



## **Video Transcript: Ask Me Anything: Meaningful Youth Engagement**

**Elena (00:00):** Sarah, what is your favorite hobby and why do you love it?

**Sara (00:03):** Oh, my favorite hobby is playing Dungeons and Dragons with my friends, and I love it because it's like adult make-believe.

**Elena (00:10):** It is.

**Sara (00:11):** Elena, what is your favorite snack?

**Elena (00:13):** My favorite snack is those little Babybels that come in the red wrapping. It's like opening a present every time, I just love it so much.

**Sara (00:21):** Delicious.

**Elena (00:23):** Ask Me Anything: Meaningful Youth Engagement. Hi, I'm Elena Martinez...

**Sara (00:29):** And I'm Sara Richman Davidow.

**Elena (00:30):** From Austin Healthy Adolescent.

**Sara (00:32):** And today we're going to let the RHNTC ask us anything about meaningful youth engagement.

**Elena (00:38):** What is your favorite thing about working with youth?

**Sara (00:42):** I think to see just how much joy and excitement they find in things that maybe I have forgotten are joyful and exciting. They have so much intentionality with the work that they do, and if they're showing up, they care about it. That gives me some hope about the work that we're doing. We operate a Peer Health Education Program, which means that we have students that go to the schools that we teach in who come and join our classes. And so they're involved in making sure that they know what the icebreaker questions that we're asking are, that they are ready to present the slides that we're teaching, answer the questions that the workbook provides. So they're pretty involved in making sure that our classes are running smoothly. Also, the purpose of having peer health educators in the first place is so that they are there to be relatable to their peers by default. Their existence is essential to the work that we do.

**Sara (01:37):** Elena, how do you relate to the young people you work with?

**Elena (01:41):** Well, it helps being young, it does really. A big part of relating to the youth is really coming on their level. They speak to me like I am just a normal person and that helps us build a really amazing, dynamic relationship.

**Elena (01:55):** Tell me about the first time you really felt like you made a meaningful connection with a young person you worked with?

**Sara (02:01):** Oh, that's a great question. When youth started staying after the classes, as we were finishing them to hang out, to ask me questions, to sit and eat their lunch without telling it to me, they were saying that this was a trusted space, that they were liking what we were doing, and that things are going well.

**Elena (02:21):** That's awesome.

**Sara (02:22):** What was one moment in the last year that you are most proud of, related to engaging youth as respected and equal partners in your project?

**Elena (02:31):** We did our pilot year with the Peer Advisory Committee, and it was amazing. We had so much fun with them. And as a part of our annual feedback session, we actually let the youth design the budget, which was very jarring, but it really let us know where their priorities were and where we were not meeting them, where they were at. And provided us a lot of clarity.

**Sara (02:53):** Do you remember what they cut the most?

**Elena (02:54):** They cut family nights.

**Sara (02:56):** Ooo.

**Elena (02:57):** They were like, "our parents don't need to be that involved." We were like, um, hey... [laughs].

**Sara (03:02):** Got to balance.

**Elena (03:02):** We got to have some balance here. [laughter]

**Sara (03:05):** How are youth involved and making decisions that affect your project?

**Elena (03:10):** So the Peer Advisory Committee annually does a service learning project, and a lot of those decisions come directly from that cohort. Every year it's a different project. It's whatever those 15, 16 youth in that room are excited about. So a lot of that decision-making capacity is left in their hands. Of course, we keep them realistic [laughs].

**Sara (03:30):** Yeah.

**Elena (03:31):** But a lot of that decision-making power is with them, which they really, really find value.

**Elena (03:37):** How are youth involved in communicating about your project?

**Sara (03:40):** Oh, well, I definitely think that there are a number of fun communicators. We have a youth newsletter that we're trying to have them share with all of their friends. We have our t-shirt, our AHA t-shirt, which is changing every year. We find a new design for it each summer that they get to design and then wear out into the world, to share our work. During our social nights, which is when we have all of the youth that we work with be able to come and join us on a Friday night, they get to bring their friends and their cousins and their siblings and whomever they have in their life at that time to come and hang out with us and share the work that we do with them. We get to continue that reach and expand that reach because of the work that our youth do in sharing it.

**Sara (04:25):** How are youth involved in implementing project activities?

**Elena (04:29):** Throughout the year, we have several events. We have Adolescent Health Month, we have National HIV and AIDS Awareness, and we create planning committees for our youth to actually sit on, and they are involved in the creation and implementation of those events, whether they are day-of, running the run of show, or if they're more passively engaged with social media content, whatever is their jam, their comfort zone, and they get to really help us put some amazing events on.

**Sara (04:59):** How do you want young people to feel when they are working as a partner on your project?

**Elena (05:05):** I think the biggest thing for us is we want young people to feel like they are valued participants. We want them to feel like when your voice is spoken, it's heard.

**Elena (05:14):** We are not just these blank canvases, these hard walls where you are throwing things at us, and we are just kind of like, we're going to do what we want anyway. Having a valued participant is really important for any meaningful youth engagement. They want to feel heard, and that is pretty important.

**Sara (05:33):** Yeah. This video was created by the Reproductive Health National Training Center, RHNTC.