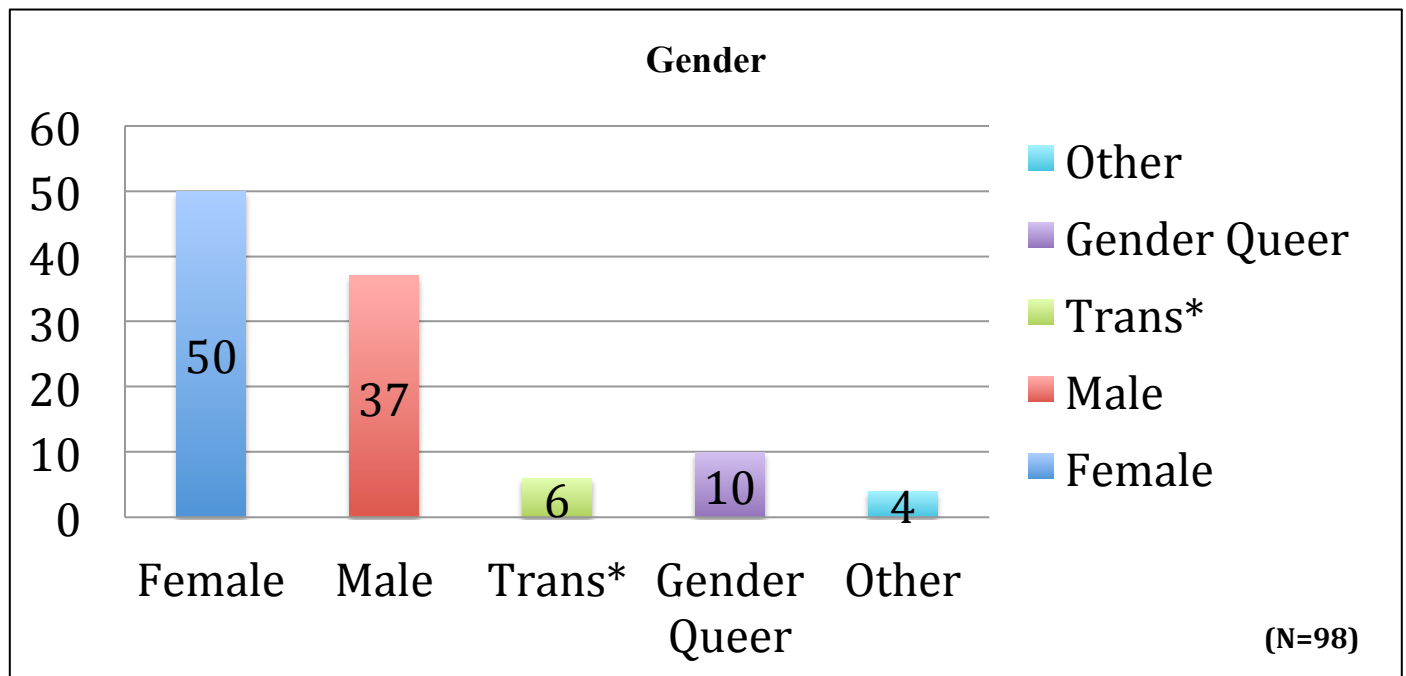
Both the average
and median age
for survey
participants was:
18



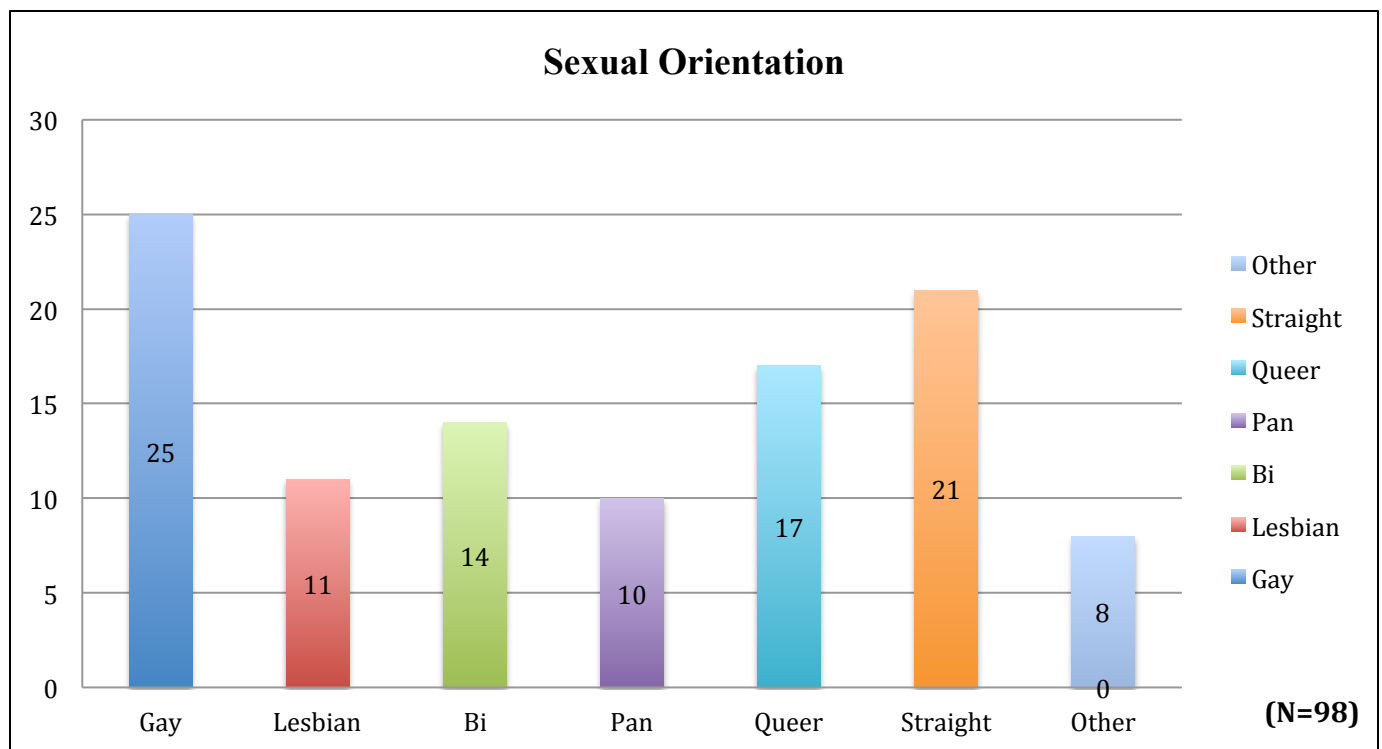
The top 3 most
reported POC
identities were:

Black 24%
Latin@/Hispanic 14%
Multi Racial 8%

For the following set of data respondents could chose more than one response.



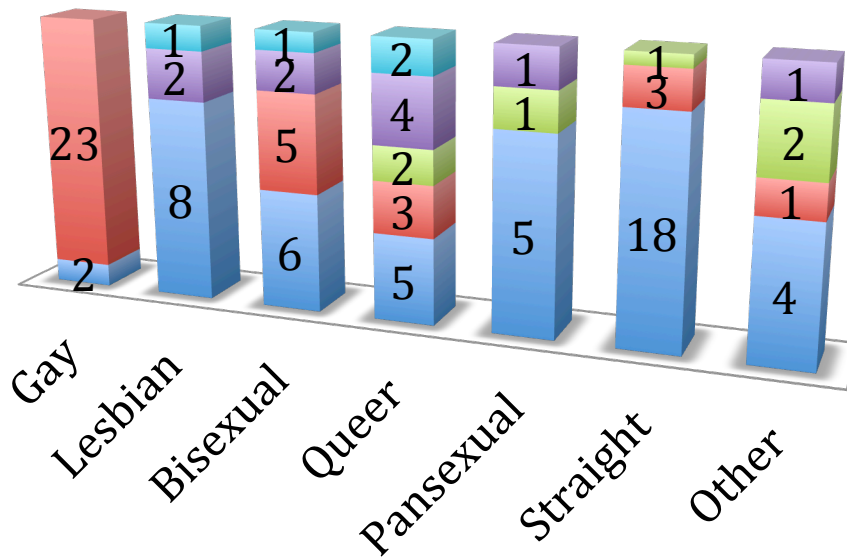
Other: Agender, Androgynous, Not Sure/Don't Identify, Two Spirit



Other: Heteroflexible, Homoflexible, Do not identify, Asexual, Fag/Dyke, Questioning

Intersections of Gender & Sexual Orientation

■ Female ■ Male ■ Trans* ■ Gender Queer ■ Other



(N=98)

18% of the participants identified as trans or gender non conforming

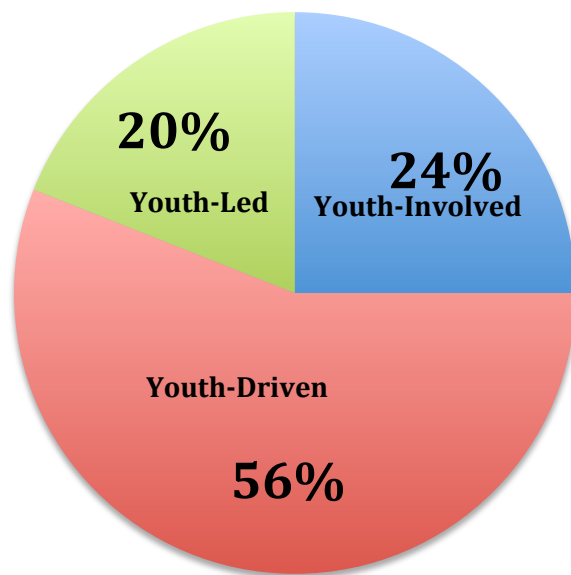
- 6% Trans* Identified
- 12% Genderqueer Identified

About 79% of participants were LGBTQ identified

YOUTH LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCE

We focused on past and current experiences with leadership overall not just confined to theater programs. Although there are youth who have a variety of leadership experiences 1/3 of the participants had no experience with leadership roles.

Please read the following definitions and pick the one that best describes your experience with youth leadership?

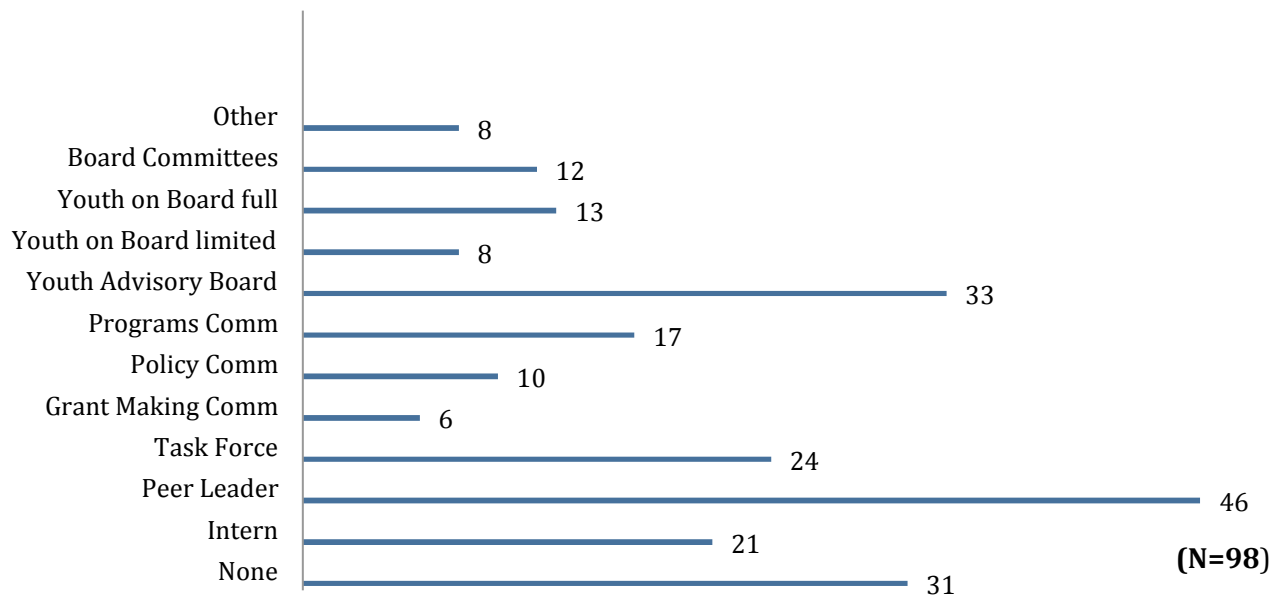


- Youth-Involved: Youth participate in programming that is organized, informed, led, and assessed by adults.
- Youth-Driven: Youth have a significant voice in shaping their projects, the program and when appropriate, the organization.
- Youth-Led : Programming which is designed, implemented, evaluated, redesigned, and driven entirely by youth, with adult support.

(N=98)

Most of the PYTA participant youth have been in youth driven programs.

What type of leadership roles and/or structures have you experienced?



Other: Creating Shows, Glee Club Director, President of GSA, Team Captain, Youth Artistic Committee, Peer Spiritual Care

“Peer Leader” was the most popular choice
Second to that with 33 respondents was “Youth Advisory Board”
Third with 31 respondents was “None”

What trainings have you experienced in building opportunities for youth leadership (trainings in workshop facilitation, classes exploring directing or producing, workshop on budget management)?

- While 84% reported having experienced trainings in areas of theater, event planning, jobs, peer mediation and youth leadership
- 16% of youth reported having not yet received any training in youth leadership

EXPERIENCES IN DECISION- MAKING WITH ADULTS AND PEERS

We used opened ended data to explain the range of positive and negative experiences in making decisions with adults and among peers. Summarized in the following plus/deltas tables are key factors that contributed to positive decision making and also identified areas of needed work in order to improve decision-making.

What ease/difficulties have you experienced and/or witnessed around youth decision making in the past working with ADULTS? *



- ❖ Welcoming environments
- ❖ Open-mindedness/support
- ❖ Inclusion in decision-making
- ❖ Value youth voices



- ❖ Youth not being heard
- ❖ Youth being overlooked
- ❖ Adults don't believe in youth
- ❖ Disconnect due to generational gap.

(N=87)

What ease/difficulties have you experienced and/or witnessed around youth decision making in the past working with PEERS? *



- ❖ Openness
- ❖ Fun
- ❖ Relatable
- ❖ Bonding



- ❖ Disagreements
- ❖ Disorganization
- ❖ Differences – hard to blend ideas
- ❖ Cliques

(N=87)

*** These responses are in order of most frequently stated to least stated. ***

Do you think that youth ages 14-17 should have different decision-making responsibilities than youth ages 18-22?

55% of ALL youth surveyed believe youth 18-22 should have more responsibilities than youth ages 14-17

“From my experience youth 14-17 don't want too much responsibility. They want to just have fun. The older youth have more of the responsibility sense to them.”- 19 y.o

“With a younger mentality comes fewer things to juggle in mind, only people with high levels of experience or wisdom should make tougher decisions.”-16 y.o

“I think that as younger teens we are less experienced and since leadership is something that is cultivated over time needs guidance.”- 17 y.o

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“Youth of today are not less minded than the adults of today. We are all equal and mature.”- 15 y.o

45 % of youth believed youth should have equal responsibilities regardless of age

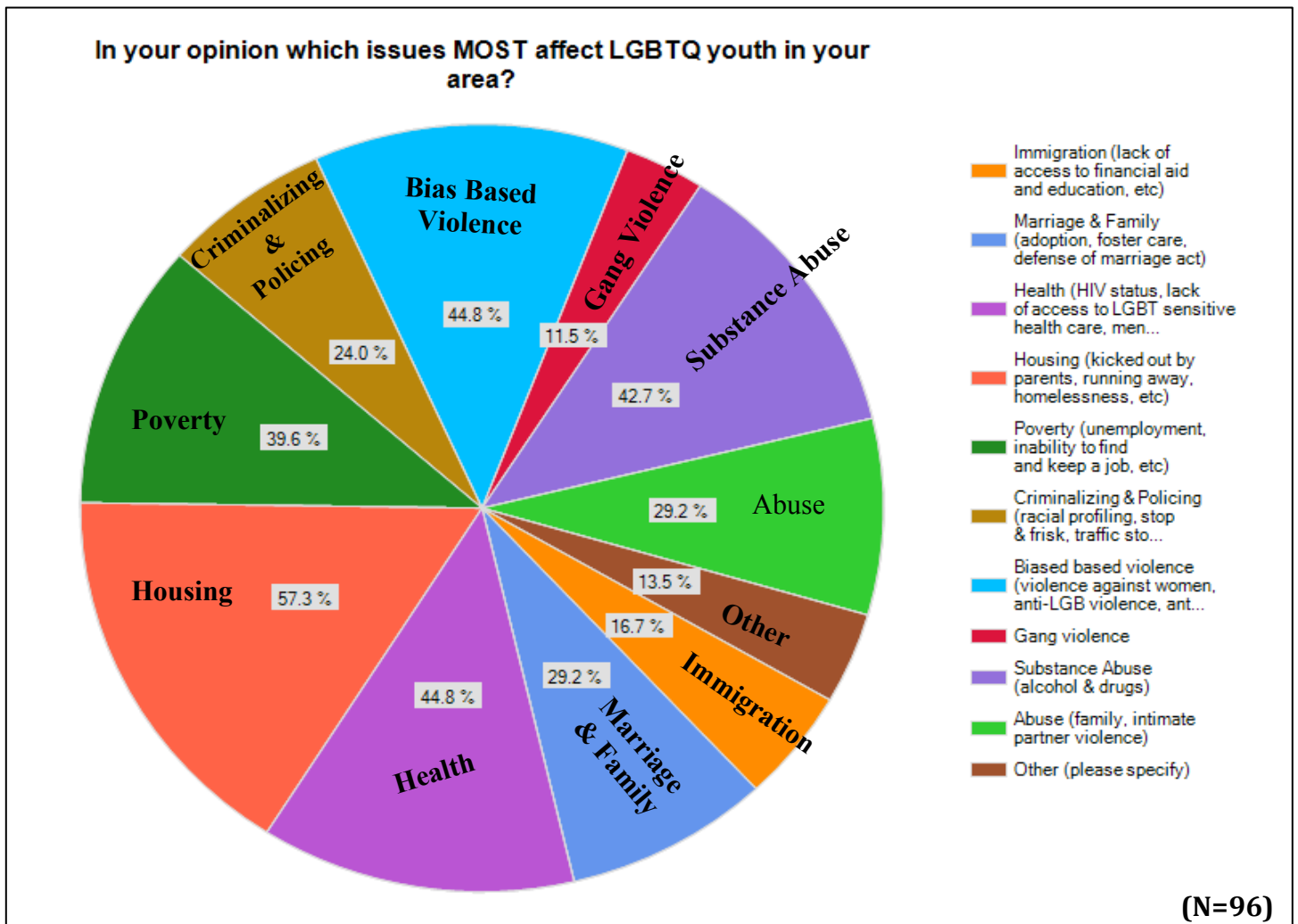
“If we all share the same knowledge on a subject, the age of the decision-maker should not matter.” – 17 y.o

“I believe youth between 14-17 should have the same decision making responsibilities because I believe we're training the youth and should allow them to express themselves and give their honest opinion on what they feel because their feelings are just as valid as anyone aged 18-22.”- 20 y.o

(N=87)

PERCEIVED ISSUES OF IMPORTANCE FOR LGBTQ YOUTH

What do youth want from PYTA? We assessed what youth perceived to be the most important issues facing LGBTQ youth in their area and how PYTA might address those issues.



Other: Youth who are undocumented, Ignorance and the lack of knowledge about LGBTQ, LGBTQ Youth experiences, Peer bullying, Treatment, Self identification-self acceptance-internalization, Segregation, High drop-out rates for schools and poor college attendance due to un-GLBT-friendly environments (bullying, etc.) and poverty

As an International alliance PYTA has an opportunity to address the issues you've just identified. How would you like to see these issues addressed?

- ❖ Raise Awareness
- ❖ Education on LGBTQ communities
- ❖ Programming & performances
- ❖ Funding
- ❖ Social Media Outreach
- ❖ Cultural Competency trainings for Adult Leaders
- ❖ Youth Involvement

(N=96)

These recommendations came from the open-ended question above and a content analysis was used to extract the most common themes.

DESIRED POSITIONS OF INVOLVEMENT

In order to best identify ways to involve youth in decision making in PYTA we asked them how they would like to be involved.

What kind of decision-making in PYTA would YOU like to be involved in?

1. **Creation:** Developing ideas into new programs, performances, workshops and/or events and assessing the creative needs of those involved in programming. (92%)
2. **Peer Leadership:** Collaboration with youth across the PYTA to sharpen leadership skills in preparation for more intense leadership roles. (86%)
3. **Outreach:** Work to connect organization with participants, collaborators, venues, community members, and/or other programs by the development of outreach materials or personal relationships. (71%)
4. **Curriculum Design:** Develop alternative approaches to teaching activities, meeting youth needs, interest, and learning styles (68%)
5. **Research:** Identify the issues that affect youth, design appropriate research tools, conduct research activities, assess findings, and recommend responses to the findings. (67%)
6. **Evaluations:** Provide necessary feedback and on-the ground perspectives on programs, classes, and other activities, and work with organizational leaders to design appropriate responses. (64%)
7. **Policy Making:** Provide on the ground perspective for rules, regulations that affect peers, families and communities. (49%)
8. **Tech Applications:** Assess technological needs, design websites, and provide technical assistance. (28%)
9. **Grant making:** Contribute unique perspectives to the funding process, learn valuable skills, and develop strong connections with the communities where they are involved in grant making, and identify and solicit grant funding. (28%)
10. **Budgets:** Determine which and how activities are funded and evaluate budget performance. (20%)

Beyond this list, what other ways can you imagine contributing your skills as a youth leader to PYTA?

THEMES

**Educate/Lead Workshops
Act, Sing, Write
Bond/Connect with other PYTA youth
Volunteer/Mentor other youth
Recruitment /social media outreach**

(N=93)

“Reaching out to peers - Through artistic activism - Through creative writing”

“Through what I do. I write, I sing and I act.”

“I have experience in mentoring youth to become leaders, and 5 years of experience as a youth in a youth-led organization. If other groups were interested in becoming more youth-led, I would be able to provide assistance and guidance on effective youth leadership and youth-led organizations.”

THE 3 BIGGEST CHALLENGES OR

“the inevitable difficulties in managing integration of youth leadership with "adult" leadership.

The youth showed a deep awareness of the challenges to incorporating youth leadership in PYTA. Data was collected from 3 open-ended questions, which were:

What ease/difficulties have you experienced and or/witnessed working with adults?

What ease/difficulties have you experienced and or/witnessed working with your peers?

What excites you about the idea of youth participating in decision-making in PYTA? What concerns you?

ADULTS NOT TAKING YOUTH SERIOUSLY

“Adults tend to not take youth on a serious level. Many tend to believe youth do not understand power structures and information that many actually do know. Youth ideas tend to be pushed aside for "safer" ideas given by adults. Youth are seen as being inexperienced, immature, and not capable of making strong decisions compared to adults. Due to these pre-existing stigmas I have experienced adults not taking me on a serious level due to my age and education and brushing off ideas from myself and other peers.”

“Sometimes adults do not take the opinions of youth as seriously as they do the opinions of their other coworkers. Adults often make assumptions about the abilities of youth as well”

“Youth are there, but NOT being heard. We try to say something and adults come over and take over. There needs to be a an adult ally at a meeting full of adults.”

TOKENIZATION

“I've often found difficult the differences between the lived experience of the young person and the adults. Adults can take up and get used to taking up a lot of space, having unrealistic expectations and sometimes just being adultist or racist. These differences can often leave a young person feeling tokenized and feel more of a burden than supported. Or an adult can earn a young person's trust than break it just as easily. Some adults just don't know how to work with young people but do it just because it's accessible and the right or good thing to do.”

“I have been in student leadership roles that do not matter. We are puppets playing a game of pretend. That is a waste of time and resources for the student and adults involved.”

“It concerns me that this might just be token positions and not influential in the organization.”

YOUTH NOT TAKING THEMSELVES AND OTHER YOUTH SERIOUSLY

“I am always a little intimidated at the idea of speaking for others and adequately expressing their needs/desires.”

“I am concerned about the quality of my execution.”

“Youth are often reluctant to view their opinions as valid as those of adults”

“I think like maturity level is a scary thing when letting a 14 make a decision that effects a lot of people I feel like as a younger person we don't always think everything through or have the right mindset at all times to make a serious decision as older youth would have”

THE 3 BIGGEST BENEFITS

“it benefits PYTA then in turn benefits the youth and if it benefits me and other youth that in turn benefits PYTA.”

Despite the challenges youth were able to recognize the advantages of youth leadership in PYTA. Data was assessed from 3 open-ended questions, which were:

What ease/difficulties have you experienced and or/witnessed working with adults?

What ease/difficulties have you experienced and or/witnessed working with your peers?

What excites you about the idea of youth participating in decision-making in PYTA? What concerns you?

YOUTH VOICE

“More youth voice would increase the awareness of issues most pertinent to youth participants. PYTA would be better able to cater to the needs of youth, with a better understanding of youth needs and preferences. Youth who feel like they have more say in their organizations are more dedicated to those organizations.”

“My voice would be heard and have empowerment to believe in myself Having a relief to know that my voice is being heard Most importantly, the fact that I am being validated”

“I believe that more youth would come away feeling like their voice had been heard, and their needs acknowledged. Potentially being able to reach more youth and make a bigger impact on our community. To be able to create an even more uplifting and positive atmosphere.”

YOUTH LEADERSHIP

“Development of leadership skills and self-confidence, increased feelings of connection and power in regard to their community and their lives, the needs of youth would be addressed more directly and more effectively.”

“Future career development and preparation - this opportunity would look great in a resume and provide youth with many skills that would make them marketable in the job market.”

“We would learn more leadership skills We can become more educated and see more pours of view as of what it's like to be a queer adult and it can give us hope and inspiration. We can feel more like we are making a difference.”

INSIGHT INTO LGBTQ YOUTH

“PYTA would have better insight into the realities of what it means to be a queer youth in today's world. With more knowledge PYTA could better serve queer youth's needs in a more efficient manner. You would get to hear all the amazing stories and ideas we have.”

“If youth were involved in decision making the PYTA would get first hand perspective on the needs of the present youth. By combining the perspectives of third party help with those directly involved in the LGBTQ struggle. PYTA is forming a system that combines practicality with experience. Through this combination, new approaches to age old problems could be created. Also PYTA would gain more relevance because the problems are being approached by people who are related with them.”

“More perspective on what it's like day to day for a queer teenager nowadays More like modern views such as we are becoming more educated and accepting of things as the generations continue and I think as teenagers really get to see that day to day”

WHAT DO YOUTH NEED IN ORDER TO FULLY PARTICIPATE AND BE LEADERS IN PYTA?

Youth were provided with a space to brainstorm what they need in terms of skills, trainings and assistance in order for them to fully engage in PYTA.

What do youth NEED in order to fully participate in PYTA?

- ❖ 48% reported needing trainings
- ❖ 43 % of youth reported needing transportation assistance
- ❖ 32% reported needing financial support/stipends

(N=87)

Responses are based on PYTA's current structure, which was outlined for the youth prior to this question

RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall the study found that most PYTA participant youth are familiar with leadership roles. Those that are not want to be. Young people are aware of the challenges of both working with adults and their peers but are still eager to be in positions of leadership because they recognize the benefits. There is also a strong desire from the youth to connect with other youth around PYTA. However as stated previously youth need to better understand PYTA to really know how they can contribute. Based on the data collected the following recommendations are offered:

1. AN IN DEPTH INFORMATIONAL SESSION FOR YOUTH ABOUT PYTA

- Many youth who took the survey were unclear about PYTA. PYTA should create an “All About PYTA” curriculum that program directors can then share with their youth.

2. RESTRUCTURE PYTA CORRESPONDENCE AND MEETINGS SO YOUTH CAN PARTICIPATE

- All youth cannot participate because of school hours. A more inclusive schedule is needed

3. ASSESS INTEREST IN A YOUTH ADVISORY BOARD

- Youth from across PYTA are interested in working together and can help decide what youth involvement looks like going forward

4. YOUTH ADVISORY BOARD, CONFERENCE COMMITTEE AND YOUTH LEADERSHIP COMMITTEE COLLABORATE TO CREATE A YOUTH TRACK AT THE CONFERENCE
The current conference structure does not cater to youth. This structure would engage youth and allow them to take ownership of participation at the conference.

