



PREPARING
YOUTH TO **THRIVE**

Promising Practices for Social & Emotional Learning

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Authors

Charles Smith, Ph.D., Gina McGovern, Reed Larson, Ph.D., Barbara Hillaker, Ph.D., Stephen C. Peck, Ph.D.

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AHA! (Attitude, Harmony, Achievement)

Jennifer Freed, *Co-Executive Director*
Rendy Freeman, *Co-Executive Director*
Ben Zimmer, *Director of Programs*
Isis Castañeda, *Senior Facilitator*

Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Milwaukee

Natalie Cooper, *Senior Director of Social Emotional Learning*
La'Ketta Caldwell, *Senior Program Manager of Social Emotional Learning*

Philadelphia Wooden Boat Factory

Brett Hart, *Executive Director*
Zeelyna Wise, *Director of Student Support Services*
Victoria Guidi, *Program Director, Boat Build and Sail*

Voyageur Outward Bound School

Elizabeth "Poppy" Potter, *Director of Operations*
Laura Greenlee Karp, *Program Coordinator*
Megan Olivia Hall, *Open World Learning Community*

The Possibility Project

Paul Griffin, *Founder and President*
Elizabeth Howard, *Artistic Director, Afterschool Program*
Meagan DuBois, *Artistic Director, Saturday Program*

Wyman

Allison Williams, *Senior Vice President, Programs*
DeVonne Bernard, *Director, Teen Outreach Program*
Karen Guskin, Ph.D., *Senior Vice President, Research and Learning*

Youth on Board

Jenny Sazama, *Co-Founder and Director*
Rachel Gunther, *Associate Director*
Teena-Marie Johnson, *Education Organizer*

YWCA Boston

Beth Chandler, *Vice President of Programs*
Julie Thayer, *InIt Program Manager*
Andrea Gomez, *InIt Program Coordinator*

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All inquiries regarding the contents of this guide or other Challenge findings and tools should be directed to Gina McGovern at gina@cypq.org.

Visit SELpractices.org for more.



Susan Crown Exchange (SCE) is a Chicago-based foundation invested in shaping an ecosystem of anytime, anywhere learning to prepare youth to adapt and thrive in a rapidly changing and highly connected world. Through three primary programs—digital learning, social and emotional learning, and catalyst grants—SCE connects talent and innovation with forces for positive change. SCE’s exchange model leverages up-to-date research, best practices, grant-making, and innovative programming to design, evaluate, and promote high quality learning experiences for young people beyond the classroom, particularly youth from underserved communities.



The David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality is an organization focused on improving the quality of services available from expanded learning systems and settings. The Weikart Center’s core product and services line, the evidence-based Youth Program Quality Intervention, is the leading performance management and measurement intervention in the expanded learning field and is currently used by over 105 systems at over 4,000 expanded learning program sites. The Weikart Center has core competencies in the areas of positive youth development, adult learning, measurement, knowledge management, technical assistance, and lower stakes accountability policy.



Strengthening the Bridge Between Research and Practice

Foreword by Karen Pittman, Co-Founder, President and CEO, Forum for Youth Investment

The verdict is in: Social and emotional learning (SEL) skills matter enough to be mandated. Social and emotional skills have always mattered to those who ascribe to positive youth development. Voluntary school and community-based programs have long been the places families and youth rely on, not only for safety and relationships, but also for exploration and practical skill building. But, until recently, they were relegated to second-class status. So-called soft skills, non-academic skills, and non-cognitive skills hovered outside the realm of public accountability.

These skills were frequently acknowledged as useful by the big four (education, health, social services, juvenile justice) but either seen as not critical to the primary goals mandated by public funding (academic achievement, pregnancy or substance abuse prevention, violence prevention) or not enforceable. Even if all agreed that social and emotional skills mattered, lack of evidence that these skills were easily malleable or measurable made them unmarketable in public policy circles, even those focused on expanding out-of-school-time (OST) programs.

But this picture is rapidly changing with a growing body of research studies proving social and emotional skills matter and will increasingly play an important role as young people progress into adulthood. These skills are linked to increased academic performance and employability and decreased anti-social behavior and mental health issues. Adolescent brain research also confirms that social and emotional skills are malleable well into young adult years. The flood of survey tools suggests that these skills are measurable.

The groundbreaking collaborative work behind this guide, however, is, in my opinion, the first solid evidence that we have that SEL skill building is widely marketable to programs, to funders, and eventually to policy makers.

The Forum for Youth Investment partnered with the HighScope Educational Research Foundation to create the Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality because of our shared belief in the importance of promoting research-based practice as an alternative to contributing to the proliferation of research-based program models. The collaboration with Susan Crown Exchange and the eight visionary out-of-school organizations whose disciplined brilliance is reflected in this Guide is a stellar example of what happens when the research question shifts from measuring and replicating program outcomes to distilling and disseminating program practice.

This learning community was incredibly productive: They agreed on a subset of social and emotional skills that are both easily observable and relevant to most OST programs, developed practical measures, and tested them, knowing that they were running the risk of revealing program weaknesses. They pushed to describe the nuanced practices they use to promote growth in each of the six skill areas, using an iterative process to create best practice standards that were relevant across the Challenge programs, linked to program effectiveness, and supported by research. And then, as a bonus, they pushed forward to create a theory of what it takes to support the infusion of these SEL practices into their programs' official curricula, which varied from pregnancy prevention to boat building.

Combined, these three accomplishments give OST practitioners the tools they need to declare SEL goals and improve SEL practice. This is both timely and important. OST programs are, by design, hardwired to promote these soft skills. They are voluntary, experiential, choice-driven settings for relationship building, exploration, and learning. They are increasingly being recognized as critical partners in system-wide efforts to expand learning.

These tools, however, provide the OST field with an opportunity to do more than increase market share: They pave the way to making readiness broadly marketable to policy makers. By demonstrating the level of organizational intentionality even the best youth development programs have to commit to to ensure that staff implement the formal programming in ways that support SEL skill building, they are stepping forward to display what, I believe, needs to be mandated across settings in which youth spend time: Demonstrate how the official curriculum supports the developmental. Only then will the OST field have done everything it can to ensure that all young people are ready to meet life's opportunities and challenges.





Kids are Drivers, Not Passengers

Foreword by Susan Crown, Chairman and Founder, SCE

Far too many young people are growing up today with challenges that are almost insurmountable. Kids contend with poverty, random violence, substandard schools, racism, and a scarcity of safe, supportive places to hang out. Yet even facing these kinds of challenges, the young people highlighted in this guide, like Brenda from the AHA program and Kimo from the Philadelphia Wooden Boat Factory, are on the path to success.

Why do some kids beat the odds while others struggle? At SCE, we believe the work we have undertaken over the past two years helps us move closer to the answer.

Not long ago, success in school meant success in life. We also believed that things like grit and determination were traits people were born with, not skills that could be developed over time. Over the past few decades, hard and soft sciences have produced an impressive body of evidence that teaches us two very new, very important things. First, that we can take our innate abilities and cultivate them, just like we build up muscle, dexterity, and language fluency. And secondly, that social and emotional skills matter just as much in determining life satisfaction and success as traditional intelligence. The use of the word “skills” here is intentional. These qualities are not only innate. They can be taught. And, they can be learned.

The practice of building social and emotional skills is what this field guide is about. With the help of the highly regarded David P. Weikart Center, we closely studied eight of the finest youth programs in the country and empirically tested their components, cycles, methodologies, aspirations, and results. We wanted to test the assumption that top notch youth programs might have a lot in common. By studying their work, we have confirmed that they do. No matter what these programs offer to kids, fundamentally youth service is about what it takes to help build fine human beings.

So why do some kids thrive while others struggle? Through our research, we’ve learned from youth like Brenda that it is related to finding a safe and supportive environment like the one she found at AHA. And it’s about genuinely connecting with an adult who offers unconditional support and direct, honest feedback, like Brett Hart of the Philadelphia Wooden Boat Factory who taught Kimo the lessons learned from failure and provided the chance to try over and succeed.

Above all, cultivating social and emotional skills is about learning—at the deepest level—that we can all drive our own lives in any direction. To get to the right destination, we need to become deft at steering, managing speed, sensing when to be defensive, to map, to backtrack, even calling on a mechanic when something breaks. Getting more youth on this path will take a lot of practice and exercise; we are proud to present the eight programs we studied as models for this work.

It is our privilege and pleasure to share what we’ve learned about social and emotional learning and to provide a roadmap for practitioners far and wide to help all youth unlock their potential, even those with the toughest of circumstances.



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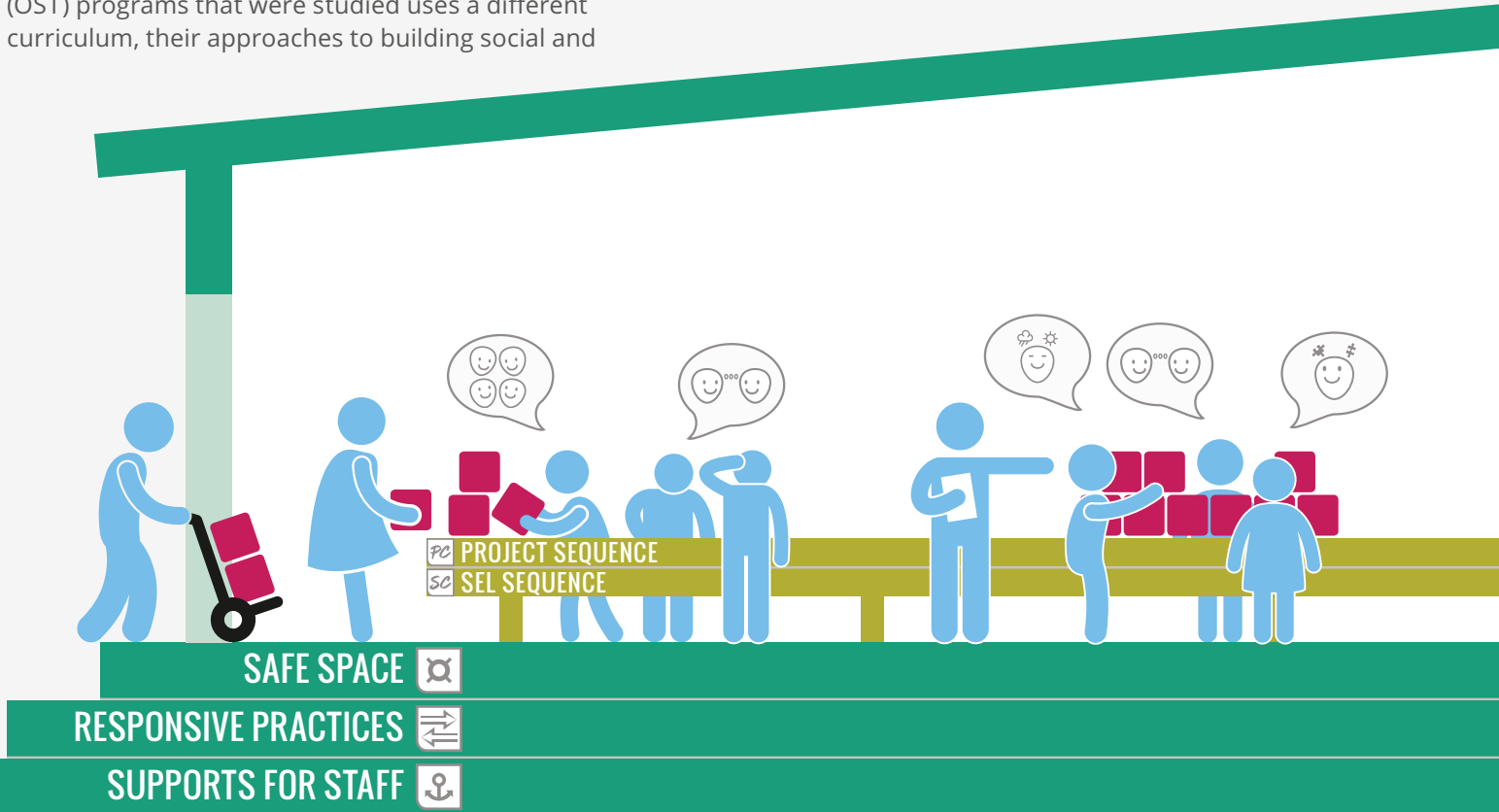
Executive Summary

The Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Challenge was designed to identify promising practices for building skills in six areas: emotion management, empathy, teamwork, initiative, responsibility, and problem solving. The Challenge was a partnership between expert practitioners (youth workers, social workers, teachers) delivering exemplary programs in eight unique communities, a team of researchers, and a national foundation.

Although each of the exemplary out-of-school time (OST) programs that were studied uses a different curriculum, their approaches to building social and

emotional skills have important similarities, and these are the subject of the guide. This guide presents 32 standards and 58 indicators of SEL practice in six domains as well as four curriculum features that were shown to be foundational for supporting SEL practices.

For teens, social and emotional learning helps build resiliency and a sense of agency—skills critical for navigating toward positive futures of their own design. Social and emotional skills are the skills for



Key

STANDARDS FOR SEL PRACTICE



FOR EACH DOMAIN THERE ARE A SET OF STAFF PRACTICES AND KEY YOUTH EXPERIENCES THAT SUPPORT SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL SKILL BUILDING.

SEL CURRICULUM FEATURES



action that help youth on that path. These skills go by several names—21st century skills, soft skills, character education, experiential learning, positive youth development. We focused on translating “the action” that staff and youth see in exemplary out-of-school time (OST) settings to share widely and in plain language *how* professionals can embed practices that support social and emotional learning with greater intentionality. This guide is designed to start conversations about the kinds of social and emotional skills readers hope will flower

in the adolescents they know and care about, and to support the adult practices that help these skills to grow.

We hope that readers will use the guide to create and pursue their own action plans for implementing SEL in their OST programs and networks. The guide is designed for readers to use on their own terms and not a book to be read from front to back—so advice to readers is provided at the end of the introduction. In addition to the guide, a technical report for SEL performance measures used in the Challenge and a website where you can plug into more findings and tools are available at SELpractices.org.



GLOSSARY



GLOSSARY TERMS ARE HIGHLIGHTED AND DEFINED WHERE THEY FIRST APPEAR IN THE REPORT, AND ARE ALSO FOUND IN THE GLOSSARY ON PAGE 212.

ADDITIONAL TOOLS AND INFORMATION



KEY YOUTH EXPERIENCES



STAFF PRACTICES



QUOTE

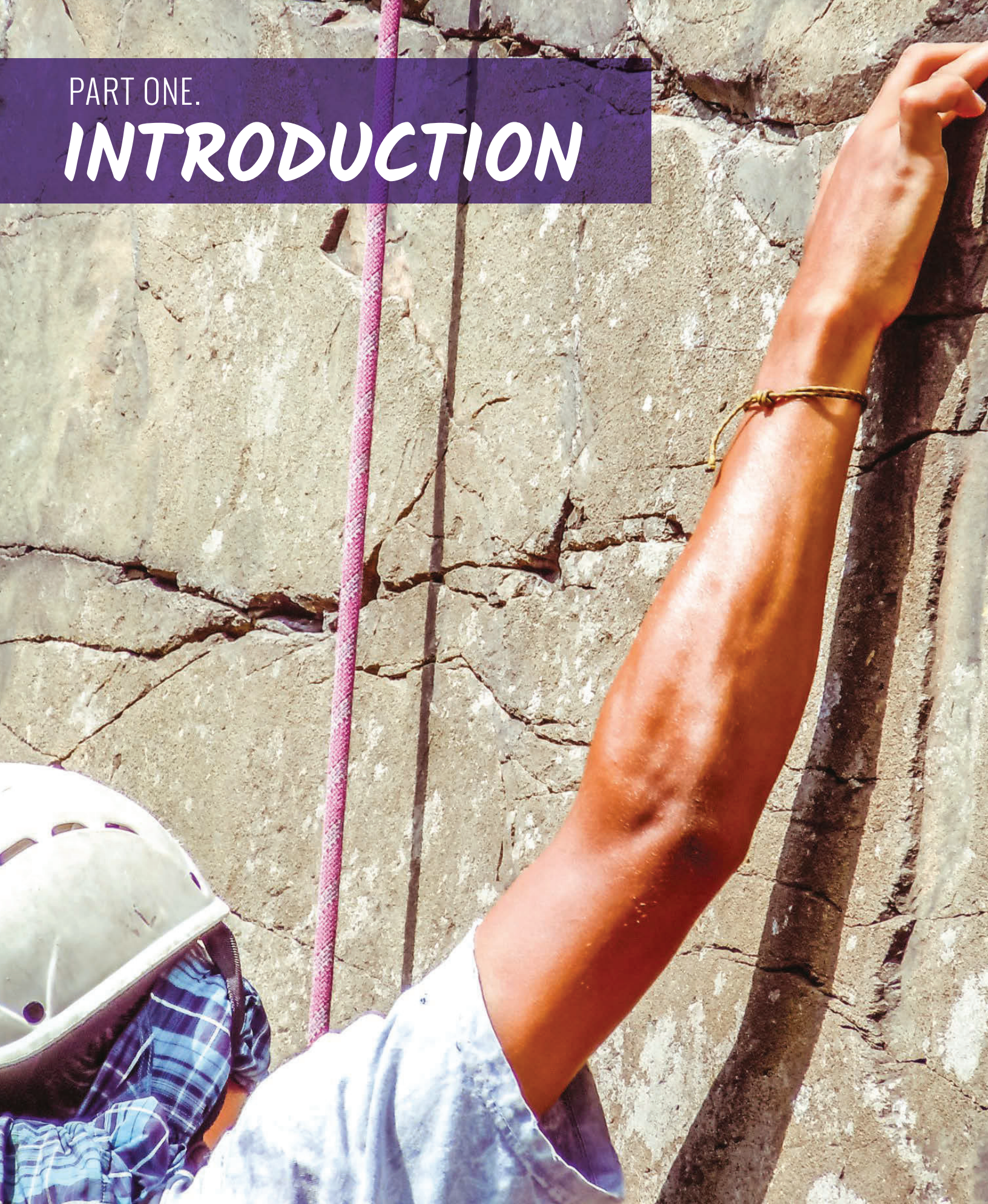


AS YOU READ

- A DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF METHODS AND FINDINGS FOR ALL ASPECTS OF THE SEL CHALLENGE IS AVAILABLE IN THE TECHNICAL REPORT FOR SEL CHALLENGE FROM THE WEIKART CENTER, AVAILABLE AT SELpractices.org.
- ADDITIONAL TOOLS AND SUPPORTS ARE AVAILABLE ONLINE AT SELpractices.org AND FROM THE WEIKART CENTER.

PART ONE.

INTRODUCTION



1.0 About the Guide

Imagine this scene: The public school district, city government, and local businesses have kicked off a citywide effort to build **social and emotional learning** (SEL) skills for adolescents in the City of Milwaukee. As part of the initiative, Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Milwaukee (BGCGM) staff meet to discuss their response: How do we use the initiative as an opportunity to increase access for youth who we know are not being adequately served? How do we demonstrate our effectiveness with individual youth and our organizational leadership in this important area of policy? Staff point out that existing BGCGM program offerings are focused on adolescent social and emotional skills, but that this is difficult to communicate. Most people understand these programs in terms of their arts or community action content rather than their effect on how adolescents regulate their emotions, motivation, attention, and behavior. The staff are challenged to point to a set of standards for social and emotional skills that could help them communicate the SEL focus of their existing work or to help attract further investment in this area of great need. Finally, although the BGCGM have adopted a standard for quality and conduct program evaluations, this work is not translated into the language of SEL.

Social and Emotional Learning: Defined in the following way by the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL): the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions.

This scenario is playing out as states, cities, and communities across the United States marshal their resources to help their most vulnerable youth thrive. However, many communities also struggle to make investments that support diverse providers and agencies to build momentum, increase scale, demonstrate progress, and tell others about their work. This guide to standards for SEL practices, and the accompanying Technical Report and online supports, were developed to help expert practitioners and local policy makers address complicated questions like these. The SEL Challenge supported experts in eight unique communities to identify what they did in common so that these common practices that support SEL could be named and promoted at greater scale in other communities.

Our goal was to produce a framework that integrated multiple languages of SEL practice—words to describe individual skills, curriculum, instruction, and management. We also wanted to use specific ideas and plain language that could help professionals talk to each other, and to youth, about what social and emotional skills are and how they might be actively developed using specific practices. Our focus was on descriptions of “the action” that staff and youth actually see in **out-of-school** time (OST) settings. Although each of the eight exemplary **offerings** that were studied in the SEL Challenge uses a different curriculum, their approaches to building social and emotional skills have important similarities, which are the **standards** for SEL practice featured in this guide.

The term **out-of-school time** is used to refer to settings variously labeled afterschool, expanded learning, extracurricular clubs, summer camps, and sports; many mentoring, tutoring, apprenticeship, and workforce development programs; programs for disconnected and homeless youth; and some alternative schools.

We hope that OST systems and communities will use the Challenge as a model to mount their own local and regional SEL initiatives. The OST sector is experiencing dramatic growth and innovation, and our experience suggests that OST systems and programs have broad developmental purposes in which social and emotional skills figure centrally. The OST sector is already “tuned” to youth who can benefit from SEL through connections to schools, families, and the workplace. The sector has invested in quality improvement systems that are well suited to implement SEL standards.

An **offering** is characterized by the same group of youth and adults meeting over multiple sessions for a planned learning purpose. The target offerings in the SEL Challenge are those exemplary offerings using SEL practices and curriculum to grow youth SEL skills.

The primary purpose of the SEL Challenge is to engage experts and novices alike in conversations about the kinds of social and emotional skills they hope will flower in the adolescents they know and care about. Regardless of whether these skills are known as SEL, 21st Century Skills, soft skills, character education, experiential learning, or positive youth development, these are the skills that constitute a resilient identity and a sense of agency in the places and pathways of early adulthood.

We use the phrase “standards for SEL practice” and the term “**standards**” to describe practices that (1) appear across the Challenge offerings, (2) were described as important by the expert practitioners, and (3) were supported in the evidence base. In this guide, each standard consists of a sentence describing the practice and multiple practice indicators describing different facets of the standard.

1.1 Overview of the SEL Challenge

The SEL Challenge is a partnership between Susan Crown Exchange (SCE), staff teams from eight exemplary OST programs, the David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality, and technical consultants. The partnership was created as a learning community with a shared purpose: To gather our collective expertise into an integrated set of statements and stories about how to do SEL skill building with vulnerable adolescents, and then to share this information in a way that helps OST professionals, and others, develop a clearer understanding about SEL work they are already doing or hope to do more of.

WHY FOCUS ON SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL SKILLS FOR ADOLESCENTS?

Social and emotional skills are important.

While there are many ways to define and discuss the importance of social and emotional skills for adolescents, a great deal can be summarized using the terms self-regulation and agency. In general, an adolescent's ability to self-regulate—to manage emotions, attention, motivation, and behavior to achieve specific purposes—is related to a wide range of positive outcomes. Perhaps more importantly, the ability to intentionally shift focus away from environmental cues that cause reactive or negative emotional responses, or to choose to be in environments already free from these cues, is a powerful step toward transcendence of contexts that limit potential. When adolescents use self-regulatory powers to ignore distractions or to choose environments that have higher developmental potential, they are often referred to as having agency.¹ Social and emotional skills are action skills.

The evidence is in.

While we have much to learn about social and emotional skills, we also have a great deal of evidence already. The definitive meta-analyses—studies that summarize across findings from many prior studies—suggest that SEL skill-building curriculum delivered in both OST and school settings have positive effects on a wide range of skills and outcomes, such as improved attitudes about self and others, increased prosocial behavior, lower levels of problem behaviors and emotional distress, and improved academic performance.²

The available information about SEL practice is difficult to use.

Much of the available information about SEL practice is difficult to use for performance improvement. Intervention designs are often privatized in specific curricula and tools that do not support translation and integration. Curricula can be difficult to implement in some circumstances and often do not include technical supports for adaptation. Finally, much of the scientific description of SEL is focused on individual youth skills and outcomes rather than the curriculum features and staff practices that produce those skills and outcomes.



SEL DOMAINS

The SEL Challenge was designed around six categories of SEL practice and skill. We refer to these categories as domains. The six SEL domains are: Emotion Management, Empathy, Teamwork, Initiative, Responsibility, and Problem Solving. Selection of these six domains of practice was based on prior research, the input of the Challenge participants, priorities of the funder, and a desire to discuss SEL practices and skill in plain language. There are many ways to define and talk about SEL practice. We used the definition provided by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) in our glossary of terms and as a guide to our thinking about individual social and emotional skills.



Emotion Management

Abilities to be aware of and constructively handle both positive and challenging emotions.



Empathy

Relating to others with acceptance, understanding, and sensitivity to their diverse perspectives and experiences.



Teamwork

Abilities to collaborate and coordinate action with others.



Responsibility

Dispositions and abilities to reliably meet commitments and fulfill obligations of challenging roles.



Initiative

Capacities to take action, sustain motivation, and persevere through challenge toward an identified goal.



Problem Solving

Abilities to plan, strategize, and implement complex tasks.

We also identified a set of curriculum features—Content Sequence, Safe Space, Responsive Practice, Supports for Staff—that support implementation of the practices in each domain.

PARTICIPANTS

We looked for expertise in OST programs because this field offers rich examples of experts who manage to find the resources and the freedom to mount the program designs they believe will build social and emotional skills. We recruited teams of expert practitioners and asked them to tell us about their experiences doing SEL work in OST programs and then to help us synthesize these insights into standards.

Participants in the SEL Challenge included eight SEL service organizations serving vulnerable³ youth in seven states. Each organization submitted a design for an exemplary SEL offering.⁴ The offerings presented a wide variety of curriculum content, from outdoor adventure to youth organizing, varied in intensity from 20 to 75 sessions, and lasted between 8 and 11 months. Youth were aged 14 to 19 and were exposed to a wide array of risk factors in their everyday lives.

Three-person teams from each of the eight OST organizations—the organizational leader, the lead instructor for the targeted SEL offering, and the organization’s evaluation specialist—were invited to participate in the Challenge. A summary description of each organization and the targeted SEL offering is provided in Table 1. Case study narratives for each organization and the targeted SEL offering are provided in Part Three of this guide.

8 YOUTH SERVING ORGANIZATIONS









7 STATES

20-75 SESSIONS

8-11 MONTHS

14-19 YEARS OLD

Table 1. Targeted SEL Offerings at the Eight Challenge Sites

ORGANIZATION	OFFERING			YOUTH	
	NAME	CONTENT	SESSIONS	AGES	YOUTH CHARACTERISTICS AND RISK**
 <small>Attitude. Harmony. Achievement.</small> AHA! Attitude, Harmony, Achievement Santa Barbara, CA	Girls' Relationship Wisdom Group	Group Self-Improvement	36	14–19	Latina/Hispanic, girls, divorced parents
 Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Milwaukee Milwaukee, WI	Can You Hear Us Now?	Poetry and Community Service	48	12–19	Minority teens exposed to extreme effects of poverty and violence
 Philadelphia Wooden Boat Factory Philadelphia, PA	Boat Build and Sail Club	Boat building apprenticeship	45	14–18	Exposed to gang violence, crime, neglect
 The Possibility Project* New York, NY	Afterschool Program	Theater and Community Service	75	13–19	80-90% youth of color, low socioeconomic status, 15-25% LGBT, foster care
 Voyageur Outward Bound School* Saint Paul, MN	Strive Forward	Outdoor Adventure	35	14–18	African American boys, low socioeconomic status
 <small>Real Teens. Real Life. Real Results.</small> Wyman St. Louis, MO	Teen Outreach Program*	Life Skills and Service Learning	36	14–19	Low-income, often single parent, primarily students of color
 Youth on Board Somerville, MA	Working Group	Organize youth policy in Boston	20	14–19	Low socioeconomic status, students of color
 YWCA Boston Boston, MA	Youth Leadership Initiative (Int)*	Youth Organizing	20	14–19	Diverse ethnic, gender, religion

* Widely replicated curriculum or program model

** Language drawn from Challenge applications

METHOD

The SEL Challenge method was designed to identify standards for SEL practice and describe performance at each site. The method consisted of three parts:

- First, we designed an application process to identify exemplary SEL offerings.
- Next, we used a qualitative approach with participant feedback loops to identify standards for SEL practice.
- Finally, we implemented performance studies at each of the eight OST sites to describe the quality of SEL practice and youth skill growth in the exemplary offerings.

The Technical Report details the methodology and provides guidance for other entities to implement their own local SEL Challenges.

IDENTIFICATION OF EXEMPLARY PROGRAMS

From an initial pool of 250 applicants, eight organizations were selected based on several criteria.⁵ The ability of the staff to clearly describe the offering curriculum and what and how students learn was of paramount importance and perhaps the distinguishing indicator of the applicant’s expertise. We were looking for participants who were implementing offerings they thought were exemplary and could explain why at a high level of detail and with evidence. Beginning with the letter of intent and then the invited application, we asked applicant staff to describe their targeted SEL offering in great detail and to answer questions about their practice.

STANDARDS FOR SEL PRACTICES

Identification of exemplary **practices** entailed mapping of the targeted SEL offering curricula as well as multiple interviews and focus groups with team members, youth in the current offering, and an “expert youth” who had completed the offering in an earlier year. The data were subjected to content and thematic analyses and iteratively reviewed in the Challenge learning community. The published work of Reed Larson and colleagues provided the primary evidence base and a starting framework for development of the application process, the interview questions, and, ultimately, the standards. The Larson et al. framework is anchored in the voices of adolescents themselves in hundreds of interviews conducted during this nearly two-decade research program. We provide references for the primary research articles in the Larson et al. evidence base as Appendix B. We recommend readers review this work further if they want to learn more about individual youth skill development processes in each domain, which directly complement the focus on practice in this guide.

*Our definition of staff **practices** includes both staff behaviors (e.g., modeling appropriate use of emotion) and program structures that the staff put into place (e.g., recruitment policy). Key youth experiences (e.g., taking on roles and obligations) point to staff practices and program structures necessary to produce those youth experiences. In this sense, the staff practices and key youth experiences are both included as standards for SEL practices.*

Because our intent was to describe curriculum and practice related to learning social and emotional skills, we crafted an SEL learning theory that fit the relatively short timescale of the SEL offerings—less than one year in all cases—and the even shorter momentary, daily, and weekly timeframes in which curriculum features and staff practices are delivered. The learning theory that guided development of the questions we used to engage the Challenge experts is summarized in Appendix D.

We use the phrase “standards for SEL practice” and the term “standard” to describe practices that (1) appear across the Challenge offerings, (2) were described as important by the expert practitioners, and (3) were supported in the evidence base.

PERFORMANCE STUDIES

We also conducted performance studies for each of the eight offerings. Performance measures⁶ were selected to describe the quality of management practice, the quality of instructional practice, and change in youth SEL beliefs and behaviors. We produced an SEL performance report for each organization that included comparisons to normative performance benchmarks, and we engaged Challenge teams in a continuous improvement process focused on SEL practice.

FINDINGS

The findings for the SEL Challenge are organized in two parts: standards for SEL practice and results from the performance studies.

Standards for SEL Practice

The standards for SEL practice are the primary findings from the SEL Challenge. The Challenge method produced 32 *standards for practice* and 58 *practice indicators* in the six SEL domains. Additionally 18 practice indicators were developed for four SEL *curriculum features*. These findings are discussed in detail in Part Two of this guide and have substantial alignment with features named in prior research on adolescent development and positive youth development.

*The lowest level descriptor for an SEL standard in this guide. **Practice indicators** describe specific youth experiences, staff behaviors, or other objective conditions that occur during out-of-school time offerings.*

The standards are presented within the framework of *key youth experience* and *staff practices*. Key youth experiences point to adult decisions and behaviors necessary to make youth experiences happen. There are 17 standards and 32 practice indicators for key youth experiences across the six domains. Our definition of staff practice is broad and includes both momentary staff behavior as well as more enduring structures that the staff put into place. There are 16 standards and 26 practice indicators for staff practices across the six domains.

Performance Studies

There were two findings from the *performance* studies: The quality of staff practices and youth SEL skill change. These findings are of interest because they offer evidence of validation for the selection of exemplary offerings through the SEL Challenge application process and for the SEL best practice standards that were drawn from these offerings. The standards are more credible (i.e., valid) if they come from programs that are of unusually high quality and where there is evidence of youth skill growth. Appendix A details these findings.

*Use of selected **performance** measures at an individual OST site to describe the quality of management and instructional practices as well as change in youth skills to produce a performance report used during a continuous improvement cycle. The performance report includes comparisons to normative performance benchmarks.*



1.2 Using the Guide and other Challenge Resources

Whether you are an OST leader, an educator, or just passionate about helping young people reach their potential, this guide can help you provide powerful learning experiences that make youth more ready for whatever comes next. In this section, we provide guidance about how to use the guide and the suite of resources produced through the Challenge. Stay connected by following us online at SELpractices.org where you can connect to a virtual learning community.

FOR GENERAL READERS

Skim Part One to understand what the SEL Challenge is and closely review Table 2 on page 16 to understand the content of the standards. Then dig in to Part Two of the guide where the standards and practice indicators are presented. Finally, review one or more of the case studies in Part Three to better understand the kind of information available about each of the eight exemplary offerings.

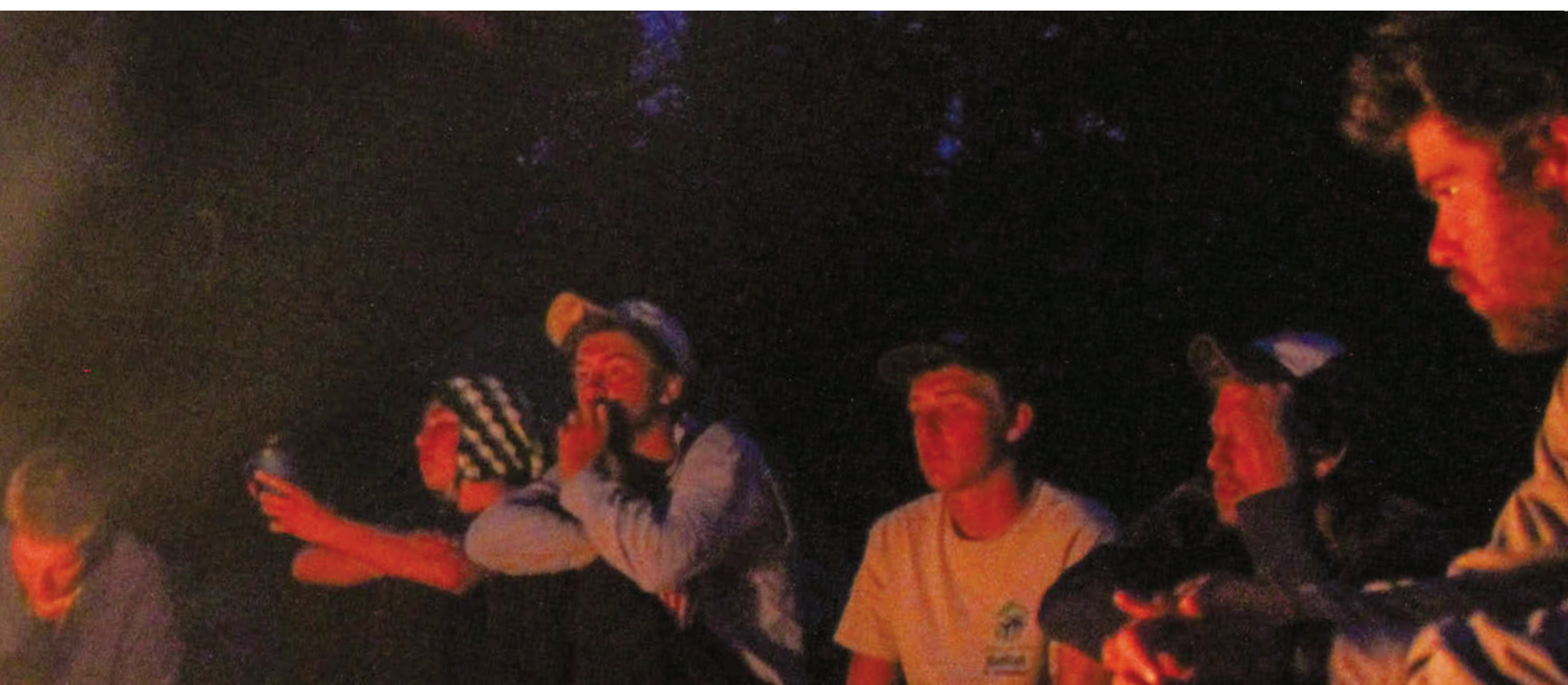
FOR EDUCATORS WHO BUILD, DELIVER, AND IMPROVE SEL CURRICULUM

Focus on Part Two where the standards and vignettes for specific SEL practice indicators are presented. Start by reviewing the SEL curriculum features in section 2.1, then move to an SEL domain and read some of the vignettes closely. The presentation of each of the six domains is designed for review and discussion by a staff team. Notes for curriculum builders are provided below.

FOR USE IN CONTINUOUS QUALITY IMPROVEMENT SYSTEMS (QIS)

This guidebook provides a set of standards—definitions of high quality practice—for settings working on social and emotional skills with adolescents. Aligned performance measures and performance improvement tools are available in the *Technical Report for SEL Challenge* as well as online at SELpractices.org. Together, the guide, the Technical Report, and online resources comprise the suite of resources produced through the SEL Challenge. The scope of these supports will be increased in a next phase of the work. Notes for applications in QIS are provided on page 13.

In the OST field, a QIS typically consists of four elements: Standards for good performance, performance measures and reports, an annual continuous improvement cycle, and supports and incentives necessary to implement the prior elements.



Things to consider while viewing the standards

In this section, we offer the reader several things to consider while reviewing the standards. Our desire to present the standards in a uniform format can obscure some important nuance in the content. Importantly, we think the ideas presented in this guide are sound. However, these standards are not clinical procedures and were not developed as responses to any set of diagnosable conditions. Here are some things to keep in mind:

Vignettes provide examples of how the practices are applied in different ways

Multiple vignettes—short descriptions of practice—follow each practice indicator to give the reader a context-rich description of how the practices are applied in the language of expert practitioners. The vignettes demonstrate an important developmental principal—that many variations on the practices described in this guide can be used to affect the same experiences for youth.

As you read, consider:

- » *How does this staff practice support youth to practice social and emotional skills in this domain?*
- » *What variations would most effectively achieve the same effect with the youth I work with?*

Youth are key players in their own social and emotional learning

Although these standards are presented for use by staff, it is not meant to discount the youth role in SEL. As we heard from all of the Challenge partners, adults are often only the facilitators of youth's own active process of growing social and emotional skills.

Youth skills often develop in a sequence and/or hierarchy

Within the domains, the individual standards describe the building of youth skills as a sequence and/or hierarchy where first youth name and understand an SEL concept (figuring out what the "it" is) before going through the sequence of steps necessary to change the "it" in some way. This is an important distinction for all skill building but may be especially important to social and emotional skills. Naming and modeling the SEL skill by an adult staff is likely an important first step toward acting on and changing social and emotional skills in an intentional way. For example, youth might learn the steps of a process for resolving conflicts, but until a conflict arises and they are able to practice those steps with each other, they may not acquire the skills for conflict resolution.

Emotion management has a special place in SEL offerings

Emotional dynamics happen very quickly and emotion states are linked to the context in powerful ways. The SEL Challenge offerings were designed to "push" so that staff can come to understand the limits of self-regulation for individual youth. Next, they provide youth opportunities to practice and extend those limits of healthy control. Emotion management may be of higher relative priority when serving youth who have been exposed to traumatic experience and toxic stress.

Relative importance and sequence of the standards is locally determined

The relative importance and the structure (e.g., sequence, frequency) necessary to implement the practices effectively is likely to vary with the needs of youth served and the resources available to address those needs. These are decisions that need to be made by local expert practitioners and are the types of conversations that the guide should support.

Using the standards in quality improvement systems

The SEL Challenge partnership was formed as a launch pad for conversations and actions that help OST programs (or networks of programs) to focus on SEL, assess their performance, and improve over multiple program cycles. In particular, we hope that OST systems already working on quality improvement will incorporate standards for SEL practice into their definition of high quality services and use their existing quality improvement systems to build SEL capacity.

QIS in the OST field typically consists of four elements:

- standards for good performance,
- performance measures and reports,
- an annual continuous improvement cycle, and
- supports and incentives necessary to implement the prior elements.

These QIS have established accountability models that adopt a lower-stakes approach for the improvement of instructional practices, which allow staff a safe environment to reflect on their practice and receive supports for building their skills without the fear of unfair sanctions. These evidence-based, lower stakes QIS models⁷ can be extended to include a focus on SEL practices and skills.

This guide is designed as a support for an annual quality improvement cycle, as a set of standards that describe best SEL practice and curriculum features. Through the Challenge, a full set of performance measures were implemented and a performance report developed for improvement uses at the offering and program levels. These measures and performance reports are detailed in the Technical Report and available on the accompanying online resource.

For users of the Youth Program Quality Intervention, an alignment of Weikart Center's Program Quality Assessment items aligned to the SEL standards is provided in Appendix E. If your program does not already have a system of continuous quality improvement with one or more of these components, you might consult the Wallace Foundation's Building Citywide Systems for Quality: A Guide and Case Studies for Afterschool Leaders.

SEL STRENGTHS BUILDER

Additional resources at SELpractices.org can help you build a continuous improvement cycle with your staff team:

Use the standards to self-assess. Start with a self-assessment process using the SEL practices checklist (available at SELpractices.org). Engage a staff team to complete the checklist independently to identify practices that are both prominent and infrequent in your offerings. Hold a meeting for staff to discuss their results and start to build a common vocabulary around SEL practices. The self-assessment conversation can be extended by asking staff to complete a rating of youth behavior for a few program participants and discussing the results.

With the guide and some performance information in hand, staff can ask important questions:

- Who are our youth and which social and emotional skills could really help them achieve greater agency in their lives? What does it look like when these youth are demonstrating these skills in our program?
- Are there opportunities for these youth to practice these skills in our program? What changes to the curriculum would increase opportunities to practice these social and emotional skills?
- How do our current youth experiences and staff practices compare to those described in the standards? Which standards do we enact very well? Where are our weaknesses? Given the needs of our youth, where do we need to improve?
- Are we biased? Is there any systematic reason why we might rate one youth lower or higher than another?

Plan with SEL performance information. The self-assessment conversations feed into a cycle that can lead to an improvement plan that suggests changes in practice and better use of moments in the curriculum where opportunities for SEL practices occur. Part Three of the guide provides examples of curriculum maps for the eight Challenge programs. What is your curriculum map?

Identify system supports. For sustainable change, professional development and assessments should be aligned and integrated into the annual cycle with skill-focused professional development available to help build skills and knowledge.

Learn more at SELpractices.org.

PART TWO.

STANDARDS FOR SEL PRACTICE



Social and emotional learning (SEL) is difficult work. It requires thinking and talking about ongoing emotions and relationships, topics that are complicated and sometimes taboo. SEL is deep, powerful, and can be quite personal. In all of the eight programs that participated in the SEL Challenge, SEL work goes hand-in-hand with complicated and engaging work projects—like creating a relevant community service project or building a boat. All of this, of course, happens among youth who can struggle dealing with everyday life as an adolescent in a risky world.

We found in the SEL Challenge offerings (characterized by the same group of youth and adults meeting over multiple sessions for a planned learning purpose) social and emotional skills emerged as youth (and adults) worked through challenges and experienced successes:

- Facing fear;
- Accepting anger;
- Recognizing assumptions one has made about others that may be unfair;
- Recognizing deeply entrenched differences in power;
- Coming to terms with disadvantage and unequal treatment without succumbing to helplessness;
- Learning that errors and failure are necessary and useful; and
- Learning to tough things out, endure setbacks, and persevere through tedious work.

The curriculum features and standards for practice presented in this guide are intended to help adults who work with youth teach youth how to encounter, understand, and surmount challenges and experience success within the context of strong positive relationships.

We use the phrase “standards for SEL practice” and the term “**standard**” to describe practices that (1) appear across the Challenge offerings, (2) were described as important by the expert practitioners, and (3) were supported in the evidence base. In this guide, each standard consists of a sentence defining the standard and multiple practice indicators describing more specific facets of the standard.

*We use the phrase “standards for SEL practice” and the term “**standards**” to describe practices that (1) appear across the Challenge offerings, (2) were described as important by the expert practitioners, and (3) were supported in the evidence base. In this guide, each standard consists of a sentence describing the practice and multiple practice indicators describing different facets of the standard.*

Because our method was to ask expert practitioners about what happens in the targeted SEL offerings, the standards within each domain are shaped by their responses. Practitioners described what they wanted youth to experience during the offering and what they did to support those experiences. The standards are presented within the framework of key youth experience and staff practices.

Key youth experiences

The SEL Challenge offering curricula are designed to provide youth with real-world challenges, such as providing community service, writing and performing in a theater production, surviving in the wilderness, or organizing a campaign for school improvement. These experiences are intentionally co-created by staff and youth, but they point to adult decisions and behaviors necessary to make them happen. For this reason, key youth experiences are included as standards for SEL practice.⁹ There are 17 standards and 32 practice indicators for key youth experiences across the six domains.




Staff practices

Our definition of staff practices is broad and includes both momentary staff behaviors as well as more enduring structures that the staff put into place. There are 16 standards and 26 practice indicators for staff practices across the six domains. We also identify each standard as one of five types of practice: structure, modeling, scaffolding, coaching, facilitating.

The standards for SEL practice are summarized in Table 2. Sections 2.2 through 2.7 provide comprehensive information for each of the six SEL domains. Multiple vignettes are provided as examples for each practice indicator.

We believe that the words of the expert practitioners increase both the meaningfulness and actionability of the standards. This is true both because our experts were so eloquent, and because they described their work in their own terms. Important guidance for interpretation of the standards and practice indicators is provided in Section 1.2.

Table 2. Standards for SEL Practice in Six Domains

<p>EMOTION MANAGEMENT</p> 	<p>Abilities to be aware of and constructively handle both positive and challenging emotions.</p> <p>YE Key youth experiences</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Youth experience a range of positive and negative emotions in a safe context. Youth have opportunities to practice and develop healthy and functional emotion skills. <p>SP Staff practices</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff create and adjust the structure of daily activities to accommodate youth's processing of emotion. Staff model healthy emotion strategies within the context of caring, mutually-respectful relationships with youth. Staff provide coaching to youth about handling and learning from their ongoing emotional experiences. 	<p><i>"I used to think of this program as more of an outlet too. Whenever I used to have a bad day, I needed to come here. You know you're cutting wood. That's a great outlet for bringing out some of the anger or depression you have. And it really helps you control yourself."</i></p> <p>—PWBF Youth Focus Group participant</p>
<p>EMPATHY</p> 	<p>Relating to others with acceptance, understanding, and sensitivity to their diverse perspectives and experiences.</p> <p>YE Key youth experiences</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Youth explore social structure and power in relation to themselves and others. Youth share their stories and listen to the stories of others. Youth practice relating to others with acceptance and understanding. <p>SP Staff practices</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff provide programs with appropriate structure for sharing experience and promoting equity. Staff model empathy skills with youth. 	<p><i>"When you start teaching about concepts of empathy, you have to be secure in who you are and what your feelings are to be relate empathetically for something that somebody else is dealing with."</i></p> <p>—Natalie Cooper, Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Milwaukee</p>
<p>TEAMWORK</p> 	<p>Abilities to collaborate and coordinate action with others.</p> <p>YE Key youth experiences</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Youth develop group cohesion and trust. Youth participate in successful collaboration. Youth manage challenges to creating and maintaining effective working relationships. <p>SP Staff practices</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff provide programs with norms and structure. Staff model teamwork skills with youth. Staff facilitate or intervene as needed to foster or sustain youth-led group dynamics and successful collaboration. 	<p><i>"When it comes to teamwork it's about doing exercises that allow youth to work together as a team and then process out their experience as a team, so that they're not only understanding the techniques like the craft of being a good team member and how teams work, but also beginning to believe in that as an idea."</i></p> <p>—Paul Griffin, The Possibility Project</p>

Curriculum features

Although the Challenge research methods were focused within each SEL domain, we also identified practices that were not specific to a single domain. The targeted SEL offerings had common features among all programs that organized implementation of the SEL practices in each domain. The curriculum features are presented in section 2.1, before the standards for the SEL domains, because these features are foundational to the SEL work. Challenge participants frequently described these features as non-negotiable.

Our method was focused on identifying practices *within* specific skill domains, so the evidence for the curriculum features is not as comprehensive as it is for the standards for SEL practice. However, there is extensive evidence supporting the benefits of these features elsewhere.⁹

RESPONSIBILITY

Dispositions and abilities to reliably meet commitments and fulfill obligations of challenging roles.



YE Key youth experiences

- Youth take on roles and obligations within program activities.
- Youth encounter difficult demands.
- Youth draw on resources to fulfill challenging roles and internalize accomplishment.

SP Staff practices

- Staff provide structured but open-ended roles for youth.
- Staff model and fulfill their own roles.
- Staff promote high expectations, respect youth's ownership of their roles, and provide help only as needed.

"While on course, students have an opportunity to use their leadership styles as a leader of the day. In the wrap up for the day, there is an opportunity to give the leader of the day feedback - what the group thought that they did well and what they thought they could improve on. This is an empowering experience for everyone involved. It is an opportunity for the group to begin to take ownership for who they want to be and the culture they want to create."

—Laura Greenlee Karp, Voyageur Outward Bound School

INITIATIVE

Capacities to take action, sustain motivation, and persevere through challenge toward an identified goal.



YE Key youth experiences

- Youth set ambitious and realistic goals.
- Youth develop and sustain motivation by doing work that matters to them.
- Youth have experiences persevering through the ups and downs of difficult work.

SP Staff practices

- Staff provide ongoing assistance to help youth develop motivation within the work.
- Staff encourage youth to persist through challenging work, making sure that the effort behind youth's achievement is recognized.

"The facilitator can really build the service learning as it makes sense for that club. "Okay, so we did that, and now what are you guys interested in doing, and how do we build upon our success?" So you're trying to engage the youth voice as much as possible in the planning, and you're trying to do it in a way that is manageable within the resources that you have available."

—Allison Williams, Wyman

PROBLEM SOLVING

Abilities to plan, strategize, and implement complex tasks.



YE Key youth experiences

- Youth engage in projects that involve organizing actions over time.
- Youth learn through cycles of strategic planning, execution, responding to emergent problems, trial and error, and reflection on outcomes.
- Youth reflect on how outcomes of their work provide information that helps build and verify youth skills.

SP Staff practices

- Staff provide sufficient structure to youth-driven projects.
- Staff create opportunities for youth to observe models of successful work.
- Staff provide assistance, as needed, to help youth learn and solve problems on their own.
- Staff offer youth opportunities for reflection on project outcomes.

"They kept having to go back to the administration to talk about what it is that they wanted to do and then they kept getting delayed, and so every time they'd set a date, there was another delay. So they kept having to move the date forward which was frustrating, but they continued to go back to the administration to find out what were the specific concerns, how could they address them so that the administration would feel comfortable in letting the activity go forward."

—Beth Chandler, YWCA Boston

2.1 SEL Curriculum Features

The SEL curriculum features are those practices not specific to a single domain but are foundational to the SEL work. These features are common across the Challenge offerings and organize the implementation of the SEL practices.

The SEL curriculum features include the Content Sequence (Project and SEL), Safe Space, Responsive Practices, and Supports for Staff. We define the term “**curriculum**” to include both (1) the sequence of content and experiences fit to the developmental and learning needs of youth, and (2) as the supports necessary for the instructional staff to implement the sequence. Each feature is described below with supporting vignettes from the SEL offerings.

[]
Description of (1) a sequence of content and planned experiences fit to the developmental and learning needs of the learner and (2) the supports necessary for the instructional staff to plan and implement that sequence. Curriculum features highlighted in the guide include content sequence, offering session structure, responsive practices, and staff supports.

Table 3. SEL Curriculum Features

PROJECT CONTENT SEQUENCE



- Staff shape the offering work with youth input, often requiring youth ownership.
- Staff shape the offering work with complex goals and/or a complex sequence of operations.
- Staff shape the offering work with repetitive skill practice in diverse contexts.

SEL CONTENT SEQUENCE



- The offerings follow a progression through the SEL domains.
- Offerings are structured for youth to engage their community.
- Youth master social and emotional skills and experience increasing agency.

SAFE SPACE



- Staff cultivate ground rules for group processes (e.g. listening, turn-taking, decision-making) and sharing of emotions.
- Staff cultivate a culture around the principles that all are different, equal, and important in which people actively care for, appreciate, and include each other.
- Staff cultivate a culture where learning from mistakes and failures is highly valued.
- Staff organize consistent routines, activities, roles, or procedures to provide a structured and predictable experience.

RESPONSIVE PRACTICES



- Staff observe and interact in order to know youth deeply.
- Staff provide structure for check-ins to actively listen to and receive feedback from individual youth.
- Staff coach, model, scaffold, and facilitate in real time as challenges occur.

SUPPORTS FOR STAFF

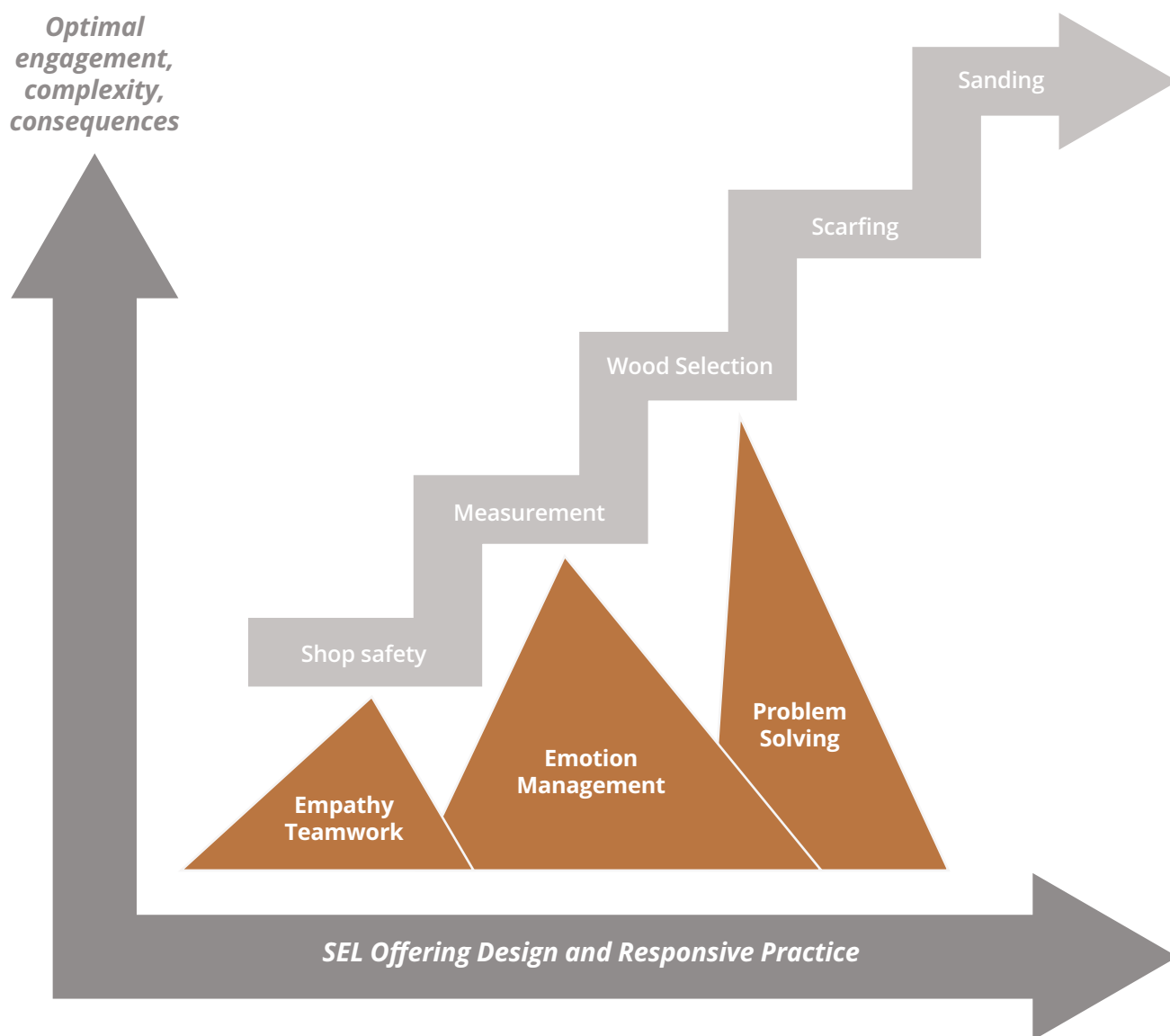


- The organization recruits youth who will benefit from the offering.
- There is more than one staff member in every program session with the ability to implement responsive practices.
- Staff work together before each program session to plan and collaborate on the session activities and regularly debrief following each session to discuss youth progress, staff response, and adjustments for future sessions.
- Staff are supported to grow professionally and rejuvenate energy for the work.
- Staff are supported by their organization to reflect on and improve their practices through a continuous improvement process.

CONTENT SEQUENCES

Perhaps the defining curriculum feature of the SEL Challenge offerings is the sequencing of content. In these offerings, there are two content sequences at work. Figure 4 illustrates how the two interact. The stair-stepped arrow represents the *project content sequence*—a content sequence that youth are guided along (e.g., the skill sets necessary to build a wooden boat) during the offering cycle. Meanwhile, the *SEL content sequence* is implemented in parallel to foster skill growth in each of the SEL domains. The figure below provides an example of how the project sequence, which is designed to build the technical skills of carpentry as youth build a boat from scratch, presents opportunities for social and emotional skills as youth work together towards shared goals, deal with frustrations and setbacks, and tackle problems together.

Figure 4. Offering Curriculum Sequence — Project and SEL Content for the Philadelphia Wooden Boat Factory



Project Content Sequence

1. Staff shape the offering work with youth input, often requiring youth ownership.
2. Staff shape the offering work with complex goals and/or a complex sequence of operations.
3. Staff shape the offering work with repetitive skill practice in diverse contexts.

Each of the offerings has a project that youth are setting out to complete. For example, at Voyageur Outward Bound School (VOBS), the project content sequence includes youth learning to set up camp—pitch tents, start a fire, store their food—a set of skills that at first staff model and, over time, youth complete on their own. At Youth on Board (YOB), youth are trained in public speaking, speech writing, and communications strategies, and employ these skills across the campaigns they work on in the Boston Public Schools. At the Philadelphia Wooden Boat Factory (PWBF), youth serve as apprentice boat-builders and learn the tools and techniques to build a boat from raw materials. The project content sequence feature includes three practice indicators:

1. Staff shape the offering work with youth input, often requiring youth ownership.

Shaping the offering with youth input not only increases youth's interest in the project but also engenders a greater sense of commitment. For all of the offerings, the final product is known ahead of time (e.g., a theater production, an outdoor expedition, a community service learning project, a political campaign), but important goals, or the details about how to achieve the final product, are largely shaped by the youth. The youth make decisions of consequence. Paul Griffin, founder and president of The Possibility Project (TPP), explained:

It's not about young people getting placed in our program and intervening or injecting ideas and things that are going to change their lives. It's about us facilitating an experience from which they can learn, but that learning really is up to them. We do our part, but we cannot and will not do it for them.

2. Staff shape the offering work with complex goals and/or a complex sequence of operations.

An appropriate level of complexity for the work serves several purposes. It keeps youth interested in the work over time as they develop mastery of skills and go on to experience new, often higher-level challenges. Ideally, the challenge level of the offering work is at the top of youth's capabilities, in a "zone"¹⁰ that is just beyond what the young person can do by him or herself and just within what he/she can do with support. Most importantly, appropriate complexity provides opportunities for social and emotional skill building by requiring youth to solve problems, take initiative, follow through, and manage the emotions that arise from frustration and success. Brett Hart, executive director at PWBF, offered this example:

There's a joint called a "compound double" that is basically fitting two pieces of wood together, and the angle where they join is not a square angle, but it might have a bevel in two directions. This is probably the perfect example because it's even harder to imagine as we're talking about it, and I think you and I probably have pretty good abstract thinking abilities. So you have to think in ways that really challenge your mind. When I'm working on a boat I get smoke coming out of my ears. I find this stuff really challenging. And the kids are doing it.

3. Staff shape the offering work with repetitive skill practice in diverse contexts.

The project content sequence can also be set up to provide multiple opportunities for practicing skills in different settings. Educational researcher Kurt Fischer explains that people build skills in a scalloped

4,000 THE NUMBER OF TIMES YOUTH AT PWBF YOUTH CONDUCT MEASUREMENT TO BUILD A BOAT.

200 THE NUMBER OF SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS YOUTH AT YOB MAKE TO POLITICAL REPRESENTATIVES TO MOUNT A CAMPAIGN.

400 THE NUMBER OF COMMUNITY SERVICE LEARNING HOURS YOUTH AT WYMAN COMPLETE TO PROVIDE A COMMUNITY SERVICE.

15,000 THE NUMBER OF REHEARSAL HOURS YOUTH PUT IN FOR THE PERFORMANCE AT TPP.

700 THE NUMBER OF HOURS SPENT PLANNING MEETINGS AT YWCA BOSTON (YW BOSTON).

pattern rather than linearly¹¹. This means learners build and rebuild a skill as they encounter new tasks or situations; practicing and adapting skills in a variety of contexts leads toward mastery of those skills. In the Challenge offerings, youth practice applying social and emotional skills many times in familiar settings (e.g., planned repetition with supports) as well as in novel settings where pressure may increase. Social and emotional skills are necessary to achieve the goals of the project content sequence.

SEL Content Sequence

1. The offerings follow a progression through the SEL domains.
2. Offerings are structured for youth to engage their community.
3. Youth master social and emotional skills and experience increasing agency.

By design, the project content sequence presents opportunities for parallel social and emotional learning to occur. In fact, many of the Challenge programs have identified specific places in the project sequence where opportunities for SEL are likely to occur and, sometimes, where learning these skills is necessary to progress in the project. Staff communicated that flexibility is imperative. All of the programs told stories about times they adjusted their project content sequence in order to effectively respond to the emotional needs of the youth—e.g., because of a traumatic event a youth faced, a conflict between teens, or an individual’s emotional breakthrough—demonstrating their responsiveness. The SEL content sequence feature includes three practice indicators:

1. The offerings follow a progression through the SEL domains.

We found the SEL Challenge programs consistently begin with exposure to empathy and teamwork experiences, whereas more intensive experiences with initiative and responsibility occur later in the offering design as the project content sequence picks up steam. Staff practices and youth experience in the emotion management and problem solving domains occur throughout the offering.

Paul Griffin explained how at TPP a spiral curriculum deepens this progression:

We use a spiral curriculum, introducing, revisiting, and reinforcing key concepts in different contexts throughout the year. For instance, “hope” or “justice” might be introduced early on as a broad idea, come up again in an exercise on race/class, come up again in the stories they share, find their way into the show as they write it, and then take on new meaning when shared with audiences. Each time it repeats it does so in a different context, deepening the meaning for our youth and giving them a subtle understanding of these key concepts.

This progression through the SEL domains allows youth to first explore and learn about themselves, then about others in their group, and finally about their larger community and the world around them. This is highlighted in the empathy domain, but occurs throughout the curriculum sequence in most of the offerings. Allison Williams, senior vice president of programs at Wyman, explained:

For example, lesson plans under the categories of communication, goal setting, problem-solving, decision making, and relationships directly address a variety of interpersonal and intrapersonal skills. These often involve activities promoting self-awareness, as well as awareness of others’ perspectives. Several lesson plans address preparing for community service learning and challenge young people to listen for and understand the perspective of family members, other adults, community members, the elderly, etc.

Julie Thayer, Int program manager at YW Boston, added:

During Immersion Week, the understanding of their own identity and the identities of others is a major component—and then seeing how that fits into the more systemic issues is the next step.

2. Offerings are structured for youth to engage their community.

In the SEL Challenge programs, the project curricula tend to move from the more private setting of the out-of-school-time (OST) program space to more public settings with involvement of, or presentation to, community members. Examples of community interaction include community services activities (Wyman, TPP), community performances (TPP, Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Milwaukee (BGCGM)), and close interactions with specific community members and partners (YOB, YW Boston).

Engaging with the community through presentations, performances, etc., at the end of the offering cycle allows youth the opportunity to demonstrate their skills. Youth also connect to a relevant community and receive feedback and validation from that community. These are moments for adolescent identity development as youth begin having ideas about how others see them that portray the youth as skilled and valuable in a community¹². Paul Griffin at TPP described this progression:

So when our youth look around and they think about the community around them, they want to make the world a better place not just for themselves but for their little brothers and sisters, the kids they see. But most of our young people start out sort of ignorant and hopeless around making an impact in their community. They have no idea what it is, and when presented with the idea they say, “Well I’m a nobody. Why does what I say matter?” And over the course of a year we want to “turn the corner” on both of those things.

3. Youth master social and emotional skills and experience increasing agency.

“Social and emotional skills are action skills.” We heard this so many times in the SEL Challenge—from both staff and youth—that we came to refer to **agency** as the “super skill.” When youth demonstrate mastery of social and emotional skills, they are successfully regulating their emotions, attention, motivation, and behavior to engage with, or exit, the contexts they find themselves in. Youth who learn to self-regulate are more successful at doing the things they want to do during the offering, as well as in other facets of life. The concept of agency also refers to the experience of control in their own lives that youth experience when they are trusted to make decisions about things that affect them. Allison Williams at Wyman offered this example:

*The concept of **agency** also refers to the experience of control in their own lives that youth experience when they are trusted to make decisions about things that affect them.*

One of the benchmarks we watch is their progression towards their 20 or more hours of community service learning. We really talk with them about that as a goal that we’re collectively working towards. We have many young people who will exceed that, and they develop a more participatory voice in that community service learning. They have a voice in planning, identifying some sort of a need, and connecting that need with what they want to do. They really have the sense of where and how their participation in the community service learning makes an impact on others.

Rachel Gunther, associate director at YOB, offered this example from her organization:

Boston Student Advisory Council (BSAC) students are constantly working on multiple levels at once—educating and mobilizing their school peers, building relationships with district and school officials, developing strategies and contingency plans with community allies, and demonstrating multi-faceted youth engagement in action. The nature of our youth organizing model requires that students learn key skill sets such as issue analysis, long-range planning, evaluating feasibility, perseverance, and adapting to a constantly shifting landscape.

Safe Space

1. Staff cultivate ground rules for group processes (e.g. listening, turn-taking, decision-making) and sharing of emotions.
2. Staff cultivate a culture around the principles that all are different, equal, and important, in which people actively care for, appreciate, and include each other.
3. Staff cultivate a culture where learning from mistakes and failures is highly valued.
4. Staff organize consistent routines, activities, roles, or procedures to provide a structured and predictable experience.

Building a safe environment using a whole-group structure is especially pertinent to adolescents, who are beginning to develop a capacity for empathy. In the SEL Challenge programs, a safe space is both necessary to establish and a direct result of the social and emotional learning that happens in the programs. The safe space in a program is co-created with the staff and the youth, and is reinforced throughout all aspects of the offering. The Safe Space feature includes four practice indicators:

1. Staff cultivate ground rules for group processes (e.g. listening, turn-taking, decision-making) and sharing of emotions.

Agreeing on and reinforcing group norms for communication creates an environment where youth feel heard, are respectful of each other, and where there is a sense of confidentiality that encourages sharing. Jennifer Freed, co-executive director at AHA!, defined the process this way:

It's really deepening the sense of empathies by having people not interrupted and not challenged when they speak. The girls develop this extraordinary capacity to tolerate taking in other people's points of view and deal with what they feel in response to what somebody is saying, but they are able to metabolize that emotion instead of what happens in normal social discourses: the back and forth, the interrupting, and the distractions.

Natalie Cooper, senior director of social emotional learning at BGCGM, explained the rule at her organization:

What goes on in the program stays in the program. It's a huge dynamic. Particularly with social media, sometimes kids get excited and they want to share, and they don't realize sharing something was great for them, [but] it might not have been great for the person in the group or somebody else who was impacted by it.

2. Staff cultivate a culture around the principles that all are different, equal, and important in which people actively care for, appreciate, and include each other.

Through words and actions, staff model and encourage interactions based in understanding and appreciation. Cultivating this sense of belonging has been shown to be a critical element of youth's positive development¹³. Young people have fundamental needs, including, for example, the need for affiliation, friendship, and belonging to a group, and the need to feel competent, efficacious, respected, and significant¹⁴. Here's how one youth participant described youth-staff relationships at TPP:

You can tell that they genuinely care because they'll check in on you. They remember the things that you say. They remember what you're going through and it's just like, "Hey, how's that going? Do you need to talk, because I'm still here for you?" It's not like, "Oh, you need someone." Or, "I'm listening to you," and then like a week later they'll never talk about that again. They're still there. They're still checking in.

Paul Griffin described one way the youth at TPP develop empathy, tolerance, and appreciation for each other:

Each participant shares the story of his/her life in a limited amount of time and focuses on what makes him/her who he/she is. The rest of the cast listens, striving not to respond. The value of this exercise is in the listening, as each participant learns about the realities of young life and has the opportunity to connect and understand his/her cast members.

3. Staff cultivate a culture where learning from mistakes and failures is highly valued.

Making it clear that youth will receive support when they try new things or make an error encourages youth to try again, make adjustments, and improve. In the SEL Challenge programs, staff view failure as an important part of the learning process, and an opportunity for youth to grow their skills. Brett Hart at PWBF said:

If we focused on protecting our students from making mistakes, we would cheat them of the opportunity to recover from failure.

Laura Greenlee Karp, program coordinator at VOBS, described the importance of failure in her program:

Outward Bound thinks failure is very important and how you deal with failure is very important. We as instructors set a goal that we know is going to be hard for the group so that we can coach them on how to deal with that challenge or failure. They learn to face the adversity as a learning opportunity. It's the students who are addressing the mistakes or the failure, and then the instructors are helping them have a conversation about it and turn that perceived failure into a gained asset.

Victoria Guidi, program director, Boat Build and Sail at PWBF, explained the importance of involving youth in the analyses of their own challenges:

When things don't go as planned because the task might be too difficult or the expectation of what we thought they were capable of doing is set too high, we're just really real. I try to be transparent, so that we can all work it out together. So the student really feels like, "Wow, I am a part of this." It makes them feel more invested, and that's what we want them to feel.

Jennifer Freed described the necessity of making mistakes for AHA!'s youth participants:

The virtue of them being teenagers is that there's a mistake a week. Our philosophy is it's the ruptures that actually create the possibility of us becoming whole people. We're all about making mistakes, and we really talk to the kids about that, and there's no problem making mistakes or from having setbacks. It's how we recover.

4. Staff organize consistent routines, activities, roles, or procedures to provide a structured and predictable experience.

Youth can relax when they can anticipate what comes next. Particularly for youth who have experienced instability in their family lives, establishing a predictable environment can be reassuring. The SEL Challenge offerings shared examples of ways they create regularity and purpose in their programs without being too rigid.



Jennifer Freed from AHA! said:

What we found over all these years, and especially for teen brain development, is that consistency, reliability, and ritual really help the youth feel more contained and relaxed. The familiarity and repetition become comfortable and help them move into being able to lead these activities. So, one thing we do is to start off with a mindfulness exercise. A couple of moments of just breathing and paying attention to the breath helps them settle in and learn how to calm their minds.

Julie Thayer at YW Boston described how personal youth experiences are connected to broader concepts:

We provide historical and current political contexts, frameworks and vocabulary, interactive activities that spark discussion, guiding questions, and experienced facilitators. While these tools provide structure, the reactions and personal experiences of the youth drive the core of the workshops.

At VOBS, meetings are framed by youth-focused discussions where students learn to decontextualize embedded social and emotional skills. Laura Greenlee Karp described the procedure this way:

We do a tone set at the beginning and a debrief at the end of every interaction that we have with the students. The debrief is a time for the students to talk about their experience, but it's also the moment that the instructors help the students discover the take-home point. We'll do that through a conversation that might be framed like, "I saw all of you be wonderful leaders today during this activity. I would like for everybody to go around the group and tell me how they're going to take the leadership work they did here today and apply it within this next week."

Responsive Practice

1. Staff observe and interact in order to know youth deeply.
2. Staff provide structure for check-ins to actively listen to and receive feedback from individual youth.
3. Staff coach, model, scaffold, and facilitate in real time as challenges occur.

The project and SEL content sequences are designed to create opportunities to practice self-regulation during moments of challenge—the “tough spots” when things don’t go as youth may have hoped on the first few tries. Importantly, during moments of challenge, youth also work through tough spots in their store of past social and emotional experiences, such as traumatic events in their homes or communities. In parallel with the youth experiences as campers, carpenters, organizers, community service workers, and young women learning relationship wisdom, the SEL content sequence stays steadily focused on the skill building opportunity that every tough spot represents in a youth’s life. In some cases, the staff stop the whole process and focus fully on the youth if they are struggling. In other cases, the content sequence moves forward and the tough spot is addressed at the next check-in. In all cases, the staff have done prior work to know the young person they were working with. The responsive practice feature has three practice indicators:

1. Staff observe and interact in order to know youth deeply.

The effectiveness of staff responses during moments of challenge is built on deep knowledge of youth interests, communication styles, abilities, emotional triggers, and a relationship with the youth. Paul Griffin at TPP explained the importance of staff listening to youth:

Our starting point in terms of our understanding of the youth and where they’re at socially/emotionally is up to them. And what we don’t try to do is define what that is. We’re literally simply just trying to understand who they are. We try not to make assumptions about them or who they are. We try to listen and really understand.

Victoria Guidi at PWBFB shared how central it is to her work to know the youth well:

We try to create a very inviting, loving atmosphere where we really get to know them. We're genuinely interested in who they are and how they're feeling and what their days have been like and how their weekends have been.

2. Staff provide structure for check-ins to actively listen to and receive feedback from individual youth.

Staff in the Challenge offerings are constantly seeking and receiving youth input, and constantly checking in on the youth's life and emotional states. One important way staff do this is by holding regularly scheduled, structured check-ins with individual youth or groups of youth in order to get to know them better, follow up on issues in their lives that have surfaced, and to ensure that youth are feeling included and engaged in the program offering. Following are brief descriptions of this component at each of the eight SEL Challenge programs.

Examples of Check-in Structures in SEL Challenge Offerings



AHA! — Groups always start with "Thorns and

Roses," a check-in activity that brings each participant's voice into the meeting, welcoming both the pleasures and pains of their current experience, and teaching others to listen non-judgmentally and empathically.



Boys and Girls Clubs of Greater Milwaukee — Staff spend time communicating with a teen one-on-one to determine the meaning of their emotion that day. No matter what the situation, every participant is acknowledged if they show up—and if they don't show up, staff will check in on them. Teens in Can You Hear Us Now? keep coming back to the program largely in part because they know the staff cares about them and continuously lets them know they are an important part of the group.



Philadelphia Wooden Boat Factory — Each evening, the group of staff and youth start their time together by eating a meal, a way to ensure that the youth are receiving the nourishment they need and also an opportunity to check in with the youth emotionally.



The Possibility Project — The youth cast engages in one-on-ones: conversations between pairs of participants (A and B) in which A asks a question of his/her partner B. When B is done answering, B asks a question of A. And so it goes for five minutes. At the end, everyone scrambles and switches partners for a second round of one-on-ones. Participants are instructed to ask questions from a place of curiosity about the person across from them.



Wyman — DeVonne Bernard told the story behind a one-on-one meeting between youth and staff

at the Teen Outreach Program, "Our very first facilitator's camp nickname was Simba. He started doing something he called the Lion's Den - if it looked like someone was having a hard time, he would just tap them on the shoulder and pull them out to the side. And he called it a Lion's Den."



Voyageur Outward Bound School

— The Launch program is the two-hour program where participants spend time doing specific team building initiatives as well as engaging in guided conversations with the staff about what they're learning and what they're taking away from the program.



Youth on Board — Bi-monthly Support Group is a time for the youth on the Working Group to share and listen to each other's struggles, successes, and personal and organizing lives

throughout the school year. This peer support group provides an opportunity for students to learn peer-counseling techniques, work through interpersonal issues, and cope with the institutional barriers they face in and outside of school.



YW Boston — Bi-weekly Delegation Meetings are small group meetings every two weeks at students' schools to work toward the implementation

of the students' community action projects. These bi-weekly meetings are an opportunity for staff to determine whether students are processing and applying the skills addressed during program days. During these meetings, staff provide any necessary guidance and skill reinforcement.

3. Staff coach, model, scaffold, and facilitate in real time as challenges occur.

Responsive practices¹⁵ are an important part of the SEL curricula and compliment the more routine schedule of check-ins with youth. In the SEL Challenge, we identified four interrelated responsive practices: facilitating, scaffolding, modeling, and coaching.

Throughout the SEL Practice standards in the next chapter, you'll see references to these four types of staff practices, employed variously across the domains. A few examples from the domains are highlighted below.

Facilitating. Staff help to foster or sustain youth-led group dynamics and successful collaboration. Staff might assist a group in thinking about the way its members work together and help to ensure that group meetings run well, conversations are fair and respectful, and group norms are upheld, particularly during times of conflict. Allison Williams described the role of facilitators at Wyman:

Wyman intentionally uses the term “Facilitator” for the adults who work directly with the teens. The facilitator’s role is to provide experiences that lead to discussions through which the group can explore issues and learn. The facilitators’ role includes:

- Enabling two-way communication—participants do most of the talking; facilitator guides learning through strategic questions, dialogue, and modeling.
- Defining the educational process with input from teens.
- Framing the activity as a learning experience.
- Allowing learners to take active roles.
- Focusing on feelings and attitudes as well as information.

Victoria Guidi at PWBF added:

It’s a lot of making sure that everyone’s voice is heard and that everyone knows we’re all an important part of this project.

Elizabeth “Poppy” Potter, director of operations at VOBS, provided this example of the delicate work often required for successful and respectful facilitating:

On our very first program, two students in particular were picking on a student who has special needs. One of the instructors had the large group, while the other instructor asked these two young men to come and help her with something. This created the space to be able to talk with them about what was occurring. It gets tricky because the information we receive on people’s medical forms is confidential. So you can’t just tell them that this student has special needs. We have to facilitate in a way to create empathy for that student. Then we have to think about, “How do you engage this person in a positive way so they don’t become scapegoated?” Teaching empathy in others will support this student’s healthy participation.

Scaffolding. Staff set up or adapt skill-building opportunities to suit youth’s current skill level, interests, or connections, keeping the work challenging but possible. Laura Greenlee Karp offered this description of routine scaffolding at VOBS:

Once the group has come together, is able to function, and has its own authority, the instructors will then graduate them on to the final expedition, which means the kids are in charge, within given parameters. The instructors will provide the space and the guidance and the opportunities, but the students get to own and make this experience what they want it to be.

PWBF’s Victoria Guidi gave us this example of engaging youth in developing their own scaffolding:

Yeah, there have been many nights that we started off on some task and then realized wow, this is way over the student’s heads and we’ve got to come up with a Plan B fast. In that case, it means bringing them all back to the table, being real, and saying, “Hey how are you guys all feeling about the way that this is going right

now? Is this a real struggle for you?" And then we have a discussion about that and throw out ideas, "Where should we go now with this? What do you think we should do to make sure that we don't fall apart as a team, that we're still all on board together?"

Modeling. Staff demonstrate or exhibit practices, characteristics, or skills they intend for the youth to emulate or develop. Julie Thayer at YW Boston explained how effective modeling requires strong, appropriate interpersonal relationships:

The relationship between youth and staff can best be described as a mentoring relationship. We put a strong emphasis on setting clear boundaries so that youth workers can build rapport and relationships with the youth while also meeting professional obligations, such as ensuring youths' safety, meeting program goals, and exercising authority when needed.

Often modeling for youth comes from returning or senior program participants. Elizabeth Howard, artistic director, at TPP's Afterschool Program, explained how peer-modeling affects their workflow:

If our youth leadership team, called the Production Team, doesn't show up on time for their Production Team meetings, our cast is going to be consistently late. If they are disorganized and unfocused and we can't figure out what to do in production team meetings, I guarantee you our cast is going to be disorganized because that's who their leaders are. Or, if the team is 100 percent and they're in it and we're doing this together, the cast will, too. Everything our Production Team does translates to their cast.

Coaching. Staff monitor, focus, and support youth's learning experience by providing perspective, feedback, or encouragement that is respectful of youth's autonomy. Beth Chandler, vice president of programs at YW Boston, describes one way this is achieved at her organization:

At YW Boston, much of the content is focused on raising awareness of disparities among social groups, and an important part of the work is to help the youth think about steps they can take to address systemic issues that exist and avoid feeling frustrated and helpless.

At YOB, Teena Marie Johnson talked about how staff debrief with youth after events in order to process and learn from the experience:

After a meeting takes place, we'll list the pluses and deltas and key learnings. After a big action we'll debrief that action and ask, "What could have been done better? What went great?" And a lot of things come through those like, "Hey I could have spoken up more about this," or, "I could have looked at this piece a lot more." And I think that's a lot of where staff comes in too, "Hey, what do you think about you possibly having done this more? Do you think that would have helped?" You know, providing framing. We definitely designate a lot of time for those pieces for the opportunity to learn from and build on the experience.



Supports for Staff

1. The organization recruits youth who will benefit from the offering.
2. There is more than one staff member in every program session with the ability to implement responsive practices.
3. Staff work together before each program session to plan and collaborate on the session activities and regularly debrief following each session to discuss youth progress, staff response, and adjustments for future sessions.
4. Staff are supported to grow professionally and rejuvenate energy for the work.
5. Staff are supported by their organization to reflect on and improve their practices through a continuous improvement process.

The features identified here capture some of the ways organizations support their staff to do the work well. The supports for staff feature includes five practice indicators:

1. The organization recruits youth who will benefit from the offering.

Most of the SEL Challenge offerings include specific attention to recruitment of the “right” youth for the offering. By targeting youth who are likely to benefit from the offering, staff are able to use their energy effectively and experience one of the most powerful incentives for this very demanding work: success with the youth. Importantly, different offerings use different criteria. This is how Paul Griffin described the youth selection process at TPP:

Why do we choose someone for our program? They do a simple written application and there may be something about what they write about or what they’re interested in that lets us know they have a story to tell or an idea they want to shout out loud. It may be the fact that they have a huge attitude inside the audition we do or that they are totally disengaged. When we see that, we think, “He/she can probably benefit from this.” The only person typically who’s not going to get in the program is somebody who is high functioning, self-confident, with a huge amount of talent and who’s clearly getting or going to get a lot of opportunities—because they don’t need us. And the other is group diversity. So we’re looking for as diverse of a group as possible, and that’s it.

Jennifer Freed explained AHA!’s youth participant selection criteria:

What we’re looking for is two parts. One is there’s a lot of youth who have heard of us by now, and they’re naturally enthusiastic and excited to be part of a progressive and inclusive community. We do group interviews, but we’re looking for youth who are like, “Yeah I want to be here,” because we’re not a disciplinary program and we don’t want to be. Now we have a whole subset of youth whose parents bribe them or bring them to the group interview that have no interest in being in AHA!, but we know they really need it because they’re the marginalized, they’re the outsiders and they don’t have other options, but they have yet to understand what’s possible for them. So those are the two groups.

Common elements for most of the programs include recruiting youth who are interested in the content of the project (i.e., youth want to be there), who have not already mastered the content of the project, and who represent diverse experiences. For many of the SEL Challenge programs, youth with severe emotional issues are directed to organizations that can better serve and support them, and the safe space includes guidance about when youth cross a boundary and require a more specialized response.

2. There is more than one staff member in every program session with the ability to implement responsive practices.

All of the Challenge offerings have more than one staff member in every program session, and many have three or four. This staffing model allows staff to stop everything and change directions as the social and emotional needs of an individual or the group demand. It requires that the staff is comprised of at least one adult who can focus on individual youth and apply responsive practices, while the project content sequence moves forward for the rest of the students supported by another adult.

For example, at each AHA! meeting of 16 young women, there are four staff facilitators in the room. At the Philadelphia Wooden Boat Factory, there is a lead program staff, a director of student support, an artist in residence, and a program assistant to support the 22 youth in the program. At The Possibility Project and Boys and Girls Clubs of Milwaukee, additional artistic staff, such as choreographers and vocal instructors, join rehearsals to support skill instruction. At Youth on Board and YW Boston, additional staff and volunteers may join workshops and events as needed, particularly if their expertise lends itself well to the campaign or discussion topic.

3. Staff work together before each program session to plan and collaborate on the session activities and regularly debrief following each session to discuss youth progress, staff response, and adjustments for future sessions.

Staff in the SEL Challenge programs come together before sessions to plan and regroup after sessions to debrief. Staff in these programs are in constant communication to discuss adjustments to the curriculum, how to address concerns that arise for particular youth, how to best introduce content, what activities to extend or eliminate, and anything else that comes up during the sessions. Managers in these programs try to support the staff to tune into the emotional effects of the work on the staff themselves. Following is how Allison Williams described the process at Wyman:

After each club, staff sit down and debrief with one another. What worked? What was challenging? How's so and so doing? Will you reach out to someone? They seemed a little upset when they left. Let's make sure we draw them back in. And how do we want to plan for next week? What makes sense? What might we want to adjust? So on an ongoing basis we really encourage them to use that plan, do, learn, adjust cycle. And just keep that going all the way through.

Jennifer Freed explained the importance of staff-staff relationships at AHA!:

Staff members actively check in with other staff members before groups and debrief after groups to ensure that they are supported and getting feedback from each other. AHA! places high priority on staff doing their own personal work and getting any extra help they need when they need it. When facilitators are challenged to empathize with a particular youth, which happens from time to time with especially-challenging teens, or when a leader's personal history causes him or her to find a youth's behavior particularly hard to handle, he or she seeks support and guidance from fellow staff members with the aim of finding greater empathic connection with that participant.

Elizabeth "Poppy" Potter at VOBS described the administrative necessity of staff debriefings:

When we leave the students, we sit down and do a thorough course debrief and take notes of observations about what worked and what we need to do better. We discuss what was going on with each of the students today. These conversations go in our course reports, and that then becomes information for the next program of things to consider. We have a record of what worked well, not so well, and student engagement. This happens both on the pre and post end of things.

4. Staff are supported to grow professionally and rejuvenate energy for the work.

We found staff in the Challenge offerings receive organizational supports through their programs that help them grow professionally and rejuvenate energy to work with youth. The SEL Challenge organizations support staff being their best selves when they are working with the young people, and they know that staff won't be able to do that if they're exhausted, preoccupied, or in poor physical health. Staff are expected not to use the program to process their own emotions, issues, traumas, etc., but to seek the counseling and support they need to do this outside of the sessions. This way they can fully engage with and support for the youth while in the room. Programs provide support in terms of extended vacation policies following intensive periods of work (e.g., following a major production or after the conclusion of a 10-week session), counseling services or referrals, internal learning communities, and regular supervisory check-ins that include discussion of general well-being. Jennifer Freed of AHA! described the importance of taking a holistic approach to staff wellness:

It helps them decrease stress so they don't take it home to their families. It helps them be their best at work. More importantly, all the research shows that people feel the happiest when they feel known and recognized and acknowledged by others. So we have tons of rituals that do that with each other. So that work isn't differentiated from a good feeling in life. And they feel really valued and loved, not as work objects but as colleagues.

Jenny Sazama, co-founder and director at YOB, added:

[The support] helps them relieve stress. I think it's very painful sometimes to listen to some of the stories. Like the closer you get to the young people, the more you learn about their lives. It helps them think about how to process things.

La'Ketta Caldwell, senior program manager of social emotional learning at BGCGM, explained how she balances supporting the needs of youth with the well-being of staff:

I support the kids, but I also support my team. I support the team of facilitators like, "Oh my goodness, session was great today! I like what you contributed to the circle, to the group." I know we've got a lot going on, but I do appreciate, so a part of this is supporting the individual, the immediate team of facilitators who work alongside you.

5. Staff are supported by their organization to reflect on and improve their practices through a continuous improvement process.

At all of the SEL Challenge programs, staff reported offerings went through numerous cycles of improvement that it took several years to perfect. Each of the offering curricula has been documented, and some include published manuals and support materials. Each of the offering curricula has also been subjected to evaluation, ranging from customer satisfaction feedback to randomized trials. You can read more about each program's history and evaluation in the Case Narratives. Natalie Cooper at BGCGM said:

It's important when we're talking about social and emotional learning that the management of it is a challenge and I think it's important for people to know that sometimes we don't know what we're doing, but we know that it works, if that makes sense. So if it's just pulling from years of experience, we might not be able to tell you exactly how we got there but we know that doing things a particular way works for the needs of our kids. So we're still trying to hone in to create a formula. We have a structure, and I hope that that's going to be okay until we can really dig deep to process what that formula could look like.

SEVERAL OF THE CHALLENGE PROGRAMS ARE REPLICATED MODELS

During the national replication of the program (1984-1996), **Wyman's Teen Outreach Program** participated in several empirical research studies to evaluate both the behavioral outcomes and the process mechanisms that lead to positive outcomes for TOP participants. Read about the studies and future plans for additional research at: www.wymancenter.org.

VOBS is a member of Outward Bound USA, the leading experiential education organization in the United States. The national network of regional schools across the country operate in collaborative partnership with Outward Bound USA to assure consistent program standards across all schools and to ensure that Outward Bound safety practices, instructor qualifications and course curricula are, without exception, exceptional. As part of a national system, Outward Bound schools build upon rich local legacies, intimate knowledge of their respective course areas and close ties with the communities they serve. Each school forges active relationships with school systems and other local organizations to weave the thread of character, leadership and ethic of service into the fabric of the local community. Read more at www.outwardbound.org.

YW Boston's Youth Leadership Initiative is an adaptation of the national model of Anytown, a summer social justice experience developed and spread through the National Conference for Community and Justice (NCCJ). Founded in 1957, NCCJ's Anytown is designed to educate, liberate, and empower youth participants (delegates) to become effective, responsible leaders and community builders.

Over its 15-year history, **TPP** has been replicated by partner organizations in cities across the U.S. and abroad. Programs have taken place in Charlotte, North Carolina (2000-present); Los Angeles and Santa Barbara, California (2001-2012); Chicago, Illinois (2003-4); Baton Rouge, Louisiana (2003-2012); Rochester, NY (2008-present); Israel (2000-2007); and Cape Town, South Africa (2004-2008). There are affiliate programs still currently operating in Charlotte and Rochester.





2.2 Emotion Management Practices



Abilities to be aware of, and constructively handle, both positive and challenging emotions.

INTRODUCTION

Emotion management is the ability to be aware of, and constructively handle, both positive and challenging emotions. The emotional experiences that help youth learn include those that arise in program activities and projects as well as emotions that arise from other events in their lives, like a recent suicide or experiences of social injustice. For the former, the goal is helping youth learn to manage their emotions in ways that are functional for the work. In the latter, the developmental goals may be helping youth learn to process a range of feelings, while also learning self-advocacy skills through interactions with peers and authority figures. Emotion management is also about managing the *situations* that may trigger emotions for youth as well as being attuned to emotions in ways that allow one to harness the valuable information and motivation they can provide.

But the task of learning these skills often presents difficult challenges. Emotions are an integral component of human experience. They are ever-present and can impact a person's outlook, mood, and behavior. Emotions are also abstract processes that can seize consciousness, and they can distort healthy cognition. The anger, anxiety, and even joy that arise in everyday life can disrupt work, distort thinking, and sometimes lead people to act in ways they later regret. Furthermore, emotions can have deep roots in prior experiences in ways that young people may not fully comprehend, particularly if their social and emotional skills are less developed. At the same time, recent research has established that emotions can serve positive functions, including mobilizing effort in the service of important goals¹⁶, promoting and regulating social interactions¹⁷, and providing useful information that assists with mature decision making¹⁸. Although emotional development begins in infancy, adolescence is an important time when youth are able to acquire new metacognitive and executive skills that allow them to become more aware of emotions and learn to deliberately manage and harness them. Because puberty can increase emotional intensity¹⁹, it is a particularly critical period for teens to learn emotion management skills.

Research shows that this array of emotion-related skills is vital to mental health, positive relationships, school achievement, adult work, and general well-being. Youth programs that successfully teach emotion management foster environments where teens encounter a variety of emotions—excitement, anger, anxiety, pride—and explicit moments for expression of emotions that are well supported and safe, such as free writing, role playing, and group share. They also have opportunities to learn about these emotions, what causes them, and how to handle, use, and express them appropriately. These programs provide spaces for youth to talk about their feelings with others, learn to recognize, articulate, and understand them, and practice responding to emotions in healthy and beneficial ways²⁰. The staff also intentionally create a culture and set of practices that encourages expressing and learning about emotions. Modeling and coaching by staff supports learning and growth.



Table 4. Emotion Management Standards and Practice Indicators

KEY YOUTH EXPERIENCES	YE
RANGE OF EMOTIONS. Youth experience a range of positive and challenging emotions in a safe context.	
(EM1) Youth engage in program work and activities in which emotions occur, are expressed, and are recognized as an important and often valuable component of human experience.	
(EM2) Emotions are experienced within a shared program culture (e.g., rules, norms) structured to make emotional expression and reflection safe and supported.	
EMOTION AWARENESS AND SKILL. Youth practice and develop healthy and functional emotion skills.	
Youth practice (EM3) being aware of, identifying, and naming emotions, (EM4) reasoning about causes and effects of emotion, (EM5) using strategies for healthy coping with strong emotions and for harnessing emotions to advance the program work.	
STAFF PRACTICES	SP
STRUCTURE. Staff create and adjust the structure of daily activities to accommodate youth's processing of emotion.	
(EM6) Staff create time, space, or rituals within program activities for youth to process and learn from emotion. (EM7) Staff adapt program activities to respond to youth's emotional readiness and needs.	
MODELING. Staff model healthy strategies for dealing with emotion within the context of caring, mutually-respectful relationships with youth.	
(EM8) Staff model healthy strategies for dealing with emotions such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) active listening, remaining calm during intense episodes, and using problem-solving methods; b) communicating effectively and honestly about emotions (including their own); c) respectfully acknowledging and validating emotions in others. 	
COACHING. Staff provide coaching to youth about handling and learning from their ongoing emotional experiences.	
(EM9) Staff provide coaching that is respectful of youth's emotional autonomy, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) using deep understanding of youth and their emotional styles to monitor, appraise, and respond in the moment to youth's ongoing emotions; b) fostering emotional awareness and reflection; helping youth frame the situation and emotion; c) encouraging problem solving in response to challenging emotions and the situations creating them; suggesting strategies for dealing with them. 	



KEY YOUTH EXPERIENCES

RANGE OF EMOTIONS. Youth experience a range of positive and challenging emotions in a safe context.



(EM1) Youth engage in program work and activities in which emotions occur, are expressed, and are recognized as an important and often valuable component of human experience.

Over the course of youth's participation in programs, they may experience a range of emotions. They may encounter frustration if their work is not progressing as expected. They may experience their own anger or the anger of others if a major setback occurs. They might feel anxiety due to a team member's lack of progress on a project's timeline. They may also feel the elation that comes from success or a powerful idea. Sometimes youth will bring in anxiety and anger from other areas of their lives. Emotions from events in the community and past personal experiences and traumas are often directly or indirectly manifested in program activities or discussions.

Emotions in programs often arise within the context of work on projects. Participating in a film or theater production that will be seen by hundreds, for example, can elicit both excitement and anxiety. Some youth in the SEL Challenge programs had to deal with the discouragement of officials who were perceived as difficult to approach or community service projects that did not meet original goals. Rachel Gunther, associate director at Youth on Board (YOB), shared this example:

We worked all spring to convince state legislators to pass the Governor's budget, which included progressive taxation that would have substantially benefited [the state's] families and community. However, the progressive measures did not pass, and there was disappointment in advocacy groups across the state and within Boston Student Advisory Council (BSAC). We had to make sure that despite that disappointment, we celebrated the important advances we did make and continued to identify opportunities where we could advance understanding of tax policy.

These shared experiences of disappointment, pride, and success were recognized in the program as opportunities for learning about the emotions accompanying difficult work.

At the Philadelphia Wooden Boat Factory (PWBF), youth had many experiences with the ups and downs in the work of collective construction requiring complex problem solving. A young participant, Randy, recounted:

A lot of times it's really frustrating, like when you have to figure out how to do something because you aren't given a direct answer on how to do it. It's frustrating because I personally am used to just being told, "This is the way it is," and I don't really have to think about it that much. But here it's not like that. You have to learn how to deal with the frustration of not knowing the answer and having to figure out the answer.

Randy's experience demonstrates the value of learning about emotions in the context of authentic work and the types of challenges it can create. Youth in project-based programs like YOB and PWBF learn not just to cope with emotions but also to anticipate them and use these anticipated emotions as valuable cues about where their work may be headed. For example, anticipation of disappointment, frustration, and anxiety can help youth better plan their work and navigate obstacles more effectively in the future²¹.

Youth in the SEL Challenge also experienced and learned from emotions in the program activities that helped them respond to situations in their own lives or communities. For example, the youth in the Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Milwaukee (BGCGM) were discussing the issue of gun violence as a theme for their theatrical production, and the conversation turned to the recent news events regarding Trayvon Martin, a young, unarmed African American male who was shot and killed by a neighbor. La'Ketta Caldwell, senior program manager of social emotional learning, shared her observations of the interaction:

As the discussion went on, it became clear that our African American males don't feel safe around law enforcement. They don't feel like they can trust them because if they move or act in a certain way it could mean their life because life on the street is tougher on the African American male. Then it came out that

one of the youth's uncles had been killed. It was emotional. Depending on how personal it is for them, it becomes a real discussion about how that issue has impacted their personal lives.

The discussion became an opportunity for youth to talk about, and reflect on, how issues shaping their everyday lives influence their emotional experience. Discussing their personal experiences of anger and fear also helped youth cultivate important moral sensibilities about perceived social injustices.

Embracing positive emotions, such as excitement or happiness, is also a necessary skill. These emotions can strengthen groups, help youth to be more open to new ways of thinking creatively, and can be a source of motivation. An important component of many of the SEL Challenge programs was the celebration of accomplished work. Although it plays a role in initiative and problem solving as well, celebration of effort and success may elicit emotional responses from youth. At BGCGM, La'Ketta Caldwell reported:

The celebration brings a lot of excitement. We look back and we talk. The biggest thing is excitement and laughter. It's amazing how young people don't believe that you're going to do what you say you're going to do because they've been let down so often. So it's a lot of, "Well I can't believe that we did that."



Beth Chandler, vice president of programs at YWCA Boston (YW Boston), recalled the closing ceremony for Immersion Week at her organization:

The delegates and the counselors were standing in a circle, holding hands and sharing something about that week that really impacted them. That's a very moving experience because some people do something in spoken word, somebody may sing. Everyone finds different ways to express just how meaningful the week was for them.

In the SEL Challenge, and in new data from Reed Larson's research, we have seen that youth learning to experience satisfaction and pride in their projects can help motivate and guide them in future work²². These examples give an indication of the variety of occurrences in SEL Challenge programs where emotions are valued as part of the human experience and are an intended part of the learning process.

RANGE OF EMOTIONS. Youth experience a range of positive and challenging emotions in a safe context.

YE

(EM2) Emotions are experienced within a shared program culture (e.g., rules, norms) structured to make emotional expression and reflection safe and supported.

We define program culture as the values, beliefs, and ways of acting that are embraced by all who are a part of the program. In effective programs, the culture is cultivated through the leaders' interactions with youth and then passed down among members from session to session. Youth's experience of a program culture that recognizes the importance of emotions and provides support for youth to name, express, and discuss them is critical to youth's learning about emotions. This culture creates norms and rules among program members that help youth to feel safe engaging in emotional expression and reflection. An effective emotion culture also contains rich exemplars of healthy emotion management and includes ways of thinking about, talking about, and expressing emotions that support learning.

At AHA!, learning ways to express emotions in a healthy way is an important part of the curriculum. According to Jennifer Freed, co-executive director, writing, roleplaying, or group sharing helps generalize emotion into “something relatable for all the girls.” New youth at AHA! are immersed in a culture in which emotions are not feared; they are expressed, analyzed, celebrated, and sometimes laughed about.

At some programs, the flow of the sessions or the content of the projects allows for regular expression of emotion. At PWBF, the day starts with mindfulness meditation that helps youth let go of everything else and focus on themselves, their feelings, and the work. One youth commented on the atmosphere at PWBF and why it made sharing of emotions feel safe:

It’s a very peaceful environment. There’s no yelling. There’s no screaming. I mean, you may do something wrong, but you’re not going to get yelled at for it. You’re just going to be led in the right direction of how to do it the right way.

Additionally, the physical task of working with wood provides some youth an outlet to express their emotions. One youth explained how it worked for him:

I used to think of this program as more of an outlet, too. Whenever I used to have a bad day, I needed to come here. You’re dealing with wood, you’re cutting wood and stuff. That’s a great outlet for bringing out some of the anger or depression you have. It really helps you control yourself.

At BGCGM, they abide by the “Vegas Rule”: Whatever happens at the program stays at the program. Two youth participants in the program spoke about the significance of this trust in creating a safe space to let down their guard and build deeper relationships:

You know you can trust them so you’re just going to say [whatever you want] because whatever you say stays in the room. So, just like if you’re feeling some type of way, you can just speak and ain’t nobody going to judge you. They’re just going to support you.

Before I started Can You Hear Us Now? (CYHUN), I was angry. I didn’t trust nobody. When I got to CYHUN, they made me feel like I could trust people. They showed me that they was here for me. I used to not think nobody was there for me. I used to be angry at the world and lash out on people. [At CYHUN] I told people stuff that I’ve never told. I told about my life, and they got to see a different part of me.

Youth awaken to the important emotional dimensions of their experience when program norms encourage them to pay attention to their emotions and provide them with a safe space in which emotions can be expressed. These opportunities are vitally important because many youth grow up in families or attend schools in which emotions are not appropriately expressed or the expression of emotions is discouraged or even punished, leading to emotional denial or stunted emotional development.



Youth practice (EM3) being aware of, identifying, and naming emotions.

As youth experience repeated episodes of positive and challenging emotions in the program, they may begin to identify patterns of emotional responses. Over time, these patterns can help youth to identify the cues in their body, voice, and thought patterns that are associated with different emotions. Identifying one's own emotions is important to managing the expression of emotions, becoming comfortable in having and expressing emotions, adapting emotional expression to suit the context, and anticipating the influence of emotional reactions on oneself and others. To do so, youth may need to work through a taboo learned from their families against expressing emotion. Being able to name emotions allows them to be discussed and enables youth to learn from each other.

At AHA!, learning about emotions is a core feature of the curriculum. It is central to the organization's purpose of helping young women explore and understand human relationships. The group sharing and activities provide content and opportunities to identify emotions. Jennifer Freed at AHA! described how they focus on developing emotional awareness and understanding:

We're talking about—and this is huge—how do you know what you're feeling? So really helping girls start to identify cues that they have in their bodies around anger and fear. We do the work around the healthy expression of anger versus the destructive expression of anger. We work on fear and how to self soothe when you get in an anxious state. We work on laughing and humor.

YOB staff use peer counseling sessions to provide youth participants the opportunity to express themselves. Teena-Marie Johnson, education organizer, explained:

It's really just like, "I'm here, you have X amount of minutes, do whatever you want. I'm all eyes and ears. You have my full attention." I'm really actively listening, and being very intentional about making sure that I'm giving you an opportunity to really get out what you want to get out, while also sort of pushing you to get out what you might be holding back.

Youth eventually hold peer-counseling sessions for each other using what they've learned from staff modeling. When youth offer peer counseling to each other, the learning is twofold: Youth sharing their emotions are expressing themselves in a safe, supportive environment, and listeners are practicing recognizing the emotions of their peers.

Youth in SEL Challenge programs learn from experience to name their emotions and tell others about them. One youth participant from Voyageur Outward Bound School (VOBS), Kailey, explained the significance of the program in helping her feel comfortable sharing and expressing her emotions to others:

My family is not supportive about showing emotions or being peppy. We do have fun and we do love each other, but we don't show it as much as we should. I've learned it isn't so great living this way. Outward Bound gave me a reason to not only be open to my own emotions, but to others as well. It showed me that it's okay to take support and help from others; there is no shame in it. I also learned that others won't understand or know what I want if I don't tell them. I have to be more expressive for myself. Outward Bound taught me to not only be dependent, but also independent.

Kailey learned the advantages and support gained from recognizing and embracing her emotions. In this example from AHA!, a young woman described what it was like to learn how to identify the emotions she was feeling:

I remember in my Ally [Leadership Program] group we learned how to know what emotion you're feeling because sometimes you don't know what exactly you're feeling, so you don't know how to manage it. I learned how to know when I'm feeling sad or when I'm feeling mad or when I'm feeling happy. It sounds kind of obvious that you would have to know how to do that, but once they actually [teach you to] do that, you realize this whole time you haven't been knowing what to do with what you're feeling.

Another AHA! youth shared how the daily reflection activity helped her develop a vocabulary for describing her emotions:

Every time you do thorn and rose, they make you think about how you're really feeling and really evaluate your emotions by yourself. So you also work on your vocabulary and your ability to describe things.

SEL Challenge programs also consistently provided youth with repeated opportunities to recognize and name emotions within themselves and constructively share those emotions with others.

EMOTION AWARENESS AND SKILL. Youth practice and develop healthy and functional emotion skills.



Youth practice (EM4) reasoning about causes and effects of emotion.

Repeated experiences of emotions within an emotionally supportive culture provide opportunities for youth to reason about the factors that cause specific emotions and about how those emotions influence them. Causes may include both immediate and recent situational events and conditions that triggered the emotions, as well as longer-term biographical experiences in youth's lives (often including traumatic experiences) that predispose them to particular emotional reactions. Effects may include how emotions influence thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. They also include anticipation of how these effects might influence others or play out within the group.

One example of youth learning about the causes and effects of emotions comes from PWBf. Victoria Guidi, program director, provided feedback to a youth participant about his poor performance as a team leader. The youth's reaction was a decision to step down as team leader and leave the program. Upon hearing this, Victoria requested a one-on-one discussion and learned that the youth's father consistently put him down and he never felt good enough:

During the discussion he said, "Wow I never thought about this before. When you said to me that I wasn't doing a good job of being the team leader, I thought back to my dad. You know, when I think about it, the relationship that I have with my dad and never being good enough and then hearing that from you triggered that reaction, which was really, really hard. I was stuck for the entire weekend. I have deep-rooted feelings about not being good enough that come from my dad."

After Victoria and the youth had an open, honest discussion, he decided he was going to stay on as team leader. Analyzing the causes of his emotions and realizing how they had affected his behavior allowed the youth to move beyond what had been a major obstacle in his life.

Sometimes the causes of emotions may be obvious, but other times youth may need to first examine the effects emotions are having on their progress before they are able to clearly identify the cause. Elizabeth "Poppy" Potter, director of operations at VOBS, described the realization youth may come to:

They realize their limits on the rock climb. They realize "Wow, I'm way more scared than I thought I was, and I feel like I'm in a dangerous situation and I need to come back down from this climb." That's an okay thing to learn, that it's not just about getting to the top. It's that self-management that connects to the social and emotional skills, experiencing that and feeling that so they know where those lines are for themselves. Everybody has different fears and even if someone may not be able to get through that correct move, there's still a ton of learning that can come from it. It might be disappointing because they hit a limit, or they wish they had tried harder. That is a great teachable moment.

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—Poppy Potter, VOBS

In this case, a youth might learn skills to manage and overcome fear by identifying the root of the fear and deciding to work through it.

Youth practice (EM5) using strategies for healthy coping with strong emotions and for harnessing emotions to advance the program work.

Youth in SEL Challenge programs learn to cope with and harness strong emotions. Coping generally refers to the process of coming to terms with or terminating challenging emotions or their causes. Harnessing refers to a wider set of situations in which the goal is learning not to eliminate an emotion but to channel the emotion and to use it as information or motivation. Youth may use emotions like distress, anger over injustice, pain, frustration, or compassion to pick a related project, learn from experience, or creatively express their feelings. Handling emotions may also include learning to modify expressions of pride or anger so that the work of the group is not disrupted.

The youth learn and practice strategies to handle their emotions or the situations that created them. Youth reported learning to avoid situations that caused frustration, refraining from expression of anger towards others in the program, using breathing and other techniques to calm themselves in heated situations, and communicating effectively about their emotions. The following are some excerpts from focus group conversations with youth who discussed how they learned to appropriately handle their emotions:

At AHA!, one youth said: There's a time and a place for emotions, and sometimes we just get so flooded and we need to learn how to manage them. If we are having a conflict, we approach it in a safe way or in a way that's not going to be destructive for us later. You need to, like, I don't know, be smart about it.

At BCGGM, one youth said: We had to focus. So I controlled my feelings by deep breathing.

At The Possibility Project (TPP), one youth said: We learned techniques to calm it down, de-escalators. We learned about blood flow. If you're tense and you're breathing heavy then less blood is going to your head so you're not thinking as straight. You're angry. Take deep breaths. Try not to raise your voice. Don't use curse words. Use "I" statements as opposed to "you" statements. So it's more like, "When I feel like I'm not being listened to, I feel hurt because then I feel like I don't matter. But I love you. This is what I need and this is what I'm willing to give." Conflicts can go one of two ways, and we just learn how to take those negative forces and turn it into something else.

In Larson's research²⁵, youth reported learning to restrain the impulse to express pride or anger so that it didn't disrupt the work of the group. What was particularly striking about the SEL Challenge programs was how often the learning the youth were doing was not just about coping or "handling" their emotions but harnessing them.

When youth experience dismay or anger at circumstances in their communities, they have opportunities to practice and learn how to channel what they were feeling into motivation, focused attention, and constructive action. Teena-Marie Johnson at YOB offered this example:

Right now seventh and eighth graders [in the school district] are going to lose their yellow school bus and are now required to take the MBTA here in

Larson and Rusk's research on youth's emotional learning in out-of-school programs provides results from more extensive data that help identify what youth learn about the causes and effects of emotions as well as how they learn them. Effective programs can help youth learn about how personalities, nuanced situations, others' emotions, and physical states influence one's own emotions. Youth also acquire knowledge of the effects of emotions on their thoughts, attention, and motivation and learn firsthand how emotions can be contagious and change the dynamics within groups²³.

This research also shows that, in addition to learning from staff, youth learn about emotions through reflection, trial-and-error, and practice. Youth in these studies described learning by making comparisons across emotional episodes and between people, from trying things out, and sometimes just from "thought experiments," where they visualized what would happen if they made different decisions about how to handle an emotion²⁴. Experiencing emotions in the context of supportive program culture allows youth to experiment and learn to manage and harness a wide range of emotional experiences.

Boston [to get to school.] Our young folks, they're in high school and so that doesn't affect them directly, but they got so mad and so angry and so sad just knowing that these young people had a decision made on their behalf without being asked how they felt about it. That was the feeling of things happening to you without you being aware of them or being asked. It got them really fired up, and they decided that this is something that they really want to work on.

Another example of harnessing emotion took place in the Wyman program where youth planted a community garden in memory of a club member who was struck and killed by a drunk driver. Although this may seem like a simple act of kindness, the context of the situation added to the emotional intensity. The young woman had joined the Teen Outreach Program (TOP®) when her club from East St. Louis, IL, was merged with the Wyman club on the Near South Side of downtown St. Louis, MO. While very close in geography—separated only by a river and a short drive—there was a natural rivalry between these areas. Staff described the merging of the clubs as a trying time: the youth were at times combative with each other and it nearly brought the program to a close. Over time, however, the youth began to work through their differences and form relationships based in trust.

After the club member's death, dealing with their grief took its toll. The youth needed an outlet for their grief. DeVonne Bernard, director of TOP, said it took the club a while to “really get their momentum back. We kept doing TOP, but they were very passionate about doing something.” The teens planned and orchestrated the dedication of the community garden at the site of the young woman's home agency. To this day, the garden is maintained in her memory by the TOP club. While many of the current TOP teens do not know her, they have experienced tragic loss among their peers and can identify from an emotional perspective on why this project matters and has meaning.

At BGCGM, poetry is a vehicle for expressing and harnessing emotion. In the following example, one youth was initially uncomfortable and dismissive when others expressed strong emotion. Eventually, she used poetry as a creative emotional outlet, as Natalie Cooper, senior director of social emotional learning, described:

One CYHUN participant named Chantelle used to get frustrated when the other youth in the group would express too much emotion. She shared that she thought it was not necessary for them to share all of their “business” and start crying during the session. Yet Chantelle kept coming back to CYHUN each week. During one of the sessions the participants had the opportunity to write poetry about their life experience. To the facilitator's surprise, Chantelle came back the next week and shared the poem that she wrote. Chantelle's poem depicted her battle with low self-esteem and not having an outlet to feel safe to share her feelings. After coming to CYHUN for many weeks, Chantelle felt part of a community and trusted the group enough to share her personal struggles. Chantelle's story is a great example of social and emotional growth. She has really gained skills in using the anger and fear she felt inside and transforming that into a positive experience.

At YW Boston, youth are responsible for leading a social action project at their schools, but they are likely to face challenges that create barriers to their success. The way youth handle their emotional response to these roadblocks can influence the ultimate outcome. If youth are able to use the setbacks to re-group and re-motivate, they are more likely to achieve their goals. Program Director Beth Chandler shared the struggles youth had with getting both administration and students to take action. In order to renew their motivation and persevere, the youth had to handle the shift from excitement to disappointment and frustration as well as handle interpersonal emotions:

[It] is frustrating because the youth have this idea. They're really excited about moving it forward and now they're hitting roadblocks. They finally figured out their own interpersonal stuff and now they're hitting roadblocks from the administration. [They] had to just keep going back and back and back.

Youth from YW Boston shared how much more productive it is to have calm conversations about sensitive topics with people who may have opposing views than it is to berate someone for disagreeing:

Us being mad at you is counterproductive. So when you're standing up for something, you can't bash other people's ideas just because they're different from yours, and I think that's the most important thing to come out of social justice work. It's not to have one group versus the other. It's to slowly, but surely, get the most from the non-supportive group and bring them with you. I don't attack them. I just try to ask them more questions just to clear up any confusion and kind of create an understanding.

STAFF PRACTICES

STRUCTURE. Staff create and adjust the structure of daily activities to accommodate youth's processing of emotion. SP

(EM6) Staff create time, space, or rituals within program activities for youth to process and learn from emotion.

One way we found the SEL Challenge programs prioritize supporting youth in learning to process and handle emotion effectively is by creating rituals, or particular times and spaces, for dealing with and processing emotion. In this way, the programs are deliberately structured to create safe spaces for youth to experience emotions, express them, and learn about handling their own emotions and the emotions of others. YOB has regularly scheduled peer-counseling sessions for the explicit purpose of processing emotions that arise in the course of community action work. VOBS has its Restore ritual for addressing conflict (the idea is to restore or bring back what has been lost: trust, open communication, respect, etc.). TPP creates theater spaces where emotions are both a part of the play and a part of youth's experience in creating the play. AHA! has lessons and activities to learn about and get in touch with emotion stored in the body. BGCGM creates activities designed to trigger emotions, and other SEL Challenge programs have activity structures for youth to explore emotions around specific issues, like gender, sexuality, and injustice. Staff from the programs discussed these activities and sessions in the examples following.

In all of the programs, agreeing on group norms for interaction is an important early step in establishing how the group will work together (see Teamwork). In particular, staff may cultivate group dynamics that create a positive learning climate for everyone as emotions are shared. Jennifer Freed of AHA! pointed out how staff structure sharing activities to ensure that everyone learns:

What we don't generally do is focus on one girl for too long because that becomes more like therapy. So we learn how to take the specifics of what one girl might be struggling with or sharing and bring in the rest of the group in terms of generalizing that experience into something relatable for all the girls.



And at YW Boston, where youth discuss topics that they may not have discussed before with individuals who may have perspectives different from theirs, staff actively monitor and redirect conversations to help youth learn to be respectful of each other. Julie Thayer, Int program manager, elaborated:

Youth are allowed to express their emotions because they are often peers, but they learn to do it and/or are supported to do it in a way that is not hurtful to others. And so they're allowed to talk about stuff they may have been feeling or thinking but never had a chance to talk about before. They develop the ability to feel comfortable voicing their opinions and understanding that they may not be the same opinions held by others, but they're at least going to be respected in saying them and having them.

With activities in the curriculum that are known or designed to elicit emotional responses in youth, staff recognized the importance of building in enough time for youth to process and debrief the experience and adjusting the timing to make sure emotional closure is reached. Julie Thayer at YW Boston explained how during an intensive, week-long summer program, youth can go in-depth on issues:

I think that the more important thing is that there's closure at the end of each workshop. We have this whole theory called Trust the Process. Sometimes we'll be in the middle of a workshop and people are crying and upset and some of the students will be like, "Why are we doing this?" We'll tell them to trust the process and, sure enough, within the next half an hour after the next activity or whatever the case is the students have moved through it and have come to a much greater point of understanding. Even if we have to get off schedule we won't just arbitrarily end a workshop just because that time's up. We make sure that the students are in a good place overall.

Laura Greenlee Karp, program coordinator at VOBS, described how "we run a bunch of initiatives that push them a little bit, push them to work together, and then we also have those guided conversations to get them thinking and sharing what they're feeling." The structured debriefing time that follows the activity gives youth an opportunity to process and sort out their emotional responses.

Staff from AHA! and YOB discussed a process of "zipping back up" after youth had "unzipped" during the session. As youth open up and expose raw emotion during the session, it's important that they experience a sense of closure before leaving the safe space of the group. Staff might open the floor for



other youth in the group to offer supportive words to the individual or may ask the individual an off-the-wall question to draw attention away from their feelings and lead them back into something silly and lighthearted. The youth from the AHA! focus group identify a principle learned from a daily ritual:

So we always do gratitude at the end, which is a way to walk out on a good note and realize that you don't have to be so discouraged by the negative. It's important to take a moment to recognize the positive in your life.

In hearing these appreciations, youth learn from introspection and from the words of others.

Some programs provide appropriate times and places for sharing personal experience that are separate from the time on project tasks. At YOB, they offer a peer-counseling group that meets biweekly and is a place where the only agenda is for youth to share what is going on in their lives and gain the support they need. Director Jenny Sazama commented:

I think it's giving them a chance to feel and express what they are going through. We also cry quite a bit around here. We think crying is great. We try to encourage people to cry with discipline. The reason we started the peer counseling groups was because we weren't leaving enough room for structured social and emotional pieces. And if you have the structured piece then you can be more disciplined about the work piece. But they bleed into each other too much if you don't have the structures. And there's a job that needs to get done that is about social emotional learning, but it's not always about your personal crisis.

The focus of the peer-counseling group is emotional processing and learning. Having this built into the culture and purpose of the group allows free expression of emotion. It also contains the emotion and creates a culture where emotion is accepted and embraced, but its expression is structured and disciplined. This allows the expression of emotion to benefit and support the youth, and to enhance rather than interfere, with the work.

The structures described above provide built-in venues for youth's processing of emotions. As the content and curriculum of the programs may elicit emotional responses from youth, having planned processes and activities for youth to learn from their emotions is integral for both positive youth development and program success.

STRUCTURE. Staff create and adjust the structure of daily activities to accommodate youth's processing of emotion.

SP

(EM7) Staff adapt program activities to respond to youth's emotional readiness and needs.

In addition to these planned structures, the staff in the SEL Challenge programs also recognized the importance of being flexible and adjusting the structure or flow of activities in order to adapt to the needs of the youth. Staff are attuned to youth's emotional states so that they can adjust the day's activities according to the needs of the youth. La'Ketta Caldwell at BGCGM said:

Maybe what we're doing today we need to shift because they're already not having a good day. We need to maybe play and try to figure out how we can get them to process through that. We know we have to hit outcomes and stay on schedule, but our kids are the number one priority in outcome. We can push our agenda, but our agenda is not as important as their agenda and what's going on with them, the whole child.

Natalie Cooper at BGCGM added that the staff practices and expectations they set help them respond quickly and adapt to youths' needs:

My staff are expected to be standing and engaging with the kids at all times. I taught them years ago to scope a room when they walk in. So just doing an immediate, one-minute scan when you're going in a room, you can tell who's happy in this moment, who's a little sad; who normally is vibrant, but is kind of down. When you do that and you begin an activity, you know who you need to pay attention to when you are working the room to provide support for the kids during their individual activities or work... Sometimes there are days where the kids have to just focus on something that happened in their neighborhood that has nothing to do with the session, but it's real for them so it becomes real for us, and we process it as a group. We rally around each other when a club member is going through something. We support and show love.

Paul Griffin, founder and executive director of TPP, and Laura Greenlee Karp at VOBS also emphasized being aware of the youth and listening in order to determine if the plan for the day needs to be adjusted to meet the needs of the youth:

Paul: We try not to make any assumptions about our young people. We listen first. So the production team, which is the youth leadership team, they're listening as well. So they can reorder that according to what they're hearing, and they do. They may say, "Let's not do that, let's do this because this is what we're sensing." That kind of flexibility is absolutely necessary because it allows them to listen and understand and respond to the actual people they're working with rather than trying to get those people punched in to some formula we have that's supposed to be good for them that produces these outcomes.

Laura: Giving the students a space to be who they are and meet them where they are is important. If they are not in a place to have a long conversation, then staff modify the conversation and come back to it. Knowing where the students are and coming together so that the students are successful.

These examples emphasize how important it is to withhold pre-judgment, be attuned to the emotional states of the youth on any particular day, and be flexible with program structure to allow youth opportunities to cope with their emotions.

MODELING. Staff model healthy strategies for dealing with emotion within the context of caring, mutually-respectful relationships with youth.

SP

(EM8) Staff model healthy strategies for dealing with emotions such as:

- a) active listening, remaining calm during intense episodes, and using problem-solving methods;
- b) communicating effectively and honestly about emotions (including their own);
- c) respectfully acknowledging and validating emotions in others.

Leaders in successful SEL Challenge programs serve as models of mature expression and management of their own emotions and how to respond to the emotions of others. This modeling includes accepting and naming emotions, setting boundaries on what personal information is shared, and use of patient and open problem solving to resolve emotionally-charged issues.

This modeling occurs within the context of caring relationships with the youth at both individual and group levels. Leaders are not detached models youth view from a distance. Youth learn working models of healthy bi-directional relationships through their participation in positive, caring interactions with the leaders and through observation of leaders' similar caring interactions with other youth. Griffith and Larson²⁶ found these model relationships to be particularly powerful because many youth haven't experienced them in the past. Laura Greenlee Karp from VOBS helps youth to "redefine how they see authority figures" by presenting models of emotion management that youth may not typically see from other authority figures. By seeing adults express emotions appropriately, youth become motivated to study and apply what they see in this healthy model—first with other youth in the program, and then in their relationships beyond the program. In some cases, this includes relationships with their parents and guardians.

Sharing by adult facilitators can make youth feel more comfortable expressing their personal experiences with the group. At AHA!, the staff learn how much to share in groups:

The facilitators are trained to "create space for heartfelt sharing and learning, and to hold the container and share authentically, to serve as solid, dependable resources and affirmative influences for youth, but not as peers or 'friends.' Staff share their troubles in a bracketed and appropriate manner so as to avoid burdening youth or overtaking groups' emotional climate with their own issues. Enough to model truly showing up with openness and vulnerability, but not so much that their issues drive the emotional tenor of the group."

Staff use themselves as role models through personal sharing. For instance, at an AHA! Girls' Group meeting, participants were asked to share a time they really "lost it emotionally." Jennifer Freed described her observation of when Leo Corporal, an AHA! facilitator shared an example of being emotionally exhausted with the Girls' Group:



Her baby son was up all night vomiting. She was so exhausted after working all day she just wanted to scream and run away. Leo said she turned to her husband and asked him if he would hold her for five minutes and reassure her and give her a needed break from her son. Many girls said that Leo's story was impactful: she knew what she needed, she asked for it, and, as a result, she was able to rally for her son and her husband.

One youth, Maci, described how much of an impact it made when a staff member from a similar background shared personal stories:

Jennifer Freed, oh man, I am so, so grateful for her. She knew me. She would pull me aside, and I guess we could relate because she would tell me stories, and that also helped knowing that she came from a rough past, you know. She went through some stuff that I was going through.

Another component of modeling is when the emotions of the staff motivate youth. Laura Greenlee Karp spoke from her experience at VOBS:

I think one of the most important things I share with staff is that their energy and excitement is contagious. So the way that you approach an activity, for example, if they are excited, even if a few students are not excited, will help the group be excited and get students engaged. Their energy will spread throughout the group. This energy will help the students get invested and bought into the day. The same goes the other way. If staff are weary of doing an activity and they don't know how it is going to go, the group will pick up on that energy. Because of the staff's uncertainty, the group will be uncertain and uncomfortable and may not want to participate.

Staff also model effective emotion skills when interacting with youth directly. Regarding the incident previously described where a PWF staff had a rift in her relationship with a youth based on something she said, Victoria Guidi shared how she approached a resolution for the situation:

I was transparent with him and really open and also apologizing to him. I let him know we adults mess up sometimes or we say the wrong thing sometimes. I'm not perfect, and I'm continually growing, too. Life is just a journey of learning and growing.

Revealing her humanity to the youth in this situation demonstrated to the youth how to communicate openly and candidly about emotions, how to own one's emotions, and how to move past them personally and with others. The close relationships that staff build with youth provide a necessary backdrop for modeling healthy emotion strategies. For BGCGM's La'Ketta Caldwell, communication is everything. She stressed the importance of remaining calm and refraining from using brash communication styles that the youth may be confronted with in other settings:

It's important to be able to effectively communicate with the teens. And not always what you say, but really the nonverbal communication that you have with them. I've been in schools where people are yelling. I'm not doing that. I don't yell at kids. I walk away before I yell. I need them to see how no matter how angry somebody is that it's not okay for them to cuss or to just say things. Because you can't take back words.

Approaching a situation calmly means sometimes leaving time for the emotions to settle before addressing them. Below, La'Ketta Caldwell described how she might follow up with a young person after a heated experience:

I'm more patient. Sometimes, I know that because I'm sensitive, we've really got to address this some other day. I say, "That hurt my feelings." If I cry or I'm frustrated, I talk about it or write it out, and then when I come back I say "What did you mean when you said that? Can we talk?"

In this environment of heartfelt care and trust, staff can also feel safe to share their emotions, which may result from things youth share. La'Ketta Caldwell described when and why she sometimes shares her raw emotions with the youth:

Sometimes I cry. And I cry with them because I hear something and it throws me off. If you don't show that you can cry, then they feel they're on a battlefield. Part of the issue is they're expected to be strong, and expected to be a soldier because if you're not a soldier you're going to die. And that's jacked up. An adult and a kid shouldn't have to deal with that. So being able to be transparent and to share, to a degree, one time my heart was broken, and I felt like I didn't know how to keep it together. It might look like I got it together all the time, but sometimes I don't. You need to share that. I think it's important for them to see that we all go through ebbs and flows in life. And to inspire, to show them, "Yeah, we're here and this is ugly, but there are other parts to life. Life is not always this. There's bad and there's good. So this is the good."

Letting the youth see her express her emotions and process through them sends a message to the youth that they can share their emotions, too, and that there is value in that. One youth shared the lesson she learned about showing emotion:

About your feelings, you can't just keep them closed in 'cause then nobody is going to know how you feel. Like if I was mad in here and people were messing with me and I'm not telling I'm mad, stop messing with me, they're going to keep messing with me until I tell them. So being more open with people is better than keeping it closed in.

COACHING. Staff provide coaching to youth about handling and learning from their ongoing emotional experiences. 

(EM9) Staff provide coaching that is respectful of youth's emotional autonomy:

Staff show respect for youth's emotional autonomy by taking care not to manipulate youth or tell them what they should feel. This process is sometimes called emotion coaching. The key idea is that the coach is a "guide on the side" who contributes interpretations, guiding questions, suggestions, encouragement, and support in unobtrusive ways that respect autonomy as a youth experiences and attempts to manage ongoing emotional episodes²⁷. Through sensitive and timely coaching, staff support youth in learning effective emotion skills. Staff goals in dealing with emotions include not just helping youth resolve a situation but helping youth learn about the complex and irregular dynamics of emotions and emotional situations. The types of coaching staff provide may include fostering awareness and reflection, suggesting strategies, and encouraging problem solving²⁸. Three elements of this coaching stood out in the SEL Challenge programs.

(EM9) Staff provide coaching that is respectful of youth's emotional autonomy, including:

- a) using deep understanding of youth and their emotional styles to monitor, appraise, and respond in the moment to youth's ongoing emotions.

Leaders in the SEL Challenge programs stressed the importance of getting to know youth so they could adjust their response to suit the needs, interests, and readiness of particular individuals. This means they must monitor and read the emotions of each individual. This process depends on staff knowing youth well, listening, and being finely attuned to youth. Staff take care to listen to youth and be aware of the emotional signals they give. Getting to know the youth well and building relationships helps staff to read youth, to notice if they are behaving uncharacteristically, and to respond with sensitivity. Victoria Guidi at PWBF said:

I try to get a really good feel of where the students are at when we first come in. Also developing personal relationships lets me know where their strengths are and what their challenges are, so I can work with them to manage any emotions that are going on.

Paul Griffin from TPP added:

It's different for every young person because some are good fakers. So sometimes if they're smiling a little too hard or they're a little too expressive they would seem a little "off." You just want to check in and see if everything is all right. You want to talk to the production team and see if they know what's going on. And that being "off" means you need to understand what "on" is for that person. Because you don't want to assume, "Well, they're not very happy." That may be a person who's never happy. That's their orientation. They've made a decision to be that way. That doesn't necessarily indicate anything.

SEL Challenge staff use their knowledge of individuals to respond flexibly in ways that support individual and group learning and respect youth's autonomy. Depending on the situation and the emotion, they may address upsetting emotions fluidly in the moment. For example, with anxiety or anger, a response might be necessary in the moment. In other cases, staff wait for the right time. They may help youth process the situation individually, or sometimes group processing is appropriate. In some cases, youth need time and space to experience release from the grip of a strong emotional reaction to a situation before being ready to reason through the causes and effects of that emotion. Wyman uses an approach where staff members create time and space in the moment—even in the middle of a lesson—to check in with a youth individually. DeVonne Bernard, director, Teen Outreach Program, offered the following example:

In club, I would honestly say that we have a really talkative group and if someone comes in and they are not talking or they are completely shut down, we'll attend to them. One of our long-term facilitators really modeled this. If he saw somebody struggling, he wouldn't stop the lesson. He would make sure there was someone else to continue, but he was going to make sure that the individual teen was okay.

One youth from AHA! described how staff adjust their responses according to the individual youth, which is something they're able to do because they begin by developing personal relationships with each youth:

She says, "Tell me why you're scared or tell me why you don't want to do it. Is it because you're lazy? Are you feeling ill today? Is that why you don't want to do it?" But she says it in this way with this grin, like, challenging me, you know? First they learn your personality, so they know which way they can talk to you. If she would have talked this way to, like, let's say Kimberly, Kimberly would have been so scared, right? But they know I'm the type because they learned about me. They got to work with my personality, which is a skill that's so amazing to me.

And this story about a young woman at BGCGM who opened up to the group about her feelings for her family shows how La'Ketta Caldwell responded in the moment to meet the youth's needs. The young woman had shared how she felt unloved by her family. She was overcome by emotion and left the room. Here's what happened next:

I went to go get her, and I was like “We need you to come back.” So our session stopped. What we were supposed to do? I was like, “Okay, I need everybody to make a half circle. Right now she needs love, and we’re a family and we support our family. So I need everybody to tell her why she’s loved, why you love her.” One of our young men is so silly every week. That’s the first time he was serious. He told the young lady why she was loved. The next week she came back with a poem.

In these ways, SEL Challenge staff were nimble in their responses, adjusting their tone or manner based on the youth and the situation. Staff’s responsive practices simultaneously balanced the relationships with youth, the goals for the project, and the needs of the group.

COACHING. Staff provide coaching to youth about handling and learning from their ongoing emotional experiences. 

- (EM9) Staff provide coaching that is respectful of youth’s emotional autonomy, including:
- b) fostering emotional awareness and reflection; helping youth frame the situation and emotion;

When staff coach, they gently support a journey where the youth learn to articulate their emotions. They do this by encouraging youth to process and reflect on their emotions and their lives and take the lead in their emotional learning. Even with positive emotions, staff come alongside to gently encourage reflection and emotional growth. Rendy Freeman, co-executive director at AHA!, explained how she responded to a teen who has just expressed to her romantic crush that she likes her:

She is on cloud nine. She acts like all of her problems of self-worth are solved. I helped her feel great about her skills without making it about the love object. Her hope and optimism about the relationship make her feel important, loved, worthwhile. I showed excitement with her, affirming her powerful feelings and guiding her in her choice in the matter.

This staff member’s response shows support for the youth and creates space for the young person to process her feelings and make a next decision. Another example from Teena-Marie Johnson at YOB shows how staff reached out to a young person they noticed:

There’s a story behind why they can’t really articulate their emotions. You know they try not to be emotional. They’re not like affectionate or whatever. We’ll really try to get that person’s story during support group because that’s really what that space is for. And it’s a process. It’s not something that is figured out right away, and we are fine with letting that take as long as it needs. We’re not rushing anyone, and the young people really decide what to work on. We’re following their lead.

At TPP, when youth see that their cast members are taking care of each other, they feel safe to be able to express their thoughts and feelings more openly:

For a very long time in my life I’ve felt like I had to suppress whatever it was I was feeling. I never had a place where I could just let go. I felt like I always had to keep it in and be tough for the people around me, right? But in the program—I mean I still struggle with that today—but something that I’ve learned and I’m trying to grow from because of The Possibility Project is that it’s okay to let people in. It’s okay to ask for help. It’s okay to have people there and to allow them to be there for me.

COACHING. Staff provide coaching to youth about handling and learning from their ongoing emotional experiences. 

- (EM9) Staff provide coaching that is respectful of youth’s emotional autonomy, including:
- c) encouraging problem solving in response to challenging emotions and the situations creating them; suggesting strategies for dealing with them.

Staff often provide emotion coaching by asking questions that encourage reflection and problem solving. Allison Williams, senior vice president of programs at Wyman, spoke from a youth’s perspective:

I think you'd hear them say, "They don't tell us what to do, but they ask us lots of questions. And they ask us lots of questions about why we would make a choice one way or the other, and what do we think about the benefits of that one way or the other." I think you might hear some of them say, "We may get all frustrated because they ask us more questions and I just want an answer from them," but we believe our role is to facilitate their thinking, reflection, and learning, as opposed to simply telling youth what to do.

Elizabeth Howard, artistic director of the Afterschool Program at TPP, provided an example of a situation where two cast members were in a physical altercation, and staff encouraged the youth in the cast to problem-solve:

For my part, I just pointed out to them, which happens often, that we were building a show with some intense emotions and no wonder the two people who are playing the "bad guys" in our show are now fighting. Things that we're building are starting to resonate with us and causing us to take on those emotions, and so it's hard to take on those emotions. What are we going to do to support each other? That's when they ended up in that cast circle sharing what had happened from their point of view. We're not just building a show. It's about each other and our lives and what we want to do. The cast handled that in that way. They focused on how we are going to support each other.

Staff may help youth to problem-solve in response to challenging emotions, whether they affect an individual or a larger group.

In some cases staff also help youth channel strong emotion into new goals (e.g., turning an emotional response into a program goal or plan) or motivation to keep making progress toward existing goals. At YW Boston, much of the content is focused on raising awareness of disparities among social groups, and Beth Chandler shared that an important part of the work is "to help the youth think about steps they can take to not just feel frustrated or helpless, but there are some systemic issues that exist that you too can help address now that you are aware of them."



2.3 Empathy Practices



Relating to others with acceptance, understanding, and sensitivity to their diverse perspectives and experiences.

INTRODUCTION

Empathy development involves learning to relate to others with acceptance, understanding, and sensitivity to their diverse perspectives and experiences. Every Blue Ribbon panel that has been assigned to identify crucial skills for adulthood in the 21st century has included empathy²⁹. In our ever-shrinking world, capacities to understand and empathize with people across differences are vital to the future of humankind. Young people need abilities to see things from others' perspectives, to suspend judgment, actively listen, and recognize how different values, life opportunities, and obstacles have shaped others. Learning empathy goes hand-in-hand with learning about the self. As youth become more conscious of their own emotions and how life experiences have shaped who they are, they become able to understand others' perspectives and feelings. A central component of empathy development is learning how limits in one's own experiences can create stereotypes that distort how one perceives people from different backgrounds. Out-of-school programs can be powerful contexts for young people to develop greater understanding of both self and others given the diverse populations they typically serve.

The teenage years are a key stage in the development of empathy—as they can be a critical point for either developing empathy for others or solidifying bias and judgment towards them. As youth get older, their capabilities to take in and understand other people's points of view grow. With the right experiences and supports from adults, such as through an out-of-school program, they can learn to better understand the thoughts, feelings, and actions of others. They also become more aware of their own biases and blind spots³⁰. But there are also obstacles and challenges to the development of empathy that must be addressed by program staff in out-of-school programs. Although evidence suggests that human brains are wired for empathy³¹, there are thoughts and emotions that sometimes get in the way of behaving empathetically, such as our natural biases towards those who look and act like us³². Teens may also experience fewer cross-group relationships, as they choose peer groups where they fit in with others like themselves and perhaps ostracize those who are different³³.

The key youth experiences and staff practices identified in the eight SEL Challenge programs address these challenges and are convergent with prior research on the facilitation of empathy development. The youth experience of sharing their stories and emotions with others is central to this process. It is both a mechanism that encourages the development of empathy and the context in which empathy is expressed. The SEL Challenge programs create safe spaces for youth to share stories and learn from each other and program staff. In several programs, discussing societal stereotypes and discrimination early in the program sets the stage for sharing personal stories and putting them in a larger context. That standard is discussed first here. Additionally, staff model and encourage inclusion and empathy. All these experiences and practices work together to support youth's development of empathy, not only a vital SEL skill in itself but one that facilitates or is part of other social and emotional skills, like teamwork and emotion management.

Table 5. Empathy Standards and Practice Indicators

KEY YOUTH EXPERIENCES	YE
INEQUALITY AND IDENTITY. Youth explore social structure and power in relation to themselves and others.	
(E1) Youth explore effects of stereotypes, discrimination, and social structures (e.g., based on race, gender, class, sexuality, religion, ability, etc.).	
(E2) Youth own and articulate their identities, including in relation to these social structures.	
DIVERSE PERSPECTIVES. Youth share their stories and listen to the stories of others.	
(E3) Youth develop and share personal stories, and (E4) provide attentive, empathic listening to the experiences, backgrounds, and perspectives of others.	
ACCEPTANCE. Youth practice relating to others with acceptance and understanding.	
(E5) Youth practice identifying, understanding, and managing judgments and (E6) experience empathy and demonstrate caring when others reveal or share emotional experiences.	
STAFF PRACTICES	SP
STRUCTURE. Staff provide programs with appropriate structure for sharing experience and promoting equity.	
Staff cultivate a safe and caring space, including: (E7) Employing appropriate structure for sharing different cultural backgrounds, personal beliefs, and stories (particularly those that are emotionally charged) without judgment. (E8) Actively promoting inclusion and equity and demonstrating support for the principles that all are different, equal, and important. (E9) Cultivating a program culture in which people actively care for each other. (E10) Providing programs with ritual structures for multiple sessions that allow youth to first check in, then open up, and end with reflection.	
MODELING. Staff model empathy skills with youth.	
(E11) Staff model empathy skills, including: a) intentionally recognizing the influence of their own identities and how these may affect interpersonal interactions; b) active listening; c) serving as an ally for youth who are isolated by differences in culture, family background, privilege, or power; d) modeling boundary-setting, including sharing or withholding personal experiences as appropriate and as needed.	

KEY YOUTH EXPERIENCES

INEQUALITY AND IDENTITY. Youth explore social structure and power in relation to themselves and others.



(E1) Youth explore effects of stereotypes, discrimination, and social structures (e.g., based on race, gender, class, sexuality, religion, ability, etc.).

Many of the SEL Challenge programs believe strongly in the importance of directly discussing and learning about the forces of stereotypes, discrimination, and social injustice. It is a core curriculum component of half of the participating programs and important in two others. For these programs, such discussions link the social purpose of the program and the personal experiences of the youth. The development of empathy is supported as the programs provide context for understanding oneself and others through the sharing of stories. Current research reveals a growing belief among many Americans that we are all the same, everyone has the same opportunities, and that differences no longer matter. Paradoxically, such a stance can be an obstacle to developing empathy³⁴. Although few would deny the value of these beliefs as an aspirational goal, in the SEL Challenge programs, youth learn to recognize stereotypes, discrimination, and other social structures that influence different groups' experiences. This is important for youth, whether from majority or minority groups, to better understand how these forces alter perceptions and opportunities in their own lives and the lives of others. According to Paul Griffin, founder and president of The Possibility Project (TPP), youth learn about these issues of understanding differences through personal experiences that help them comprehend the influences of various "isms" and macro-level violence. Julie Thayer, InIt program manager at YWCA Boston (YW Boston), reported youth participants at her organization explore historical and systemic injustice and systemic and institutionalized factors that perpetuate privilege in some groups and injustice in others. She said the goal is partly "so that everybody has the same language to think about those issues and process those in the best way that they can, particularly if they haven't processed them before."

Many of the SEL Challenge programs serve youth who are disadvantaged, members of various minority groups, or, what La'Ketta Caldwell, senior program manager of social emotional learning at Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Milwaukee (BGCGM) calls "at-promise" youth. TPP's Paul Griffin said many of the youth in his program have had past experiences with violence or trauma. As Rachel Gunther, associate director at Youth on Board (YOB), stated:

The vast majority of Boston Student Advisory Council (BSAC) students experience a variety of structural barriers such as poverty, racism, homelessness, and community and interpersonal violence. These factors often contribute to students being labeled "high risk" for dropping out of school and entering the criminal justice system, and less likely to encounter social and emotional learning practices in their daily lives.

For YOB, one of their main motivations is to change the system so young people of color in the Boston Public Schools feel listened to, supported, understood, and prepared to make real policy change. For youth in the SEL Challenge programs, addressing issues of inequity and privilege serves as a stepping stone to empathy. YW Boston wrote in their SEL Challenge application:

Students gain skills in empathy precisely because of the diversity of youth's background and life experiences. As they see the forces that shape the lives of others, forces for which youth are not to blame, they gain empathy and understanding and realize that others may have come into the program with different sets of life experiences and unconscious perceptions.



Teaching empathy is also supported by a framework that does not blame others for the situations or problems they encounter. Julie Thayer of YW Boston said:

We want people to understand that social injustice isn't primarily about individuals treating other individuals unfairly, but it's about systemic and institutionalized factors that perpetuate privilege in some groups and injustice in others.

"...they begin to get a realistic sense of the way the world is. If these young people are growing up in a bubble, that bubble bursts. And youth who are growing up with violent experiences begin to understand they're not alone. So that bubble bursts as well. Everyone starts to see the patterns that make up the bigger picture that is our violent society."

—Paul Griffin, TPP

Over time, youth begin to understand the larger societal picture, as Paul Griffin at TPP revealed:

Our young people are now looking at their own experiences and connecting their experiences with violence to macro-level violence. Violence isn't character-based and it doesn't happen to individuals randomly. So they begin to see that if they've experienced violence, they're not alone. And if they haven't experienced it, they begin to get a realistic sense of the way the world is. If these young people are growing up in a bubble, that bubble bursts. And youth who are growing up with violent experiences begin to understand they're not alone. So that bubble bursts as well. Everyone starts to see the patterns that make up the bigger picture that is our violent society.

Whether a youth has experienced stigmatization or privilege or both, empathy development requires dealing with the injustice of cross-group misunderstanding and mistreatment.

INEQUALITY AND IDENTITY. Youth explore social structure and power in relation to themselves and others.



(E2) Youth own and articulate their identities, including in relation to these social structures.

Forming and exploring identity is a fundamental task of adolescence³⁵, and out-of-school programs can provide contexts "in which youth can make sense of the vexing and contradictory forces that shape their lives³⁶." These forces include societal expectations, stereotypes, and interactions affected by race, class, gender, etc., as well as personal and family history. Important narratives are shared about living with immigrant parents, living in poverty, processing peer relationships, changing teenage bodies, and personal experiences of sexism and sexual assault. Stories are powerful, making vivid how each person is an individual outside of a stereotype. The act of putting their experience into words requires youth to ask questions about who they are, what influences their emotions, and their conscious and unconscious values. Formulating and sharing how they see and define themselves helps them work through personal issues, see themselves more closely, and articulate the roots of their behavior and emotions. Youth gain self-awareness and growth as they are able to see themselves through the eyes of others. Beth Chandler, vice president of programs at YW Boston, shared what this looks like:

It's an opportunity to be in a safe space to explore issues of identity, so there are conversations and workshops on issues of race, gender, ableism, class, and privilege. Youth who've never thought about some of these issues learn about and become aware of them. Others who have been struggling with these issues find a safe space where folks aren't forcing them to give any particular answer, but will help facilitate conversation so people can go deeper and really think deeply about these issues. One of our goals is to help delegates really explore their own identity.

Much research shows that for youth from marginalized groups, mental health and well-being is related to developing a positive identity.³⁷

Doing that requires coming to terms with unfair stereotypes, discrimination, and structural racism. These conversations are linked, as Beth Chandler at YW Boston said, "because it's hard to think about social inequities if you don't have a good sense of who you are and where you may fit." Forming cultural identity is an important developmental task that contributes to social and emotional learning. "For adolescents from non-majority cultural groups, cultural consciousness and identity—including understanding prejudice and developing skills to deal with it—are consistently found to be valuable to youth's well-being"³⁸.

Perhaps the most challenging work is dealing with people's negative views of one's own group³⁹. For youth from immigrant families and minority groups, the challenges may include dealing with people and images that denigrate one's own value system, practices, and identity⁴⁰. Out-of-school programs have an important role in supporting youth in developing a positive identity that includes their understanding of themselves within the context of their cultural background⁴¹.

The structure of the program needs to be purposeful, where youth study the effects of stereotypes, discrimination, and social structures like racism, sexism, and ageism and also listen to each other's life stories. Youth begin to discover more about who they are and, through this understanding, begin to relate to the experiences described by others. In TPP's production, the youth set out to communicate to the audience that they're not alone in their experience either. One youth explained how moving it is to affect someone else's feeling of connection:

Sometimes you think there's no other people going through the things you're going through. When we make a show we just try to send the message that we're going through everything, and that a lot of people need your help to solve the problem. We didn't know the audience was watching us going through the same thing they're going through and every day they would learn something. Like at the last show my teachers were crying. I never saw them cry [before] and I think that's amazing.

As youth are able to articulate who they are, they gain a stronger sense of self from which to empathize with others. Natalie Cooper, senior director of social emotional learning at BGCGM, sees this as helping youth. She said:

They find security in who they are as individuals, and also their power as individuals. It allows us to delve deeper into how that power impacts them and others around them. It allows them to be secure in who they are and what their feelings are, to be able to relate empathically to something that somebody else is dealing with.

Activities aimed at increasing their consciousness of the forces at work in the lives of urban and ethnic minority youth are designed to foster a self-understanding that is ultimately liberating. Paul Griffin at TPP said:

What we're doing is just working our way down to that center—building an understanding of those social forces that shape who they are. So they have a sense of all those things that are shaping their lives. When they begin to understand themselves, they're liberated from all of those things that define who they are, and oftentimes do so in negative or disadvantaging ways.

DIVERSE PERSPECTIVES. Youth share their stories and listen to the stories of others.



(E3) Youth develop and share personal stories.

In many of the SEL Challenge programs, work on empathy development centers on youth sharing their stories and experiences with each other. Telling their own stories and listening to the stories of others function in tandem to enhance knowledge about self and others. For some programs, telling and responding to someone's story plays out as part of a service learning activity, such as planting a garden in memory of someone who lost their life to a drunk driver. For others programs, sharing stories is a central activity. At AHA!, sharing one's story is integral to guiding young women towards healthy relationships and wholeness. TPP helps youth first put their individual life stories into words and then turn their stories into performance. In many programs, sharing one's story and listening to others occurs in the context of working through relationships or interpersonal conflicts. The sharing comes in a variety of forms, including poetry, life stories, and explaining how topics affect them personally. Daily structured reflection time is also a regular opportunity for youth to talk about their experiences.

A theme among the youth at TPP was that the program presented them with the opportunity to talk about themselves in ways they hadn't before. Youth felt safe to talk about themselves as they truly are:

So you learn to say things. I've said things in the room with my cast that it's been the first time I've ever said it, like, ever, or ever said it out loud. And I don't know, it just means so much.

TPP has taught me it's okay to talk about your personal issues, but talk about them to the right people. And I've talked about my issues with the right people and about the right things, and I know what to say and what not to say. And not completely, but I know what I feel comfortable saying and those things really played a role on my life.

DIVERSE PERSPECTIVES. Youth share their stories and listen to the stories of others.



(E4) Youth provide attentive, empathic listening to the experiences, backgrounds, and perspectives of others.

A consistent theme among SEL Challenge programs is that youth learn about diverse perspectives through an active process of listening, understanding, and coming to identify with the personal experiences of others. As Elizabeth Howard, artistic director of the afterschool program at TPP, said, “Just sitting and listening to each other’s stories is a huge deal for them. Just to understand that everybody has a story.” They learn about self and others together through processes of sharing and comparing⁴³.

Listening to others share their stories provides youth with opportunities to learn and practice a key empathy skill: listening attentively from the perspective of the speaker, picking up both content and emotional valence. This skill does not always come automatically. Through listening—really listening to each other’s stories—it is not unusual for youth to have revelations about how they engage with others. For some, being listened to is itself a new experience, and it allows for self-reflection, as a youth participant at TPP expressed:

This program, there’s so much honesty. It’s like you learn to be honest with yourself and the people around you and everyone’s listening for once.



Elizabeth Howard at TPP added:

Sometimes they're saying stuff, and it's not a huge revelation to anyone else, but they'd never said it out loud before to people who are listening. Just to understand that everybody has a story. That's something that people will say to me oftentimes as they leave—someone just said it to me in the last rehearsal for this year—that "I can never look at somebody the same way again on the street. I can never judge people the same way because I understand that everyone has a story, and I just don't know theirs so I can't judge them." I think that comes from sharing their life stories and because it's not complicated. There's nothing else happening, and everybody is just listening.

As the young people develop empathy, their behaviors, words, and the ways they interact with others may change. Paul Griffin at TPP provided a portrait of the transition:

They're learning from other young people and listening to their stories. We can tell that empathy is building with someone by how they're listening, how they're interacting, how they're communicating to the other people around them, how they talk about their families. And for the ones who have the big breakthroughs, it's typically when they understand that what they do hurts other people and that that matters. That awareness can happen early on, like when the boys are sitting around listening to the young women speak about the sexual violence they've experienced. It can happen in life stories when somebody says something that they relate to completely. It can happen in the context of the show when they suddenly realize that the person they're working with didn't show up and they're incredibly disappointed and they suddenly realize that it matters.

The ongoing practice of listening to others provides youth multiple opportunities for developing empathy.

ACCEPTANCE. Youth practice relating to others with acceptance and understanding.



(E5) Youth practice identifying, understanding, and managing judgments.

Sharing personal experiences and stories and listening to those of others is the first step towards building empathy. Empathy occurs when judgment or indifference is replaced with understanding and caring. TPP's Paul Griffin said it begins "when their eyes are opened to the reality of what's going on with other young people." This cultivates the soil in which empathy can grow. By listening to the stories of others, youth see a fuller picture of others. They begin to understand why people behave the way they do. They realize everyone has a background story.

Over time, these experiences teach youth to manage judgment by encouraging "careful curiosity and a desire to get to know and seek knowledge about that which we do not understand and ask questions instead of pointing fingers or turning away," as AHA! wrote in their SEL Challenge application. Forming judgments about those in social groupings different from one's own is perhaps a universal experience. However, youth are not always initially aware of this judgment. Allison Williams, senior vice president of programs at Wyman, described the process that occurs throughout teen participation in the Teen Outreach Program (TOP):

Several teens experienced new awareness: owning behaviors about which they were not even aware. As the teens reflected upon this lesson, they continued to voice additional understanding. They recognized times when they were judged by someone or judged someone else. They identified how stopping to talk and understand the perspective of the other person would have helped the situation.

Recognizing these judgments, managing the tendency to judge, and replacing them with understanding and empathy require nuanced and personal knowledge about others' experiences and emotions. Following is a testimonial from a youth at AHA!:

The AHA! program helps prevent hatred, prejudice, and bullying by encouraging tolerance, understanding, and compassion. By being part of a tight knit community with Mexicans, gangsters, preps, rich kids, gay kids, potheads, and straight edges, we were able to see the unity in all of our diversity and really appreciate a wider array of human beings. Each one of us brought something unique and special to the group, and I left feeling like I knew people on a deeper level from all walks of life, which certainly makes it difficult to

generalize or stereotype an individual based on their outward appearance or lifestyle choices. I grew to tolerate, appreciate, and embrace individuals from different groups, which makes it nearly impossible to hate others, bully, or hold prejudices against groups or individuals.

A practical step toward managing judgments begins with not interrupting and not challenging others when they speak. Maintaining the ability to listen deeply may mean managing one’s own emotional reactions and responses and learning when to listen and when to speak up. Beth Chandler at YW Boston explained that emphasizing listening as an appropriate response to those perceived as different from oneself can strengthen youth’s “empathy muscle”:

I think everybody always comes from a different place, and depending on the issue, some people may be further along than others. I think [one thing] that helps students to be able to be in different places is to understand that, “Part of what I need to do is to listen.” That increases their ability to be empathetic and non-judgmental. They build their empathy muscle regardless of where they may start before they get into the program.

Managing judgments is evidenced by curbing the impulse to relate callously to others and their stories. Paul Griffin from TPP said that, at the beginning, youth might be “stand-offish” with a tendency to judge:

Early on, they oftentimes have harsh judgments. They can be almost cruel and catty and gossipy about other people. By the end of the year, they typically don’t do that anymore because they understand that it’s disrespectful to other people’s experiences.

The lessons they have had on stereotypes and discrimination help youth identify and understand judgments among their peers and provide opportunities for setting judgments aside. At TPP, participants are exposed to a diverse cast of more than 40 youth and adults who have had experiences that are different from theirs. Two TPP youth shared:

In this program, there’s so many different people. There’s so much diversity. I mean, we live in New York so there’s already so much diversity; there are also so many different ideas, so many different perspectives, so many different experiences that you’ve heard of but never been face-to-face with. Then you meet so many different people who have been there, who have experienced those things, and you learn about it, and you learn to understand it, and then, even if it disagrees with your own belief or your own truth, it’s right in front of you. So you learn to accept it and even if you’re not adopting it as your own truth, you still learn to work with it and understand it. You also have to learn to work with these people who are so different from you, but then they become part of you, too. Which is, I don’t know, it’s awesome.

Because the youth have to work closely with each other, they learn to manage their judgments and develop greater capacities for acceptance. One young woman shared how she learned not to pre-judge strangers and learned to recognize that others have struggles similar to hers:

Well, one thing I learned about this program is everyone has their own story. People in the street, you don’t know exactly what they’re going through. But when I came to The Possibility Project for the first time we did the life story. People were saying their own life story. I never knew that this is what people were going through, and that made me feel that I’m not the only person that’s going through many things. There’s a lot of people that have their own problems, too.

ACCEPTANCE. Youth practice relating to others with acceptance and understanding. 

(E6) Youth experience empathy and demonstrate caring when others reveal or share emotional experiences.

Demonstrating care for others is not only an important part of what staff provide for youth, but it also grows among the youth as they begin to develop and express empathy toward each other. Empathy includes an emotional response: It involves identification with others and a vicarious experiencing or understanding of their feelings, thoughts, and attitudes. One youth in the AHA! program described it this way:

I just kind of figured out the difference between sympathy and empathy. Empathy is feeling it—feeling what they're feeling—but having sympathy is just kind of being like, "Man that sucks." Like, "I'm really sorry for you." And not actually taking into consideration what they are personally feeling.

Empathy is a natural response when youth listen deeply to the experiences, emotions, and stories of their peers and suspend judgment. One of the leaders from AHA! put it this way in their SEL Challenge application:

One of the most satisfying aspects of facilitating AHA! groups is watching youth learn to empathize with one another. We teach them ways to do this, but ultimately it is a natural outgrowth of the kind of sharing and listening they do together in our groups. It just happens, and it is a beautiful thing to witness, acknowledge, and reinforce. Empathy is an especially potent aspect of Girls' Group, which becomes very tightly knit and mutually empathic as they share and learn together.

As the youth get to know one another more deeply through active listening, the capacity to understand and sense another's emotions grows, even when the emotions are not expressed verbally. A youth participant from BCGCM described it this way:

It's like now you know when somebody is not feeling right or you know if they don't want to participate. Can You Hear Us Now? taught us to know how somebody's feeling, know how their day has been. Like, if my day was going bad, the whole circle would know it because it would be my energy, what I bring to the circle.

As youth build trusting relationships, they begin to support each other and recognize emotions in each other. They begin adopting key qualities of the staff by reaching out to offer a listening ear to their peers. A youth at BCGCM said:

Learning about other people's emotions is like you know how they feel. You don't know exactly how they feel, but you know something ain't right. So you're going to try to ask somebody, "What's wrong?" and "Do you need somebody to talk to?" But if they don't want to tell, you can like tell Ms. Janay, you know, another person that you trust.

Sometimes this growth and self-awareness is an emotionally intense experience during the moment when empathy emerges (and it is typically in a "moment", says Paul Griffin at TPP, adding that it can be uncomfortable for youth when they first realize the power of empathy). He goes on to discuss the work of processing and reflecting that occurs in groups as part of their empathy development through a story about "Angelica," a program participant:

One example of this "moment" involves a youth whom we will call Angelica. Angelica grew up with a single mother in a very rough neighborhood. She was a fighter and got involved in gangs early in her adolescence. She was doing poorly in school when she joined TPP on a whim. Angelica and another participant seemed to have an almost natural dislike of one another. At one rehearsal, Angelica and the other girl, who was in many ways very different from Angelica, got in a heated argument over who had the right to stand in a specific place. A shoving match ensued with hair-pulling and some wrestling but was quickly broken up. Angelica was devastated and she walked out of the room crying. Afterwards, when she and the artistic director were talking, Angelica, who was in tears and shaking, revealed that she had never felt bad about attacking someone before and now she felt terrible. It was Angelica discovering—in one moment—the meaning and feeling of empathy as she realized that not only had she hurt someone else but also she had hurt many people before and was unaware, really, of what she had done. For the rest of that day, a Production Team member with whom she had grown close was at Angelica's side ensuring her safety and reassuring her that she really did belong in the cast and that others had lived through the same discovery she was making.

The story of Angelica underscores how empathy is simultaneously about self and others. The empathy and caring that develop in these programs gets exhibited at profound levels. Natalie Cooper at BCGCM shared an example from her program:

They rally around each other and show support when somebody is dealing with something that makes them uncomfortable. One of our kids ended up losing everything in a fire. That point where those kids were able to sense his energy and see that his spirit was broken and down, and they were able to connect and just show him love to the point where for the first time he felt safe enough to speak was a huge moment.

STAFF PRACTICES

STRUCTURE. Staff provide programs with appropriate structure for sharing experience and promoting equity.

SP

Staff cultivate a safe and caring space, including:

(E7) Employing appropriate structure for sharing different cultural backgrounds, personal beliefs, and stories (particularly those that are emotionally charged) without judgment.

Cultivating the processes just described depends on staff creating a safe place for youth to share, listen, express intense emotions, and process conflicting views. Many of the programs shared practical ways they accomplished this. First, many groups have ground rules or norms for sharing (See Teamwork T7). Confidentiality—what is shared in group, stays in group—is essential. Staff often had other ways to create safe places to share. Interrupting is discouraged. Some programs use an object to pass around so that only one person at a time has the “microphone.” If sharing in a large group is uncomfortable for some, a recommendation is to break into pairs or small groups.

Several programs emphasize the importance of knowing and accepting each person where they are. That can mean knowing where they are emotionally on a particular day. La’Ketta Caldwell at BGCGM said, “Because the worst thing for us to do is to walk in and we didn’t know they were having a bad day, and we just triggered it to be worse.” It can also mean accepting each group and each individual as unique. Paul Griffin at TPP said:

So when we go into that room on the first day, and we’re observing them and listening to them, we’re just trying to understand where they’re at, as individual youths as well as the group as a whole. We’re literally simply just trying to understand who they are. We try not to make assumptions about them or who they are. We try to listen and really understand.





Structure can be supplied by having an articulated set of strategies to deal with the emotions surrounding empathy. At TPP, where youth channel emotional experiences into transformative, dramatic productions, they have developed the following strategies:

The strategies that staff might use for addressing the “moment” when empathy emerges depends significantly on the context in which it occurs.

- The first strategy is to make sure that the room is safe. That is, that everyone understands and works together to make each other safe.
- The second strategy is to provide reassurance to the youth going through this process that they will be okay.
- The third strategy is to engage and include another youth (or more) in the process. This facilitates empathy for all and builds understanding and support while also strengthening the youth leadership of the cast.
- The fourth strategy is to listen very carefully to what the youth is talking about in these moments.
- The fifth strategy is to respond honestly, first and foremost, and to make him/her aware of what might be happening emotionally and of the value of learning in these moments. “Offering perspective” is what we call it and [it] involves expressing different options for interpreting emotions and experiences.
- The sixth strategy is to engage him/her in the activity at hand again so that they realize that their feelings are just that, feelings, and that they can continue even though the feelings at that time are powerful.

Part of what makes a space safe is setting norms or ground rules for sharing. At Voyageur Outward Bound School (VOBS), youth are given tools to talk about how they’re feeling and talk about how the tough things they’ve experienced. The lessons that they’ve learned from their experiences are also shared. They may be given a specified amount of time to share their story. At YW Boston, “Real talk is uncensored, but they can’t share emotions in a way that will hurt others.” Youth are taught about using “I-statements” instead of “you statements.”

When asked to explain what makes the space feel safe enough to share, one youth from TPP talked about the importance of not judging what others are saying:

It’s like magic. I know it sounds very cliché and all that cheesy stuff, but I feel like there’s a way to make it happen. It’s just telling somebody that it’s okay and I’m not going to judge you. And it sounds easy but it’s really hard. Because when I went in, I thought laughing at everything and making everything seem like it’s okay, it’s gonna be okay, but like I didn’t realize how much shit I went through until everybody started talking. I was like, “Damn, we some fucked up kids!” But everybody’s messed up in their own way. It’s just how you go about it. And that’s one thing that I learned. Because people are so scared of talking because they feel like they’re going to get judged.

Trust forms between cast members at TPP as they begin to let themselves open up to each other and learn they are not being judged or ridiculed; they are simply being heard.

Staff cultivate a safe and caring space, including:

(E8) Actively promoting inclusion and equity and demonstrating support for the principles that all are different, equal, and important.

Another component of cultivating a safe space is actively promoting inclusion and equity. The National Research Council⁴³ concluded that quality out-of-school programs must create “a welcoming environment in which young people experience meaningful inclusion in activities regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, ability level, or any other characteristic.” This also includes promoting the core value that everyone is accepted as important wherever they are developmentally, whatever their opinions or life experiences are, and whatever groupings they may identify with. This cuts across all the standards, but it has particular relevance to empathy. For AHA!, it means explicitly acknowledging and validating the differences among participants. Jennifer Freed, AHA! co-executive director, said:

From the onset, we say there’s no right or wrong place to be in your development. It’s your development. The most important thing is that you’re informed and that you choose and that you are comfortable. So we put a parameter around it. Then when girls share whatever they share, we acknowledge and validate and respect them for exactly where they are and have the other girls do it as well. So many people support one of our 13 ½-year-olds who is a virgin and very inexperienced. Everybody is like, “Yeah, that’s so great! I wish I was still there. That’s fantastic.” We also have the older girls sometimes talk to the younger ones about why they wish they had waited or what they wish their first sexual experience had been. This helps empower the younger girls about choosing their first time in a different way.

To do this, staff need to be prepared to explicitly challenge stereotypes and discrimination and to speak up about institutional injustice. This includes making their values known when youth act in ways that are insensitive or discriminatory, or when youth discuss incidents in their lives in which they experience insensitivity, personal or institutional discrimination. Staff cannot take a position that race and ethnicity do not matter.

An exercise that allows discrimination and privilege to be experienced and addressed is an activity called the “privilege line” that staff at YW Boston lead with during their Immersion Week:

Students are asked to stand shoulder to shoulder, then are asked to take steps forward or backward depending on the privileges and experiences they have had in their lives. This activity conjures an array of emotions for participants, as the physical act of stepping forward or back under the watchful eyes of others makes the realities of privilege or lack of privilege inescapable. For example, some students end up in the back of the room because they have experienced food insecurity, a family member’s incarceration, a family member’s unemployment, or racially or ethnically motivated physical or verbal attacks. These youth often feel guilt, shame, embarrassment, or pain. Students who find themselves at the front of the room because of privileges, such as a history of financial security and academic opportunity, often feel uncomfortable, defensive, or guilty as many of them are becoming aware of the impact of these privileges for the first time. The staff play an important role in this process, guiding and prompting conversation to ensure that this activity results in productive discussion that moves participants’ social and emotional growth forward. This can be challenging as staff may be dealing with a range of raw emotions and perspectives themselves.

Researchers S. Sue and colleagues⁴⁴ argue that development of cultural competence among human service professionals “is an ethical obligation; cross-cultural skills should be placed in a level of parity with other practitioner skills.” Cole states, “effective programs have a culture that privileges diversity”⁴⁵. In the SEL Challenge programs, staff promote the important message that all are different, equal, and important in the way they talk to and about youth. As with emotions, staff should help name issues and validate youth’s discussion of what can sometimes be difficult topics. They help youth learn to see beyond themselves and understand effects of bias and unequal treatment⁴⁶. Navigating discussions and situations in which issues of difference are manifested can be difficult. In some cases, there may be no clear way to respond.

At YW Boston, where discussions often focus on structural inequities, a model of affinity groups is used to encourage sharing among youth from similar groups. Once youth have had a chance to express themselves with those who share aspects of their identity, a larger group discussion encourages conversation with those who identify differently. For instance, when discussing the death of Michael Brown—a black teenager in Ferguson, Missouri, shot by a white police officer—and other similar tragedies that spurred protests in communities across the country, the youth first discussed their emotional reactions within racial affinity groups. Then, in the larger group, they listened to each other’s experiences across racial groups and, finally, discussed what actions they could take towards change.

In SEL Challenge programs that have a major program component focused on addressing systemic discrimination, like YW Boston, we found it has been important for staff to facilitate conversations skillfully so that youth leave feeling ready for action rather than shutdown. Andrea Gomez, Intl program coordinator from YW Boston, said:

We frame it in a way that the choices they have are going to impact positively, so that they’re not just like, “Oh, my god, racism sucks, this is horrible, let me shutdown.” So how do I still frame this in a way where you’re facing the realities, but you have some kind of optimism that you can be an agent of change?

Andrea spoke quite a bit about skilled facilitation, particularly during tense conversations. For Andrea and YW Boston, setting group norms was imperative to creating a space where productive conversations could occur. Some of the standard group norms that surface in one form or another included:

I don’t want anybody speaking for anybody else in this room. If somebody’s offended by what is said, just take a moment to acknowledge that they’re offended and maybe find out why. This is how we move forward. Most people know the golden rule: treat others how you want to be treated. Well I don’t know how you want to be treated. So I’m not going to treat you the way I want to be treated. My biggest example is: I love coffee. My good friend Mona doesn’t like coffee. If I really wanted to show her appreciation, I’m not going to buy her a \$50 Starbucks card. Really think about what the other person needs and take that person’s perspective first.

Although these are fairly common ground rules, Andrea helps us to understand how they’re not as basic as they seem and aren’t to be taken for granted.

STRUCTURE. Staff provide programs with appropriate structure for sharing experience and promoting equity.

SP

Staff cultivate a safe and caring space, including:
(E9) Cultivating a program culture in which people actively care for each other.

In the end, a safe place and a highly effective program is about more than the right structure or the right content. Nothing can replace the importance of genuine caring. Many examples were provided of youth and staff expressing or showing love or caring.

Victoria Guidi, program director, Boat Build and Sail at Philadelphia Wooden Boat Factory (PWBF): Students come into our shop and they come to the table at the beginning of the night and we try to create a very inviting, loving atmosphere. We really get to know them. We’re genuinely interested in who they are and how they’re feeling and what their days have been like and how their weekends have been.

La’Ketta Caldwell, senior program manager of social emotional learning at BGCGM: A lot of these young kids, they’ve never been told that somebody loves them. From the beginning, we say that all time. It’s like we love you and they’re, in the beginning, it’s like oh my goodness. That’s just stupid. Their faces frown up. What in the world, love, whatever. But we say it every session. So many of these kids have never said I love you without wanting something, and that’s amazing to me.

Teena-Marie Johnson, education organizer at YOB: I know for me specifically, I tell them that I love them all the time and how beautiful they are inside and out, and how much this work would not be the same without them. And it’s totally true. That’s not protocol at all, but that’s what we believe. We always say, “I’m so happy

to see you!” We’re just very affectionate and we’re very intentional about making sure that each young person feels like they’re at the center of whatever the issue is. At the support group every young person gets a chance in front of the group; if there has been tremendous growth we say, “Oh, my gosh, you’ve done so much better. You’re doing so well with this!” We really try to help the young people understand that they’re a part of a community, and all of them have an impact on the community.

Although these are examples of the staff showing their care and love for youth, staff also encourage youth to show support for each other. Andrea Gomez at YW Boston elaborated:

The other thing that is crucial for staff to really be aware of is that sometimes we want to fly in and be the ones who take care of the youth when them learning to take care of each other is a huge skill as well. I would rather see this youth being supported by that youth than this youth being supported by me. I don’t need to feel better about myself in that I can take care of you, but if I see you being able to reach out, that right there is huge learning to me. Being able to know when to step in and knowing when to step back.

In this next example shared from Jennifer Freed, a youth from the AHA! Girls’ Relationship Wisdom Group helped a peer through an abusive relationship:

So Maci came into the group and identified as a lesbian in a relationship with another girl in the group. I’ll call her Maria, a lesbian or maybe bisexual. I’m not sure because we try to not make people into labels so that their sexuality can be whatever they choose it to be, whenever they feel like it. They were in a relationship and they were beating each other up on a routine basis. We had to deal with that in the group because they would check in and they would have a bruise on their face or whatever. They did stay in the group the whole year, and by the end of the year they had learned how to not be violent with each other, but it was a real issue in the group the whole year. They’d be making up and breaking up and being violent and of course where did they learn how to be violent? From their families, domestic violence. So we had all other kinds of issues with these girls, but we stuck with them and both of them learned how to express themselves and their frustrations and their hopes and their dreams and their feelings without being violent, and all the other girls got really invested in the whole thing because it was affecting all of us. And so when they learned how to handle it, everybody in the room felt like we’d all defeated domestic violence.

And at AHA!, the staff measure their own success by how well they’ve enabled youth to connect to other youth. Jennifer Freed added:

We have a very important boundary that we maintain of being incredibly authentic, vulnerable, and connected, and we make it very clear that we’re not the people for them to go to. They go to each other. In other words, we don’t make ourselves indispensable. Bad move. We’re not going to be with them when they’re 18, 19, 20. They’re going to be with their peers. So we say our role stays as motivators and fighters, mentors, but not as parents and not as therapists and not as friends. We’re facilitators of their own connection to each other.

STRUCTURE. Staff provide programs with appropriate structure for sharing experience and promoting equity.

SP

Staff cultivate a safe and caring space, including:

(E10) Providing programs with ritual structures for multiple sessions that allow youth to first check in, then open up, and end with reflection.

Many programs have other structures that cultivate empathy, while creating a safe environment for youth. Having routines also creates a sense of familiarity and safety among participants. Examples of structural elements include:

- Beginning: icebreaker, check-in, and/or welcome to build rapport
- Middle: work, games, announcements, lesson
- End: Reflection, debrief
- Appreciation—some programs start with it while others end with it

Parts of these routines are intentionally designed to support the development of empathy by encouraging self-awareness and reflection, sharing, listening, or appreciation. Natalie Cooper at BGCGM said:

Every CYHUN session begins with an icebreaker to reconnect the group and establish teamwork. Icebreakers are utilized as a stress release for the participants. After the icebreaker, teens partake in an “activating activity” that provides effective communication within the group on particular topics. One such activity is called “The Truth Is...” where teens share experiences or personal truths that they don’t typically share, and for many, at all. This can often be very emotional and these activities are always followed by a follow-up conversation with the group and reflection on the activity. Finally, every session ends with the teens forming a circle, or a Cypher Circle, to lift the spirits of the youth and further establish their sense of community.

Structure creates a sense of cohesiveness within the group. Groups as diverse as PWBF and AHA! share similarities in their routines. Expressing appreciation and gratitude is a regular ritual at AHA!, PWBF, and YOB. Here are some examples of routine structure:

AHA!: From the beginning of the first group meeting, youth are greeted with joy, love and acceptance. AHA! groups always start with “Thorns and Roses,” a check-in activity that brings each participant’s voice into the meeting, welcoming both the pleasures and pains of their current experience and teaching others to listen non-judgmentally and empathically.

PWBF: And then we start our check in and it might be a question that just pops in on the top of my head that I’m feeling from the students or the conversation that they’re having with each other so I say, “Wait, hey let’s start in with what is your greatest fear?” We have that check in and then we get to the tasks on the board.

YOB: Creating and fostering a culture of appreciation, support, and inclusiveness is a key component to BSAC’s operations. All BSAC meetings start with a much anticipated appreciation session in which members offer an appreciation for another member of the group. In addition, BSAC members participate in a bimonthly support group where they have the support and space to discuss personal issues they are confronting without having to discuss the policy issues they are working on during the week.

Creating meaningful beginning and ending rituals is a common practice across programs. Laura Greenlee Karp, program coordinator at VOBS, described these rituals as a “frame” that runs through the program year. Beginning rituals are often a way for youth and staff to connect with each other, a way to recognize the emotional state the youth are bringing into the program, and a way to focus youth and orient them to fully participate in the day’s program. She calls this a “tone set.” The tone set consists of welcoming and letting the youth know what they are going to do for the day. Natalie Cooper at BGCGM underscores that simply greeting youth at the door is important.

Ending routines often foster self-reflection and reflection on what participants appreciate about each other. Reflection solidifies learning. DeVonne Bernard, director, Teen Outreach Program at Wyman, explained that meetings are concluded with what they call an “RDA: reflection, debrief, and application.” This intentional process allows teens to better integrate what they have learned and experienced during a lesson or community service learning project to other areas of their life, themselves, and their relationships with others. Laura Greenlee Karp at VOBS stated, “The debrief is where you really drive home that point.” Brett Hart, executive director at PWBF, has youth learn to articulate the processes they work on using precise language:

So at about 6:00 P.M. we do the high water/low water where students go around the roundtable and talk about what they did so that they get the chance to articulate their processes, which is really difficult when they first come in. They start off with, “Yeah, I grabbed the thing and I shaped the joint with the shaper.” And then over time that evolves into, “I had to take the plank and double off the edge of it with the hand blade.” And an accurate end-stage language would be something like, “I used the low angle block plane to shape the end grain of the wood without tearing out across the grain.” So the opportunity to use the vocabulary to articulate and to speak out loud in a group setting is something that’s really important to us.

(E11) Staff model empathy skills, including:

- a) intentionally recognizing the influence of their own identities and how these may affect interpersonal interactions;
- b) active listening;
- c) serving as an ally for youth who are isolated by differences in culture, family background, privilege, or power;
- d) modeling boundary-setting, including sharing or withholding personal experiences as appropriate and as needed.

Staff create the space for empathy to develop by being authentic models for the youth. Spaces cannot be safe unless the staff are continually modeling empathy and emotion management skills. The staff must model owning their own identities. La’Ketta Caldwell from BGCGM painted this picture:

So they know right away, they know Miss La’Ketta did not grow up on the block. I tell them. I bring in pictures. I lived on a farm. I’m very authentic. I don’t pretend to be anybody else other than who I am. And then I have Miss Sherry. Miss Sherry, she paints with her words. She sounds, I mean every word, the diction is perfect. She’s African American. Then I have Calile who’s from the block. Calile looks like them. It is important that they see somebody who looks like them. My videographer, Mark, he’s Caucasian. I expose my kids to a variety.

Although staff model being authentic, appropriate boundaries are maintained. “They maintain those strong boundaries. They maintain clarity in terms of expectations. They maintain that it’s about holding ourselves accountable with them, too, and with one another. ‘Hey, we can work through this. It’s okay for people to disagree,’” shared Allison Williams at Wyman.

Fundamentally, the staff model empathy skills by developing appropriate, empathetic relationships with the youth. According to YW Boston in their Challenge application:

The relationship between youth and staff can best be described as a mentoring relationship. We put a strong emphasis on setting clear boundaries so that youth workers can build rapport and relationships with the youth while also meeting professional obligations, such as ensuring youth’s safety, meeting program goals, and exercising authority when needed.

AHA! sums this up in a passage from their Challenge application :

Adult facilitators are trained to bring a general guiding structure designed to teach crucial social and emotional competencies and to create space for heartfelt sharing and learning, and to hold the container and share authentically, but not confessionally. The adults are there to serve as solid, dependable resources and affirmative influences for youth, but not as peers or friends.

Paul Griffin at TPP stressed:

You have to hire people or have leadership that is empathic and that not only talks teamwork, but also actually practices it. You have to have individuals who are not only capable of that but are trained in it and believe in it and adhere to it.

Ultimately, youth and staff recognize that modeling empathy and caring about others makes an impact beyond the program. A youth at TPP said:

It’s not just a program about getting to know each other, but it’s a program about, “What else can we do?” It’s not just about us. It’s about everybody because the program isn’t just changing our lives. It’s going to change everybody else’s lives because it starts with us, but it branches out.

2.4 Teamwork Practices



Abilities to collaborate and coordinate action with others.

INTRODUCTION

Teamwork skills have always been important and have become increasingly necessary in a crowded, global world where the future depends on people working together successfully. Teamwork skills include many of the same competencies as empathy: mutual respect, active listening, sensitivity to others' feelings, and attentiveness to diverse perspectives. What distinguishes teamwork skills from empathy is the ability to form a cohesive, high-functioning group that works together effectively toward shared goals. Developing these skills can be a powerful experience for youth. As Paul Griffin, founder and president of The Possibility Project (TPP) put it:

Once they feel like they belong, that's a big deal. They get a thrill out of creating something over a long period of time.

We know what an effective team looks like: Members trust each other, are collectively invested in shared work and goals, and have shared norms, or an ethos, for how they coordinate their efforts and solve problems that arise. The challenges in learning teamwork skills start with that uncertain process of finding common ground and forming a social contract with people one may not know (or may know and dislike). And then there is the challenge of balancing the human needs for autonomy and self-protection (of one's time, emotional energy, and dignity) with the giving of oneself to the common good. Individuals often differ in what they are able to contribute—ideas, skills, tasks they can do that others can't do—so learning to navigate fairness can be challenging. Youth also need to learn strategies for dealing with different types of difficult team members and avoiding different kinds of unconstructive group dynamics.

Similar to other social and emotional skills sets, teens best learn teamwork skills through doing. However, substantial research shows that, left to themselves, certain groups of youth will teach each other deviant rather than constructive group behavior⁴⁷. In successful programs, staff allow youth to learn from each other, but they ensure that group formation gets off to a good start, often through structured activities. They help youth create and sustain positive group norms for maximum group functioning, and they provide ongoing modeling, coaching, and facilitation of effective group performance.



Table 6. Teamwork Standards and Practice Indicators

KEY YOUTH EXPERIENCES	
TRUST AND COHESION. Youth develop group cohesion and trust.	YE
Youth participate in work teams that (T1) develop cohesion and trusting relationships and (T2) a sense of group identity and purpose.	
COLLABORATION. Youth participate in successful collaboration.	
(T3) Youth work together toward shared goals. (T4) Youth practice effective communications skills (e.g., turn-taking, active listening, respectful disagreement). (T5) Each group member's contribution is valued and affirmed.	
TEAM CHALLENGE. Youth manage challenges to creating and maintaining effective working relationships.	
(T6) Youth practice managing the challenges of group work, such as miscommunication, obstructive behavior, and conflict over goals and methods.	
STAFF PRACTICES	
STRUCTURE. Staff provide programs with norms and structure.	SP
(T7) Staff help youth cultivate norms and rituals for effective group work.	
MODELING. Staff model teamwork skills with youth.	
(T8) Staff model sensitive and high-level interpersonal functioning in staff-youth and staff-staff interactions.	
FACILITATING. Staff facilitate or intervene as needed to foster or sustain youth-led group dynamics and successful collaboration.	
(T9) Staff facilitate or intervene as needed to foster or sustain youth-led group dynamics. This includes: a) cultivating mutual accountability (e.g., by communicating the importance of all youth's successful contributions to the group's work) (See also Responsibility); b) intervening only as needed, allowing youth to lead group processes; c) helping to manage individuals' personalities when warranted (e.g., through one-on-one conversations before, during, or after a group activity); d) diffusing unconstructive conflict, regrouping, reorganizing, getting group back on track and functioning well.	

KEY YOUTH EXPERIENCES

TRUST AND COHESION. Youth develop group cohesion and trust.



Youth participate in work teams that (T1) develop cohesion and trusting relationships and (T2) a sense of group identity and purpose.

People develop the knowledge, skills, and aptitudes of teamwork through membership in well-functioning teams. So the first key experience for youth in SEL Challenge programs is participating in group formation. This begins at the start of each new session as staff promote cohesion and collaboration among the new group of youth. For the SEL Challenge programs, fostering group identity and building trusting relationships is essential to the success of the individual projects, so it is a priority from the start and continues to be a focus for the duration. Trust and cohesion form an important base on which the other social and emotional skills are built.

All of the SEL Challenge programs have an explicit focus on team-building exercises at the start of the year. The Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Milwaukee (BGCGM) spends 3–4 weeks at the beginning solely focusing on relationship building, team building, and group formation. TPP's Paul Griffin described how team-building activities provide opportunities for youth to practice teamwork skills and debrief and discuss their experiences in a safe atmosphere:

When it comes to teamwork it's about doing exercises that allow youth to work together as a team and then process out their experience as a team, so that they're understanding the techniques like the craft of being a good team member and how teams work, but also beginning to believe in that as an idea.

Team-building activities can range from initiatives to physical challenges to conversations. Laura Greenlee Karp, program coordinator at Voyageur Outward Bound School (VOBS), described one of their activities where developing trust is essential:

There is a person who is belaying a climber and if the climber doesn't know the belayer, it is difficult for them to climb a 30-foot rock face and know the belayer is holding that climber's life in their hands. First, it is difficult to trust their peer, who they may not consider very responsible, and ask them to take that risk and step outside of their comfort zone and trust that peer. Second, to have the climb go well is a huge deal for them because it builds trust between the two.

Physical challenges like this provide good contexts for building trust. Trust is also developed by sharing at a deeper level than what typically happens in the normal course of day-to-day peer interactions. One youth from YWCA Boston (YW Boston) described it in her own words:

At Int we're talking more about issues and stuff that affects us, and we share some stories that we might not have shared with some of the friends that we've known our whole lives. I feel like we are like a community, and that we are really close in a way.

As the individual youth get to know each other better and understand the work ahead of them, members develop a shared group identity. They discover and start to care about the "we." This sense of group identity may form in part from developing a connection to a collective purpose, such as a set of goals that is bigger than themselves. Elizabeth "Poppy" Potter, director of operations at VOBS, explained:

To me [purpose] is greater than goals. Purpose is more mission-driven. It helps create the group culture and gives them an identity. I think of it as the values aspect of what brings the group together for their collaboration. In our work, the group develops a purpose together as they progress through expedition. It may take the shape of a mission statement or a group contract.

To achieve the group purpose or mission, the youth identify common goals. In many programs, veteran youth help carry over some of the culture, identity, and mission from prior years. At Youth on Board (YOB), where campaigns may last several years, alumni re-establish commitment to ongoing campaigns by exploring their



interests and motivations for working on issues that are important to the current group of youth. At BGCGM and TPP, youth ask themselves what message they want the community to hear about the lives of teens. At Wyman, youth identify the service they want to provide to the community. At VOBS, youth may agree to support each other to overcome challenges and to not leave any team members behind. Elizabeth “Poppy” Potter said:

In the fall we are trying to do two things. One is get them to identify what they really want to accomplish and the skills that they need to do that. Second, we hope to build the community so that they have the support that they need and want from each other, so it’s a positive support group in helping each other achieve those goals, and to remind themselves and each other when they’re falling away from that.

In some groups, this sense of shared mission leads to the experience of having “one voice.” It may be a collective voice of the youth in their program, or it might reflect a more universal voice of youth who are also working for a similar cause. Natalie Cooper, senior director of social emotional learning at BGCGM, said:

Then we kind of take the kids on a journey to start exploring things. That exploration may be anything from a group activity to research to exposure. Then the kids have to kind of hone in collaboratively and collectively to identify one voice that will emanate across all the groups. So everybody has a voice, everybody wants to be heard, but for the sake of the project, we have to identify what that unified voice is.

The development of group identity and trusting relationships is seen in reduced defensiveness, increased supportive feedback, strengthening relationships, receiving focused attention, listening, physical affection, holding hands, and sharing. This grows over the course of the program. The following is an example from Paul Griffin at TPP:

When they’re doing paired work in the beginning, you know, just simple mirroring exercises, they can’t even stand in front of each other for five minutes without giggling and breaking down and having to walk away. They just can’t even be in the same space with another young person for that long. Fast forward nine months, and suddenly they’re able to be backstage in a dark theatre for two hours at a time in each other’s presence.



Development of trusting team relationships creates conditions for youth to begin practicing and honing skills and sensibilities for working together.

COLLABORATION. Youth participate in successful collaboration.



Collaborative work is a common element across the SEL Challenge programs and an important key experience to learning teamwork skills. This includes collaborative work building a boat, conducting a community-service project or advocacy campaign, an outdoor excursion, or working on developing relationship wisdom in a group context. The following section contains descriptions of three components of successful collaboration: shared goals, effective communication, and valuing group members' contribution. As youth experience these, their teamwork skills grow.

(T3) Youth work together toward shared goals.

Having goals puts purpose and mission into specific terms. Sharing those goals and the purpose they support is essential to building teamwork. In some programs, the goals are easy to identify. An apprentice at Philadelphia Wooden Boat Factory (PWBF) said:

We all want the common goal. We just want a boat that can float in water.

At VOBS, the goal may be getting the canoe to move forward rather than sideways. Elizabeth "Poppy" Potter added:

Sometimes people find it very challenging to make a canoe go straight. They know that if they're the person in the back they have the most power in the boat, and it can become very frustrating if they can't get their boat to go straight. I've seen some people say, "We've got to switch roles," and they move around so that they figure out together how to make it go straight, or begin to practice their canoe stroke and the different kinds of strokes they can use to straighten out a canoe until they get it. Then they understand the power and the force of their partner and what they need their partner to do to help them go down the river or across the lake.

In some programs, the youth must decide on the goal for their project. Whatever the goal, the youth learn that a lack of teamwork hinders reaching their goal. Paul Griffin at TPP said:

If you're working together as a team to actually create something, and that work is being presented in front of everyone else; we're seeing some things work, some don't. They start to have an experience that has a goal that has meaning. You double down on that when you're working on a show where a group will work together over three or four months to create their narrative. As they're going along and doing their run-throughs and looking at their work they're saying, "Wow this sucks!" We're like, "The reason it sucks is because you guys aren't working together very well, so what are we going to do?" And now we're talking about how we're going to deal with that and now they're having to apply all of that. The key is that they have to do it, they have to build their team.

Whether the goal is clear from the start or emerges over time with youth and staff input, having and naming the shared goal helps set the group up for success. As with purpose, common goals provide a shared investment in an outcome that transcends individuals. It provides a rallying point for making shared decisions, navigating disagreements, and deciding who will do what.

(T4) Youth practice effective communications skills (e.g., turn-taking, active listening, respectful disagreement).

Effective teamwork takes a certain set of skills that can broadly be termed communication skills. These skills include turn-taking, active listening, respectful disagreement, and communicating clearly. For youth to learn healthy teamwork skills, effective and respectful communication needs to be valued and normative. For many programs, establishing group norms and expectations for communicating is a process that typically occurs in the first few meetings and is then reinforced throughout the year. For more on this process, see Empathy.

Collaboration on a project requires that youth learn to communicate with each other. At YW Boston, youth who attend the same school may, for the first time, be working together on a project. Beth Chandler, vice president of programs, explained:

They aren't necessarily friends before they get here, so there are challenges in learning to work with people who may have different work styles. You have to learn to listen actively because you need to hear where everybody is coming from so you can try to all move in a direction that you all agree on. You have to figure out how to manage time.

For some youth, learning to communicate well may mean training themselves to resist their typical behaviors and reactions. In this example from Elizabeth Howard, artistic director of Afterschool Programs at TPP, a young woman was asked to change her behavior in order to fit with the group expectations:

I've had cast members who stick with the fight. That's what they do, and in the first three months anyone they don't like, they threaten. They come into this program with that attitude. I had a girl do that and my production team handled it. They kept talking to her, "That's not what we do here. You don't have to do that here." And I even said, "You don't have to do that here. You can let it go. I know it's hard to let go. For some of us it's scary because that's what's keeping us feeling safe, but you really don't have to do it here. And you can't do it here. If you fight we're going to ask you to leave. You don't have to be that person here." And over time, she let it go.

Work on collaborative projects presents many opportunities for youth to communicate with each other, and staff support youth to recognize when their communication is effective and when it's not. Research on the development of teamwork in classrooms indicates explaining how to do things supports skill learning for both the giver and the receiver of the explanation⁴⁸. As youth become better communicators, they become better able to express themselves and interpret messages from those they're working with. Often these skills carry over into other parts of life. A youth from PWBF reinforced this concept:

In my school, some classes we do a lot more group projects, and originally, like back in eighth grade, I would sit there in the group and just do my work and sit there and not talk at all. But now I take charge. I try and make more friends since most of the time I don't get put in groups with my friends. I learned how to cooperate with people more and learned how to get the job done through the work of other people that I don't really [converse] with.

COLLABORATION. Youth participate in successful collaboration.

YE

(T5) Each group member's contribution is valued and affirmed.

Teamwork that engages and depends on the involvement of all members of the group has been shown to be an effective mode of learning. Research shows that youth are most likely to learn teamwork skills when activities are structured so that success can only be achieved through collaboration⁴⁹. Staff at successful out-of-school programs must identify the strengths, challenges, and working styles of the youth participants and work with rather than against these factors. Youth may have different roles in the project, and deciding on these roles so that each person's contribution is valued and affirmed is part of the process in some programs. Here are two examples from SEL Challenge programs:

Julie Thayer at YW Boston: To accomplish their projects, students must work together to apply the skills and knowledge they have learned throughout the program to a specific project. Using their knowledge of communication and leadership styles, delegates identify their respective skills and talents to inform their action plans. They assign themselves tasks and hold themselves accountable for completion.

Natalie Cooper at BGCGM: Through the process of that group work, somebody's always going to step up to be a leader; somebody is always going to step up to take charge. The kids have kind of been able to identify ways to give different people opportunities to do that. So it kind of forces them to come to the forefront and to act as a glue, if that makes sense, within their individual groups.

The SEL Challenge programs also work to create a culture of recognizing the contributions of individuals to the team. Often, this is done by rituals or practices of expressing gratitude or affirmation. As Rachel Gunther, associate director at YOB put it:

They create a culture of listening and understanding and empathy and respect and appreciation for one another.

As the year progresses, youth learn to express sincere, substantive, and specific affirmations, which is noteworthy, as substantive and specific praise has been shown in research to be associated with improved learning⁵⁰. Teena-Marie Johnson, education organizer at YOB, said:

We do a lot of appreciation in our work. As the year progresses we'll notice differences in what people appreciate. In the beginning of the year they were like, "I appreciate Faja for always hanging out with me and being there for me." And then at the end of the year, the kids are like, "I appreciate Faja for always pushing me to do the work and always believing in me." It gets deeper and a lot more personal.

A similar ritual of appreciations occurs at the PWBF, as described by Victoria Guidi, program director, Boat Build and Sail:

We wrap it up at the end of the night, and this is where we have questions and students reflect on the day and on their work and where students might want to recognize someone for help. We really try to model that, like, "Hey, you know, I just want to recognize Javon for really helping me out to get this longboard scarfed. It was heavy and your help really made it a lot easier for me and thank you for setting down your work that time when I was in need."

Stating appreciations aloud to the group affirms youth's contributions, provides instructive feedback on skills they demonstrated, and strengthens the youth's sense of belonging and importance to the group.

TEAM CHALLENGE. Youth manage challenges to creating and maintaining effective working relationships.

YE

(T6) Youth practice managing the challenges of group work, such as miscommunication, obstructive behavior, and conflict over goals and methods.

Creating and maintaining effective working relationships is an advanced skill. There are many challenges that can thwart or undermine effective teamwork, including poor communication skills or group dynamics, disagreements, everyday work frustrations, negative energy or problem behaviors of individuals, and social conflicts. These challenges must be overcome in order to work effectively together. Jennifer Freed, co-executive director at AHA!, described different roles and patterns that tend to play out in group dynamics:

Somebody talking way too much, somebody going and goofing around, somebody hardly talks or looks at anybody, somebody's always trying to bring somebody out and rescue them. I mean, they're just human. They just do it. Somebody is always telling facts [rather than] sharing their feelings—that's the know-it-all. So these things just happen, and they happen very reliably, but we're not our roles or our acts and so we really facilitate the group to help people move out of their regimented roles.

Differences of opinion and personality occur and need to be worked through by the group, whether the end product is a theatrical production, a community service project, or a boat. Natalie Cooper at BGCGM, said:

The process for getting kids to agree on anything is very tedious. There's a lot of arguing. When the kids are forced to bring together 22 ideas and formulate one, there's a battle. You definitely can see the strong personalities taking surface, but what's even more powerful is when one of those strong voices can see that

there's a sister or brother in the room who has a thought like them, they want to say something, but they're scared to say something, and instead of using their voice to share their ideas, they share the idea of the person who isn't yet comfortable to speak. That's powerful.

Beth Chandler at YW Boston said:

One of the other things that we work on over the course of the year is being able to give and receive constructive feedback. It's important particularly when you have to work in a team of people. So sometimes youth might be very good at giving constructive feedback, but not always good at receiving it. We work on being able to have conversations where youth are able to share their perspective, but then also hear somebody else's perspective and be able to respect what that person is saying even if it may be different from what they believe, and also be able to think about, "What should I be taking away from this comment?"

Youth can take their frustrations out on each other. But sometimes they are able to move on easily. Laura Greenlee Karp at VOBS:

I am, on a regular basis, completely shocked at one, how resilient kids are, and two, how forgiving and open kids are, and it's a quality that I am very envious of. They think, "Okay that went wrong. That didn't go well. Let's move on. We just fought five minutes ago, that's cool, we're going to move on and come together as a group."

Being comfortable with each other allows productive teamwork to emerge. A youth from the Boston Student Advisory Council (BSAC) at YOB described it this way:

BSAC has some of the most beautiful debates I've ever seen. We can go on and on, but really all that argument, all it really shows is how much we care about it and how much we put into it and how much we want a solution and how much we really want a change. We'll all be mad at each other and then the next day say, "Hey, guys." I think that's the important part. When we're debating, when we're going over these things, it's about, "Here's why I think this part isn't going to work. That was a great idea, and I totally appreciate you putting it out there, but here's where I see that this part of your plan is not going to work and maybe this will work better." So it's a productive environment.

These are ideal examples of youth learning teamwork skills through self-observation and reflection, both individually and in the group. When the conditions in (T1) to (T5) are in place, youth learn on their own and from each other. They also learn how to learn within a group.

Youth can also learn when team challenges arise that involve problem behavior or negative energy that ends up affecting the group. Lying, physical fights, and interpersonal relationships among group members are difficulties that some of the SEL Challenge sites have had to deal with, according to our research. Elizabeth Howard at TPP said:

We had been working for about two months on the show, and they were getting on each other's nerves and got into this huge fight in the cast circle; so much so that I was holding both of them apart by my hands. They were going to like *fight*, fight. I had to drag one of them out into the other room and the cast is just sitting there. That affects the whole cast because now what? Two of our members are about to fist fight, which is the opposite of what we're trying to do here. What do we do with that? So we had to sit down and have a talk about it. Like everyone had to calm down and we had to deal with that conflict. The whole cast had to decide how we wanted to deal with that and what's happening.

Sometimes the problems youth experience at home can affect the tone of the group. Staff can support youth by offering some perspective on difficult situations. Sometimes it can be taxing on program leaders to determine how to deal with some of these issues among participants which clearly have an impact on their peers. Victoria Guidi at PWBF said:

I've got one student who's got some really challenging stuff going on and at home, and he brings it into the shop all the time. It's taxing on the kids. It's difficult. I don't know how to address it. It's a real challenge because I know that it's tough for him—there's a call for help, and I don't know how to give it. He has an effect on programming because he might talk about it throughout the night, and kids get angry and shut him

off. [Another youth complains], “I can’t stand...like no one can stand him. He’s getting on my nerves.” I say, “Let’s separate. It seems like it’s tough for you right now. It seems like you’re having a difficult time hearing him bringing in what, to you, feels like negative energy. Let’s focus on the work at hand. Do you think you could find a way to go to him and try to redirect his negative talk to talk that’s work related?”

Some of the strategies and structures for effectively dealing with group challenges will be examined below as part of the next standard.

STAFF PRACTICES

STRUCTURE. Staff provide programs with norms and structure.

SP

(T7) Staff help youth cultivate norms and rituals for effective group work.

Establishing norms promotes a cohesive team identity and fosters effective group work, which in turn creates optimum conditions for learning. These norms may be established and practiced in the team-building activities mentioned under T1 and T2, building the foundation for the positive relationships that undergird effective teamwork. In many programs, the youth are involved in formulating these norms. Examples from VOBS, YOB, and AHA! show us what this can look like:

Laura Greenlee Karp at VOBS: It’s literally sitting down and pulling out a piece of paper and asking, “What is important to our group? Who do we want to be? What are our non-negotiables?” They’ll talk about respecting other people and respecting themselves. Sometimes there will be one that’s really important to the kids that the instructors have never thought of. Then we write it all down and it allows students to set the tone for every meeting. It’s something the instructors can fall back on because we’ve all agreed as a group that this is who we want to be and how we want to do it.

Teena-Marie Johnson at YOB: We’ll set up ground rules, like, “step up, step back.” If you notice you’ve been talking a lot, then you might step back and let someone who hasn’t spoken as much have the floor.

Jennifer Freed at AHA!: The first few weeks of Girls’ Group is about setting the culture and the norms. We talk to the girls right from the onset about what kind of culture they want to create, and we make a list of the qualities the group needs to be the best it can be. We write down what things are going to be helpful in order to have a safe and thriving group culture. They decide, but we also get to weigh in.

Establishing the norms for group work early on, helping youth take ownership of these norms, and reinforcing them as needed helps build a sense of shared accountability and provides a clear structure that youth can count on within the program. Sometimes norms are created and reinforced by rituals. The norms and rituals create a code that help youth learn how to contribute as members of high-functioning groups, including how to navigate inevitable conflicts and disagreements. Natalie Cooper from BGCGM shared something she uses at all her sites:

I was doing a Girls’ Group six years ago and we had a lot of drama. So I established [the ritual] that every group will have a box. If you have a problem, you write it down and put it in the box. It’s anonymous, but we form a circle and talk about what’s on the paper. It’s a Peace Circle to deal with the conflict that’s taking place. We use a talking stick and no one is allowed to speak unless they have it. We process the conflict that way.

Sometimes language is used as a type of ritual or signal for the group to reset according to the norms and agreements that they have made. Allison Williams, senior vice president of programs, at Wyman, described an acronym that functions this way: ROPES:

Facilitators often use the acronym of ROPES to facilitate the teens setting their own ground rules. Typically, the ROPES identified by teens include respect and responsibility: opportunity, openness and “ouch” (a term used if something offends); participation and positive attitude; education, empowerment, and escuchar (Spanish for “to listen”); and sense of humor and sensitivity. Facilitators will also articulate their expectations for the teens, and teens can share their expectations back for facilitators to develop a common

understanding. The ROPES are signed by all group members and posted in the club meeting space where they can be referenced throughout the Teen Outreach Program (TOP) club.

When conflict or emotional tensions get the group off track, staff may remind the youth to “Remember our ROPES.” In VOBS, the youth have another acronym tool, PROPS, that functions similarly. Laura Greenlee Karp described it:

We were having a rough time with people talking over each other. So we gave the kids a tool called PROPS: People Respecting Other People Speaking. When we were standing in a circle and people would talk [out of turn], the instructors would be quiet and other students would just say, “PROPS,” and that was the cue for the students to be quiet and continue to focus.

While certain rituals are used in times of difficulty or conflict, standard rituals and practices that promote a sense of group identity, cohesion, and camaraderie are woven into the everyday fabric of many programs. Regular practices of reflection, affirmations, or having dinner together reinforce the relationships that support teamwork. Allison Williams at Wyman shared:

Initial program activities include getting-to-know-you icebreakers and games to help all teens feel welcome and begin to form as a supportive group. Facilitators may use name games, group games, team-building activities, and other simple challenges that allow teens to get acquainted with each other, with TOP, and with their facilitators.

MODELING. Staff model teamwork skills with youth.

SP

(T8) Staff model sensitive and high-level interpersonal functioning in staff-youth and staff-staff interactions.

SEL Challenge programs described the importance of staff modeling the behaviors and skills they want the youth to develop. In each program, staff are expected to model social and emotional skills in order to maximize group functioning. Jennifer Freed at AHA! said:

We ask facilitators to constantly up their game in terms of modeling spontaneity, responsibility, positive attitude, accountability, and teamwork.

The essence of modeling effective teamwork skills is integrity: being an example of the qualities you espouse for the youth. Keeping one’s word is important. You mean what you say, both in terms of the commitments you make to the group and also in the caring you communicate. La’Ketta Caldwell, senior program manager of social emotional learning at BGCGM, said:

We don’t just say it, we show it through our actions. When we say we’re going to do something, we do it. If we can’t, we apologize and say, “You know what, I apologize, but I’m not going to be able to do this right now. Can you give me more time?” instead of pretending like we were going to do it and just, “Oh yeah, they’ll forget.” Kids don’t forget that stuff.

However, the modeling must be done within their role as a staff member. Jennifer Freed at AHA! said:

One of the things we found out the most is we can’t be their friends.

—Jennifer Freed, AHA!

One of the things we found out the most is we can’t be their friends. So we have a very important boundary that we maintain of being incredibly authentic and vulnerable and connected, while also being very clear that we’re not the people for them to go to. They go to each other. Our role stays as motivators and mentors but not as parents and not as therapists and not as friends. We’re facilitators of their own connections to each other.

Being an effective model to youth requires always thinking about how youth may be interpreting and thinking about what you are saying or doing. Paul Griffin at TPP said:

TPP staff and artists are asked to consistently look at what they are doing, not just what they are saying, and to be aware that what they are doing is the basis for their youth’s understanding of them. Integrity is a cornerstone of our youth-staff relationships. Staff examine each and every one of their actions and interactions

with youth through this lens, asking ourselves if we are responding to our youth in a way that aligns with our mission as an organization, which is to empower youth to transform the negative forces in their lives and communities into action and support their realization of their vision for their lives as determined by them.

The staff at AHA! shared an example of addressing a changed group dynamic by channeling their emotional response into respectfully starting a conversation about getting the group back on track. Jennifer Freed described it:

Inside of us we feel enraged and irritated, but what we say is, “Wow, the group is feeling really fractured, and this is really hard, and is this how you want it to be?” And we ask them, “How is it going for you to have it be like this?” And you know, we might make a personal statement about the impact to our sense of relatedness with the girls. So we might say, “You know, I’m feeling really sad and upset that we’re not feeling like a group right now. What do we need to take this to another level?”

Staff also model effective communication by adjusting the tone and cadence of their voice. Victoria Guidi at PWBF said:

If I see that students aren’t communicating very well I take a moment to address it. I try to do it in a professional way so that they can reflect and see how they’re treating each other. If I step back and listen to the tone of my voice or the choice of my words that can totally change the dynamic of what we’re working on. It will lift whatever negativity is present and dividing us.

To model teamwork skills, staff must pay attention to their own behavior and actions and the impact those have on the youth. They demonstrate their skills in their interactions with youth and also in how they treat their co-workers. Staff internalize the skills over time, reflecting their own learning back to the youth. Elizabeth Howard at TPP shared how she models what she’s learned:

It’s easy for me to teach this stuff now because I believe it and I do it. It doesn’t feel like I’m trying to tell them something I’m not willing to do myself. When I say it’s hard and that it’s typical because emotions are running high, I’m saying that because I have done it and I fail too.

FACILITATING. Staff facilitate or intervene as needed to foster or sustain youth-led group dynamics and successful collaboration.



- (T9) Staff facilitate or intervene as needed to foster or sustain youth-led group dynamics. This includes:
- a) cultivating mutual accountability (e.g., by communicating the importance of all youth’s successful contributions to the group’s work) (See also Responsibility);
 - b) intervening only as needed, allowing youth to lead group processes;
 - c) helping to manage individuals’ personalities when warranted (e.g., through one-on-one conversations before, during, or after a group activity);
 - d) diffusing unconstructive conflict, regrouping, reorganizing, getting group back on track and functioning well.

Staff throughout all the SEL Challenge programs work to establish positive group norms and maintain the cooperative dynamics and participation that are essential to teamwork and to youth learning teamwork skills. Staff play an ongoing, day-to-day role as a monitor-participant-coach of group processes and dynamics. They may also be part of the group and share their personal thoughts when others share.

One of the ways staff facilitate teamwork is by allowing and encouraging the youth themselves to manage the group dynamics as much as possible. Laura Greenlee Karp from VOBS said:

They are their own regulators. If there is somebody who is having an off day and is being negative, the group has, hopefully, already come up with how they’re going to handle that.

Staff cultivate an underlying ethos that youth are accountable to each other, to the group, and to the program.



PWBF establishes youth team leaders whose role it is to help keep small groups on track. Being close in age to the youth, these team leaders often have ideas and insights that help them relate to the small groups. They also serve as intermediaries between the lead staff and the youth teams. They help convey the positive culture and values to the group, and they communicate with staff when teams confront social and emotional challenges that are beyond the team leader's skill level. Executive Director Brett Hart explained:

There are three teams, one for each boat, and each team has a team leader. Part of the purpose of that is to have a person who is a moderator for discussion with the group. Conversation comes out in group discussion. Victoria is not shy about engaging kids and having them talk about challenges. She'll often have a conversation with the team leader in advance and she can get insight from the team leader that she might not have had before. That actually happens quite frequently.

Allowing youth to lead is successful when staff effectively model interpersonal skills and provide the youth with individualized, scaffolded levels of support. However, the staff take a more active or assertive role when necessary. Staff are guarantors of the group's processes and learning.

Staff monitor the work of the youth and help manage team challenges. They also hold the youth accountable to the goals and guidelines established and help calm emotions. Allison Williams at Wyman provided an example of how staff might refocus youth during a challenge:

"Hey, we can work through this. It's okay for people to disagree, but what we're talking about is right here within our TOP club, what we've agreed to, and how we committed to engaging with one another. Can we be good there?"

Staff manage group situations by taking different approaches with different personalities. Making the process explicit and using humor was recommended by Jennifer Freed from AHA!

The know-it-all and monologuers are my job because they're hard. So what I do is use a lot of humor. To the monologuers I'll say, "You have an extraordinary amount of good things to say, and we need you to hold back so other people can learn to do that too. We're going to have an agreement that you'll get to say what you want, but you'll learn how to be in a relationship with others and not go on too long." I say it over and over and over, but I'm making good rapport with the girls, and we laugh about it. With the know-it-all or the drama queen or the loner, I use humor, and I make it explicit.

We intentionally use the term "facilitator" for the adults who work directly with the teens. The facilitator's role is to provide experiences that lead to discussions through which the group can explore issues and learn. During training, new facilitators learn that the facilitator's role includes:

- Two-way communication—participants do most of the talking; facilitator guides learning through strategic questions, dialogue, and modeling
- Defining the educational process with input from teens
- Setting the stage for teens to learn through the experience
- Allowing learners to take an active role
- Focusing on feelings and attitudes as well as information

[Wyman]

Situations that escalate or threaten the security of the group may be handled in various ways. Even in extreme cases, such as fighting, the staff may keep the group as a whole involved in deciding how to handle a situation. DeVonne Bernard, director, Teen Outreach Program at Wyman, admitted they have had challenges:

I mean, we've had some challenges. We've had fights in the program. Some of those have really brought about huge changes in the peer relationships within the groups and even relationships with staff. We really try to understand what happened and what's going on with the teens. There have been times where, as a group, the whole group decided, "No, we don't want the person to go." We've really worked on it and tried to make sure that everybody felt like this was a safe place.

At BGCGM, staff facilitate a peaceful and structured process whereby youth communicate and reiterate group norms and clarify whether someone wants to remain part of the group or not. Natalie Cooper shares an example from one of the sessions:

La'Ketta brought it home talking about how everybody is equal and the same and we have love for them all and that's the love that we want to share with each other. That is Agape love. The whole session ended up talking about Agape love, and once that happened, La'Ketta opened up the floor for what we sometimes call "Conflict Circle" where it's time to hash this thing out. The kids talked in a productive way; no yelling, no screaming but just kind of put it out there to the young lady about what she was doing. They held her accountable to either change or not be a part of the group anymore. She decided the group wasn't for her, and we were okay with that because she didn't fit with the dynamic and she wasn't willing to play by the rules.

One conversation was a sharp disagreement over the use of potentially offensive language. Julie Thayer, Int program manager at YW Boston, shared a story where a volunteer staff member was able to assist the youth in diffusing the emotion around disagreements about whether and in what contexts the "N-word" is acceptable. Some youth felt it has been reclaimed within hip hop culture and has an affectionate meaning when used among black youth, especially if the r is dropped. But:

Others said, "It's a shameful part of our history. Why would you want to reclaim that? What do our elders think? We need to respect generational differences about it." Some of the white students said, "Well, if you can say it, why can't I?" It got really intense. We have a wonderful volunteer staff member who has been involved in racial justice work for a long time. He let the youth drive the conversation but did a very nice job of reminding students that the most important thing they were doing was having this conversation. That it wasn't something they would solve today or maybe ever come to resolution on. The important thing is that they were listening to one another and having the conversation in the first place.

At YW Boston, the emphasis is on the importance of learning to understand others and have a respectful dialogue rather than resolving the issue or making rules about it. Successful teamwork and collaboration is something youth and staff work on together. The youth themselves recognize the value of teamwork. One youth from YW Boston put it this way:

I watched a video that talked about how our human society is very similar to an ant colony. How an ant colony only functions when those massive amounts of ants have really, really good teamwork and they all do what each of them is designed to do. It's similar to ours how an engineer cannot exist without the farmer or the teacher. You know, all these things are interconnected—without one, there is no other. So that's how society functions; we all work together to help each other out and use our own skills to benefit each other.

Youth learn valuable skills for teamwork from helping to create and participate in well-functioning groups. These groups are characterized by a culture of authentic caring and having effective, respectful procedures for resolving differences.



2.5 Responsibility Practices



Dispositions and abilities to reliably meet commitments and fulfill obligations of challenging roles.

INTRODUCTION

One marker of transition into adulthood is when a young person takes responsibility for their role as a member of a family and community. Anthropologists observed that children and youth in traditional agrarian societies are given a progression of increasingly difficult obligations that gradually prepare them for the roles of adulthood⁵¹. However, growing up in a relatively low-resourced household in America, as many participants in out of school programs do, may mean taking on adult responsibilities such as primary caretaker of siblings or elderly family members or earning wages for the household. These young people may move from childhood to adulthood without distinctly experiencing the intermediate stage of adolescence⁵². Meanwhile, some privileged young people in American society have fewer responsibilities and roles, partly because adults are ambivalent about giving them obligations or duties⁵³.

The development of responsibility is highly valued. It is linked to school completion, lower antisocial behavior, positive health behaviors, and productivity at work⁵⁴. In addition, responsibility is a core element of leadership in any context. Moreover, there is widespread concern about a lack of development of responsibility among youth and young adults in the United States⁵⁵.

Educational researchers know how responsibility develops: It emerges when youth have opportunities to take on increasingly difficult social obligations. The eight SEL Challenge programs provide optimal contexts for youth to develop responsibility by offering many experiences of taking on and completing substantive and increasingly difficult roles. Substantive roles come with obligations and demands, often within communally-valued activities and goals. Youth who take on roles experience accountability⁵⁶. Roles also come with additional benefits, including powers to exercise thought, choice, and action to fulfill necessary obligations⁵⁷.

Part of the difficulty in helping young people develop responsibility is that substantive roles inevitably entail demands that are challenging and that can be stressful and onerous. Some youth may buckle under the pressure. But the genius of the SEL Challenge programs is that they provide a set of scaffolded conditions that assist youth through new and sometimes demanding situations. They create opportunities that are meaningful to youth and give youth choices in taking roles. They cultivate a sense of shared ownership and obligation among peers, and staff provide structures and supports to help facilitate youth's experience⁵⁸.



Table 7. Responsibility Standards and Practice Indicators

KEY YOUTH EXPERIENCES	YE
ROLES. Youth take on roles and obligations within program activities.	
(R1) Youth choose or accept roles and their obligations; in some cases they initiate the roles.	
DEMANDS. Youth encounter difficult demands.	
(R2) As youth get into the roles, they encounter demands, requirements, and obligations; they understand that their actions in response to these demands will impact self, peers, or others.	
ACCOMPLISHMENT. Youth draw on resources to fulfill challenging roles and internalize accomplishment.	
(R3) Youth draw on resources to successfully fulfill roles and obligations. Resources include drawing on inner strength, commitment, or newfound resolve; a sense of obligation to their peers and the program goals; and/or leaders' support and encouragement.	
(R4) Youth succeed in their roles and internalize the experience of having fulfilled valued roles.	
STAFF PRACTICES	SP
STRUCTURE. Staff provide structured but open-ended roles for youth.	
(R5) The program design and the staff help create a variety of roles for youth that: a) have clear expectations and requirements; and b) have sufficient flexibility to allow youth initiative and ownership and accommodate youth's growing skills. (R6) Staff help fit individual youth to roles appropriate to their interests and capacities.	
MODELING. Staff model and fulfill their own roles.	
(R7) Staff model and fulfill their own roles in the program, defining and discussing them with youth.	
COACHING. Staff promote high expectations, respect youth's ownership of their roles, and provide help only as needed.	
(R8) Staff articulate, encourage, and enforce high accountability for youth living up to roles and obligations. (R9) Staff vigorously support youth's ownership, empowerment, and latitude for decision-making within their roles, providing assistance only as necessary.	

KEY YOUTH EXPERIENCES

ROLES. Youth take on roles and obligations within program activities.



Youth participate in work teams that (R1) develop cohesion and trusting relationships and (R2) a sense of group identity and purpose.

An essential element of responsibility is that the youth fully take on and invest in fulfilling the tasks and obligations of their role. The sense of ownership is enhanced when youth have the experience of choosing or defining their roles⁵⁹. In some cases, the staff create formal roles, and there is a structured choice process. At Youth on Board (YOB), for example, they have a mix of both. There are official positions, such as president, vice-president, secretary, and a teen newspaper writer. Members can run for these positions in an election process. All young people who are part of the Boston Student Advisory Council (BSAC) at YOB work on teams on social justice projects throughout the district and at individual high schools. For this kind of work, the process is more fluid. Staff lay out the roles and structures to provide guidance in helping youth think through their work, but they leave it to the youth to self-select roles and tasks as they come up. Teena-Marie Johnson, education organizer at YOB, described this process:

Staff say to the group “Hey guys, there are lots of things that need to happen to move this campaign forward. Who wants to take on what role?” Then the young people say, “All right, I’ll do the public comment,” or “I’ll go to the meeting with the Mayor.” Everyone feels part of the process. Everyone does things they are interested in as much as possible.

Youth within the SEL Challenge programs take on many different roles and their corresponding obligations, including short-term or rotating roles (e.g., leader of the day, navigator, fire person) and long-term ones (e.g., secretary, blogger, dance captain, committee member or chair). These include formal roles in which the title of the role and the obligations are predefined and informal roles that are created and negotiated spontaneously. For some youth, their roles within the group emerge as they begin to learn about each other and themselves. Julie Thayer, Init program manager at YWCA Boston (YW Boston), described one particular group of youth:

There were six of them, and they all had their strengths. Someone was really charismatic and got along with a lot of people. The students looked at him as a leader because of those skills, but quickly realized that he missed many meetings and wasn’t very organized. So he ended up playing the role of getting other students to come to meetings. Whereas the quieter students who didn’t view themselves as leaders realized, “Wow, I can really play a role in writing a big proposal to carry out a project in our school.” Those individual roles emerge throughout the course of the projects.

DeVonne Bernard, director, Teen Outreach Program at Wyman, described how having defined roles that youth choose themselves resulted in youth accepting the responsibilities of their roles without complaint:

We didn’t start out with roles or even identify them, but they felt it would go more smoothly if everybody had a place and identified roles. That came directly from the group. I’m excited that it has worked out since we transitioned into them choosing what they want to do. We don’t have to worry about them being frustrated or mad: “I didn’t want to do that,” or “You made me do that.” We don’t have that, thank goodness.

In other cases, the youth are taking on or choosing roles that may not have been specifically designed by the staff. In many programs youth spontaneously take responsibility for informal roles that are important to program goals (e.g., supporting each other, peacemaker, taking leadership for a task, taking roles within a team). At the Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Milwaukee (BGCGM), Natalie Cooper, senior director of social emotional learning, gave examples of youth stepping up to roles as needed:

Through the process of that group work, somebody’s always going to step up to be a leader. Some kids take on the informal role of being the peacemaker. Another informal role some kids take on is speaking for others. Sometimes during group work great ideas will surface, but there are kids who are afraid to speak up or just don’t feel like it. So others are able to advocate for them and speak on their behalf because they think it will be beneficial for the whole group. You also have kids who are regulators: “Y’all know what the rule is.”

DEMANDS. Youth encounter difficult demands.



(R2) As youth get into the roles, they encounter demands, requirements, and obligations; they understand that their actions in response to these demands will impact self, peers, or others.

Youth participants in SEL Challenge programs are expected to meet certain obligations and objectives, but they are often provided with the freedom to design and implement their own strategies. Especially for longer-term projects, youth may find themselves needing to solve new and unexpected challenges they hadn't anticipated when accepting the role⁶⁰. The roles may involve working with, teaching, or leading other people—peers, younger peers, or people in the community—so they require youth to develop and exercise the compassion, resolve, and interpersonal skills to do so effectively. For example, youth at Wyman cook monthly meals for family members of cancer patients who are undergoing treatment at a local facility. This project involves planning, preparing, serving, and storing food for large groups as well as considering the unique needs of participating families. Youth at YW Boston lead social change projects at their school, which means negotiating plans with the principal, staff, and students.

Many of the responsibilities in youth's roles involve obligations to the group or to other people and entail issues of integrity, trust, and safety. To have significant responsibility means that not meeting the requirements and obligations of roles will adversely affect others. Youth realize others are counting on them as they carry out the responsibilities of their roles. Elizabeth Howard, artistic director, Afterschool Program at The Possibility Project (TPP), described this process:

No one's ever cast in their own part; they're cast in a story that is representing one of their cast member's stories. There is deep responsibility to tell that story in the best way they can, and the responsibility to not tell people down because if you don't show up, we can't build stuff. They feel that, and they enforce that in each other. I don't have to enforce that. I give them skills and I say it a lot, but they are doing that for each other. That kind of responsibility to their friends or their cast members or to something bigger than themselves, I think it's a huge thing that they learn. How you can't just feel that, but you have to act on it. Your actions have to represent what you say you feel in that context.

At Philadelphia Wooden Boat Factory (PWBF), youth teams work on alternate nights on the same boat, so their performance of nightly goals impacts the workload of their teammates the following night. At Voyageur Outward Bound School (VOBS), the youth can easily see how the performance of their roles affects the expedition. Elizabeth "Poppy" Potter, director of operations, explained:

On the expeditions, there are specific roles for each day and each person. For example, one role is the navigator, who is responsible for using the map and compass to track the group's travel and ensuring they are traveling in the right direction. They learn from the instructors the goal for miles in the day. In another role, a student is leader of the day. This person ensures all things are functioning well and pays attention to the group's energy to decide about breaks, eating, and where someone might need help. This person works with the group to make these decisions and together they make it happen. Our students own these roles. They own their success and failure in them and, in both cases, instructors support the group in processing the experience.

Responsibility gets honed and tested when youth are weary or overwhelmed or are presented with competing interests and desires. When warm weather entices them away from the demands of rehearsing, will they remain committed to rehearsals? Will they show up to do their part? How do they respond when the role suddenly becomes bigger and more demanding than they ever realized or just boring and less exciting than they thought?



(R3) Youth draw on resources to successfully fulfill roles and obligations. Resources include drawing on inner strength, commitment, or newfound resolve; a sense of obligation to their peers and the program goals; and/or leaders' support and encouragement.

A majority of youth who take on long-term roles in SEL Challenge programs encounter times when the demands of the roles become greater than they anticipated, or they experience demands from elsewhere in their lives that makes them waver in their commitment⁶¹. They may have initially wanted the role, but now it feels onerous. So the question is: How do they find a way to continue?

The youth must draw on resources to fortify their resolve. Some youth draw on inner strength: "I'm not a quitter," or "My mom taught me to always finish everything I start." Many youth are influenced by their sense of accountability to their peers, the staff, or the people they are serving. As youth become collaborators and friends with peers in the program, discovery of new feelings of solidarity with and accountability to peers becomes an important force. Youth are motivated to complete their role and do it well to help peers. Youth from PWBF and YOB described how commitment to the rest of the team provided the impetus to keep going when the burden of responsibility was heavy:

PWBF: I have a responsibility not only to myself but to everyone else because I agreed to do this as my part of the team and finish it. The responsibility of it is what really got to me. The independence they gave me was like, "This is what you have to do. If you need help, we're going to help you, but this is your thing. Do it." The freedom of it and the responsibility that came with it was really life changing.

YOB: Knowing that other people are relying on you to show up at a certain meeting or to write up a specific thing, that's definitely helped with [responsibility].

As youth see how others depend on them and how their actions affect others, they recognize the shared investment they've made with peers, and meeting their obligations becomes a moral imperative. The value youth place on their roles in the programs and the promises they've made to people who have become important to them become a resource to draw on to resist other attractions. For instance, a youth participant from AHA! described how responsibility became the motivation to forgo drug use:

We're not allowed to do drugs before or after meetings. You have to be sober. So integrity, that's very important. It's also a good motive to stay sober because if I smoke after school I can't go to AHA! I can't show up stoned, and because I build that relationship with staff, I'd feel horrible showing up to groups stoned because that's a promise I made to them.

Staff also play multiple roles in helping youth rise to the challenges (see Staff Practices below), including providing encouragement and helping youth to recognize the resources they have available to them. They also support youth's identification with the collective work of the team. One young person at YW Boston described being influenced by a staff member:

Towards the end of Immersion Week, one of the staff, Rae, gave this inspirational quote: "You can't half-ass social justice. You are either all in or you're not in." What I took away from that is that it's your moral responsibility to take action to be a leader in your community. It's like that Spiderman quote, "With great power comes great responsibility." You have to take it whether you like it or not.

Although youth have chosen to take on challenging roles by participating in their SEL Challenge programs, they sometimes need strong sources of motivation and encouragement to draw on to fulfill their roles. Using the resources available to them—encouragement from staff and peers, inner strength, a sense of commitment and integrity—offers youth opportunities to succeed in their roles and experience the resulting sense of accomplishment.

(R4) Youth succeed in their roles and internalize the experience of having fulfilled valued roles.

As youth experience success in a role or obligation, they often feel a sense of pride and satisfaction, both individually and collectively. They feel more competent and more capable of taking on greater responsibilities. Some report feeling eager to take on more and bigger roles⁶². Fulfilling a challenging role that impacts others is not a common experience among American youth⁶³. For youth in out-of-school programs, it is often a very positive experience⁶⁴. Staff of the SEL Challenge programs reported that it can be powerful for youth to be recognized openly when they have successfully fulfilled a responsibility. Paul Griffin, founder and president of TPP, said:

For many of our youth, this recognition is rare and cements the value of responsibility in their lives.

At YOB, regularly fulfilling routine tasks, such as efficiently running the biweekly meetings, represents the competence of the group. One YOB youth shared:

So just working through things as quickly as possible and getting through, you feel a sense of accomplishment when you get through everything on the agenda and leave on time.

Several staff at SEL Challenge programs discussed the impact of culminating events and how powerful it is for youth to witness themselves complete something they may not have thought possible. Elizabeth Howard at TPP shared a story:

They have the realization that what they did had an impact, and it wasn't just because they were good or sang and danced really well. The audience got what they were intending. That has a huge impact for them, for their voice or power in the world. A lot of them will say, "I didn't realize I could do that."

Over time, youth come to internalize the obligations of their roles within the program. They step up, take pride, and take ownership of the program. One example is from Jennifer Freed, co-executive director at AHA!:

We don't have to recruit people anymore because the kids themselves own this AHA! thing. They bring people in because they know how to do it. At least twice we weren't able to be at a session because something happened to staff and [the kids] said, "Okay, we'll just do it in the park ourselves."

Oftentimes, youth undergo a slow transition over the course of the program and develop skills that may transfer to other areas of their lives, such as school or future careers. Below are stories about youth from Wyman and TPP. At Wyman, DeVonne Bernard, director, Teen Outreach Program, shared a story of how one young person blossomed when he learned to cook and took on the role as cook when the youth made meals for residents of the American Cancer Society Hope Lodge:

He was really shy and didn't want to do anything. He didn't want to help out. He really found his love—the love for cooking at the American Cancer Society project. Once we encouraged him to engage with other students, he just jumped right in. But it wasn't the facilitators who got him there, it was his peers. They really got him out of his bubble to come over and at least start chopping up stuff. It was chopping up stuff, and then him making a dish, and then he became the commander in the kitchen. He just ran it. And he actually is a chef now. He owned his own restaurant for a year before he came back to work at Wyman.



At TPP, one youth's role as a leader in the cast emerged over two years of participation. Paul Griffin explained:

Jabari had two older brothers who were high school dropouts and spent most of their time on the streets. When Jabari began the program, he was on a similar path. Early on in the program, Jabari was wild—he did not take anything seriously. He was, however, incredibly charismatic and a natural leader. He kept coming largely because of the efforts of the Production Team and Artistic Director who could see what he was capable of and refused to abandon him. In his second year, Jabari was selected for the Production Team. That year, with many bumps in the proverbial road, Jabari came to realize what he was capable of and what it meant for him to commit to others. He began to focus, engage others, and use his considerable talents toward achieving the goals of the team. There was no one moment that stands out. Jabari slowly and not so steadily grew into an awareness of his role in the ensemble and this translated over time to his role in the world. After leaving, he finished his GED, got his first legitimate job, and is now applying to college.

As youth reflect on their experience and sense of accomplishment, they begin to internalize the value of successfully filling a role. Staff are an essential part of this process.

STAFF PRACTICES

STRUCTURE. Staff provide structured but open-ended roles for youth.

SP

(R5) The program design and the staff help create a variety of roles for youth that:

- a) have clear expectations and requirements; and
- b) have sufficient flexibility to allow youth initiative and ownership and accommodate youth's growing skills.

SEL Challenge programs intentionally create a variety of roles for youth. This variety gives them multiple opportunities to grow in responsibility and learn different skills. Paul Griffin at TPP expressed it this way:

Sometimes they're being an audience. Sometimes they're being witnesses. Sometimes they are being leaders where they stand up and lead something. Sometimes they are being organizers. Their roles shift a lot depending on what we're doing. But I do think that the multiplicity of those roles makes it interesting for them, more exciting. I think it's a big part of the learning, too, because every time they're doing it, they're looking in from a different lens.

At BGCGM, there are teams of youth who take on certain roles to support the development of their creative production. Natalie Cooper, senior director of social emotional learning, explained:

We have our interview team, kids [who] help with the interviews. We have our script team, the kids who form the script structure for the documentary. We have the kids who I call my creative team, the ones who work with La'Ketta to help create the vision. We got our kids who are, like, all about the music. We kind of have our promo team, the kids who are tweeting, on Facebook getting the word out about the film.

Youth roles are designed to support the youth's personal growth. Roles are sufficiently structured to provide direction to the youth but contain enough flexibility to challenge the youth to adapt to circumstances and learn. For youth to learn responsibility, roles need to have requirements and demands. However, youth are not thrust into roles without being equipped and empowered with the resources to meet the demands of the role. In many cases, this balance of structure and flexibility with requirements and empowerment is enabled by training, assistance as needed, and supporting youth ownership; that is, the wise coaching on the part of staff that is discussed in more detail under Coaching (R8 and R9).

In all the Challenge programs, basic commitments are required of participating youth, such as being punctual at meetings, showing up sober, and treating each other with respect. For some youth, these requirements may seem demanding. In addition, specific roles have their own requirements. At VOBS, the structured roles youth take on during their multi-night expedition are defined by the tasks that the expedition requires, such as gathering firewood, preparing meals, and setting up tents. Flexibility within roles is then permitted as youth grow into being able to handle the responsibility. At that point, youth may be allowed to modify the roles and determine who is best suited to fill those roles.

Through a variety of committees at YW Boston, youth help shape the project according to their ideas, abilities, and interests. The social justice art slam committee, for example, was responsible for thinking about what the event should look like. The marketing group decided what promotional materials should be developed and what their messages should be.

At many of the programs, as the projects progress, roles evolve when youth begin directing portions of the sessions and assuming greater responsibilities. At AHA!, youth may lead mindfulness or reflection exercises. At VOBS, the leader of the day takes that role. Laura Greenlee Karp explained:

The leader of the day is basically the third instructor. The instructors can download information to the leader of the day, and they can then go and talk to the group instead of the instructors having to do it. That helps transfer responsibility to the student.

At Wyman, there is an intentional process of encouraging older youth who have been in the program for some time to gradually take on positions of leadership, in some cases moving into staff positions for middle school youth. Allison Williams, senior vice president of programs, shared:

Our young people bring a lot of energy. We have 9-12th graders, so there's an opportunity, especially with older youth, to have them in leadership roles because they've shown growth and development over time. Some of our kids have facilitated Teen Outreach Program (TOP) lessons as well as our facilitators could. The opportunity is to there to capitalize on that and engage young people more directly in leadership roles. Giving them progressive roles as they move through the program is inherent to how we structure that program.

Initially, the youth are given explicit directions to clarify the expectations of the roles they've been assigned. Brett Hart, executive director at PWBF, also shared how youth who are more experienced are asked to lead groups or teach participants who are newer to the program:

Some students have become proficient and are teaching other students how to use tools. There are also those informal roles where I'll put people on a task and one who's done it will teach the other student how to do it. This happens almost every night.

Several SEL Challenge programs have a group of returning youth for whom they have separate roles and a higher set of expectations. At PWBF they have the Reach Team, at TPP they have the Production Team, and YOB has the Working Group. For several other programs, returning youth are integrated with the new participants of the program, but staff may hold higher expectations for senior group members. Jennifer Freed at AHA! explained:

If they're returning, we ask them to start out helping, really take the role of when we do games or when we do this there's a lead. You know, they really step up and demonstrate.



These returning youth exemplify the progression in Challenge programs towards taking on greater responsibility over time for the life and mission of the group.

At TPP, the power, independence, and flexibility youth are granted increase over time in alignment with their growing responsibilities. In particular, the Production Team, a group of returning youth who work closely with the Artistic Director and share the responsibilities of writing and directing the show, receive additional training and are gradually encouraged to make decisions without support from the staff. Paul Griffin said:

The young people's roles shifts. They start sort of just participating, and over time they begin to become creative agents inside the program. So when they get up on stage to do their performance, we're sitting in the back of the house. We have nothing to do with what's happening on stage. It's all them.

STRUCTURE. Staff provide structured but open-ended roles for youth.

SP

(R6) Staff help fit individual youth to roles appropriate to their interests and capacities.

The variety of the roles and the creativity involved in the SEL Challenge projects provide multiple opportunities for assignments to be fitted to youth's interests and to evolve toward greater responsibility over time as youth's capabilities grow.

Youth at VOBS embark on week-long expeditions, and there are many daily roles that help structure the work that needs to be done. Coaching assures the tasks within these roles are suited to the ability levels of the youth (see R6 and R9). And, although the roles are generally prescribed by the necessities of living at camp and the nature of the expedition, Elizabeth "Poppy" Potter shared that she developed a role called the photojournalist whose responsibility is to take pictures and keep track in the group journal about what happens each day.

Her development of the photojournalist role is an example of staff creating roles that can capture youth's interests and skills and provide open-ended opportunities for youth to contribute, not just to the group's material needs, but to the processes of observation and reflection through which the group's learning occurs.

A consistent feature throughout the SEL Challenge programs is that staff work hard to truly understand and know the youth in their program. This is exhibited in the Responsibility domain as staff assign and negotiate roles, determine the amount of support and direction needed for the various roles, and adjust the pace of increasing responsibilities to the competencies and comfort levels of individuals. In some cases, staff draw on youth with specific skills to capitalize on those as a strengths. At YOB, staff pay close attention to the ambitions youth have towards particular roles and where their motivation may be coming from to take on a role. Teena-Marie Johnson explained:

I usually listen for "why" when they give their speech. I think it's just something that they may be interested in. Bill might have a gift at facilitating, so he wants to be president. Pedro might have a gift for taking really great notes, so he would like to be secretary. And I think a lot of that is why they're interested because of their own personal gifts and what they like to do.

Staff's relationships with youth help them to identify and select roles that fit well with youth's interests and abilities and guide them into more demanding roles over time.

MODELING. Staff model and fulfill their own roles.

SP

(R7) Staff model and fulfill their own roles in the program, defining and discussing them with youth.

Developers of SEL Challenge programs realize youth cannot be expected to grow in responsibility if staff are not modeling their own professional standards and role requirements. Jennifer Freed pointed out how this ethos of partnership and shared responsibility follows a consistent, top-down model at AHA!:

The partnership model comes from the very top. When we pass our positions on, it will be a co-executive director position. I think that most of society's ills come from the power of a winner-takes-all model, so from the get-go the partnership model is what defines us. It's throughout our structure and programming and the way we work with every group. There's not one leader. People get modeling from the ground up and top down about what it looks like to be in relationships in leadership.

Staff also model in specific ways for youth. They may engage in the same task as the youth, demonstrating how to do it. They may describe their own role and the roles of the youth. They may point out behaviors that serve as an example of a role being carried out successfully by staff or youth. Laura Greenlee Karp at VOBS explained how modeling works on their expeditions:

The roles are established by the instructors, and then the instructors will walk through the roles with the students, but the instructors are always actively modeling what those roles look like.

When youth become staff members or junior leaders, the modeling comes full circle. Second year apprentices at the PWBF become part of the Reach Team. One of these young leaders described their experience:

We're the veterans, so other people look up to us. People come to us with questions, "You've been here for so long, why don't you teach me how to do this?" You feel, "Ah, so I'm no longer the apprentice." They made that evident on the Reach team: "You guys are the veterans. You're setting an example. Now you need to do what you've got to do."

The Production Team at TPP is comprised of returning youth who receive extra training to organize and lead the upcoming theatrical presentation. In many ways, this team serves as an extension of the staff. Elizabeth Howard reminded them of the impact they have on the rest of the cast by the way they model behavior:

If you don't show up on time to production team, our cast is going to be consistently late. If you guys are disorganized and unfocused and we can't figure out what to do in this production team meeting, I guarantee you our cast is going to be disorganized because that's who their leaders are. Or if you guys are 100 percent and you're in it and we're doing this, the cast will be, too, because that's going to translate to them.

In modeling their own roles, staff are both providing instruction and communicating to youth their high expectations.

COACHING. Staff promote high expectations, respect youth's ownership of their roles, and provide help only as needed.

SP

Coaching is about balancing the need for youth to take responsibility and ownership with providing supports youth need for developing mastery. It is about holding youth accountable, supporting ownership, and negotiating at the same time⁶⁵. For youth who have taken on a long-term role, staff typically follow a sequence of first defining, training, and providing substantial supports for youth in their roles, then gradually backing off and holding the youth accountable to perform to high standards with considerable independence. Staff attempt to provide no more support than is necessary but exercise care and wisdom to know when and what support is needed for each individual.

(R8) Staff articulate, encourage, and enforce high accountability for youth living up to roles and obligations.

For many youth, high expectations from staff play an important role in keeping them motivated in their role and bringing out their best work. Because most youth in effective programs trust and identify with staff members, they readily internalize those expectations and use them to keep giving their all. As a youth at PWBF explained:

Everyone here—Victoria, Andy, Jesus—everyone holds you to a high standard. So I hold myself to a higher standard than I used to. That responsibility and work ethic—I always demand more of myself. If I don't do my best, I ask myself why I didn't do my best and how I can do it better. That's just transferred into everything else I do.

Rachel Gunther, associate director at YOB, acknowledged public speaking comes naturally to some individuals but emphasized they expect all youth to grow in this area:

If we see someone with those [communication] skills, we give them opportunities to build on that. At the same time, we try to push those students who don't. Through the years, they definitely progress because even if they're not the one speaking at the Department of Education, they're going to have other opportunities to speak. Whether it's just doing a listening project at the train station and talking to strangers about what they believe or meeting with a state senator. They do that as well, and that's a huge skill set they need to build.

Whether new or experienced, some youth still benefit from reminders and encouragement. In many programs, staff do a lot of reminding, nudging, and prodding to reinforce accountability within the group. La'Ketta Caldwell, senior program manager of social emotional learning at BGC&M, shared the challenges she faces in keeping youth focused on their roles and commitments and the coaching she provides to promote that expectations are upheld:

For instance, the young person I saw today has senioritis. I have to make sure I'm there and checking in. It's like case management. The hardest part is to be consistent all the way through, to keep up. Really, in the fall it's easier to do that. In the spring, whoa, it gets harder. You're competing with so much during this time period.

COACHING. Staff promote high expectations, respect youth's ownership of their roles, and provide help only as needed.

SP

(R9) Staff vigorously support youth's ownership, empowerment, and latitude for decision-making within their roles, providing assistance only as necessary.

Youth are highly valued in all of the SEL Challenge programs. Youth ownership of their roles is enhanced when their input is taken seriously or when they are given significant freedom to make decisions within their roles. At YW Boston, Beth Chandler, vice president of programs, explained the influence and power of youth committees:

There are different youth committees that help influence program content or the shape of a particular program day or thinking about how we engage alumni. Youth are on those committees to provide us with their input and thoughts. Delegates participate in the interviews for the upcoming class and many of them play a role in recruiting. The youth also vote for a class speaker for graduation.

Letting youth figure something out on their own does not imply a passive role for staff. Considerable skill and energy may go into pressing youth to struggle with a task, use their own judgment, and make their own decisions. When youth are passive or ask for direction, staff might reflect the question back to them. At TPP, this is a form of deprogramming staff do with the youth, many of whom are used to being told what to do by others. Paul Griffin said:

A lot of them, if there's a problem, they say, "What are we going to do?" And of course we say, "Well, what do you think we should do?" That's a constant refrain for us. We're trying to empower them to do those things for themselves. It takes a little while for that relationship to shift. TPP staff are trained to listen first, ask questions second, and offer options third. They understand that youth must lead the way, and our role is to facilitate that leadership.

At VOBS, the intention is that by the end of the expedition, the youth are leading and making decisions as much as possible. Elizabeth "Poppy" Potter explained:

Earlier in the course, the instructors may determine who's going to do what role, and later in the course the group may say, "You know what, [Name] you are really the best navigator. We want you to be the navigator today." That's an element that the instructors could choose to hand over to the group for their final expedition. "You have to have X, Y, and Z roles. You guys should determine who's in that." If it's a more mature group, the instructors may pose it as, "All right let's look at group roles. So far we've had this role, this

role, and this role. For the final expedition do you want to modify that at all, and who's going to play each role on what days?" As the course progresses and the group develops its skills and interpersonal relationships, those are things that can be determined by the group.

Staff are cautious, preferring to limit exercising their role as an authority whenever possible so as not to compromise youth's ownership of their roles. Youth at the PWBF understand how staff use this practice with them:

You have the responsibility to complete the tasks that you're given. So it's kind of like you have to pull your weight. I mean, you will be helped if you need help, but they want you to go as far as you can with it before you come and ask questions.

Staff must feel comfortable giving up some of their control in order to give youth authentic roles of authority and decision-making. Sometimes this means expecting the youth to hold each other accountable. Victoria Guidi, program director, Boat Build and Sail at PWBF said:

When they're off task, that's pretty clear. It's obvious. Since we're a team, I'm not going to make it like I'm the authority. If I don't see you working, I'm going to go over and talk to you, but I'll also allow the other students to be that support and encouragement to members who might be disengaged or not on task. I don't want it to feel like it's another classroom environment. This is their project. They own it. They're in charge of it. They're the support network for each other.

Having high expectations and giving youth ownership and the latitude to make decisions encourages a high level of responsibility when staff have scaffolded effectively and set up a supportive learning environment. Youth ownership leads to youth learning from doing, including learning from mistakes and perceived failures.

One youth from Wyman reflected on his awakening to what it meant to be responsible:

They gave us the leeway: "Ok, this is y'all's service. Y'all need to plan it and do it." It was then where I took control and said, "Okay, we need to be responsible for this, this, and this." It's coming out of that comfort zone and saying, "I'm going to take control of this. If it goes south, then I will take the blame for it." You know, being the responsible person in the group.

A key to having youth grow in responsibility is providing them with adequate support but not more than is necessary. In education, this "sweet spot" of optimal challenge is known as the zone of proximal development⁶⁶. Scaffolding describes supplying just enough individualized support until youth are able to handle a responsibility or task without assistance. When youth take on a role, staff are there to help them get started and help them reflect and learn from the experience afterward. In examples from PWBF, Brett Hart described how they coach youth who take on team leadership roles to lead a daily activity or discussion called "check-in". PWBF staff also follow up after youth have lead or facilitated an activity. Victoria Guidi added:

Students have the opportunity to be a facilitator. They put themselves in that role. That's great because afterward I can say, "Hey, so how did that go for you? How do you feel you did?" That will lead into a discussion and I can say, "Yeah, it's tough, right?" Then I can help them reflect on how they might be in that group dynamic.

In some cases, staff work alongside youth filling complementary roles that draw on the staff members' unique abilities. At YOB, tasks are often divided between the youth committee and the staff. The staff support youth by asking critical questions and painting the big picture but sometimes provide practical help as well. Teena-Marie Johnson at YOB, explained:

We help them because they're in school and this is our full time job. We take what they've created and brush it up for them. We help them think about how to frame the campaign plan, but it's definitely a support between both sides.

2.6 Initiative Practices



Capacities to take action, sustain motivation, and persevere through challenge toward an identified goal.

INTRODUCTION

“BSAC has helped me with initiative. I was just a sayer and not a doer, and BSAC is slowly and surely helping me to be the change that I want to see in the world.” Youth participant at Youth on Board (YOB)

In order to become an effective “doer,” as the youth participant says in the above quote, youth must take action toward a goal and continue that effort over time to see that plan through. The abilities required include not just initiating effort toward a goal, but being able to regulate and sustain that effort through the challenges and setbacks that might be part of the journey. Initiative is not just, “I want to do this, this matters!” It’s having the experience and resiliency to persevere through the frustrations, grinding work, disappointments, and doubt that often arise in the pathway to reaching a real-world goal. Initiative can also be experienced and practiced collectively as group motivation, action, and perseverance.

Initiative involves mobilizing and controlling motivation and attention⁶⁷. Many studies have shown that motivation depends on the alignment of many factors. Individuals need to know how to do an activity or feel confident they can learn; it helps if they want to do it and to be working with others⁶⁸. In real life, there are also numerous factors that can obstruct motivation, especially when we are talking about sustained motivation to reach a challenging goal. It’s possible to get overwhelmed, lose interest, or just get bored of the work. Other activities or goals can compete and become more important: everything from schoolwork, to close friends and romantic relationships, to the Internet. So there many separate pieces that need to come together to create a cohesive whole, and the task for young people is to learn how to manage and arrange those pieces.

Well-run youth programs are rich learning contexts for youth to gain the experiences, skills, and dispositions for initiative⁶⁹. Research has long shown that motivation grows when people experience positive relationships, feel competent in what they are doing, and feel that what they are doing matters⁷⁰. These are things that out-of-school programs can provide, and the SEL Challenge programs are especially good at providing them. But, as with other social and emotional skills, initiative is (almost by definition) something educators can’t just teach or give to youth. The staff at these programs are skilled at helping youth cultivate motivation that comes from within, and over time youth progressively learn to sustain this motivation, including through challenges and setbacks. Staff play important roles in providing structures that help youth identify difficult personal goals that motivate their projects, and then staff help as needed to allow youth to experience success in persevering and working toward them.

The key youth experiences in this domain outline the sequential aspects of initiative: setting goals (deciding where to aim), motivation (finding the internal energy to do the associated actions), and perseverance (continuing to do those actions over time). The staff practices support those youth experiences by facilitating growth of motivation and supporting sustained effort.

Table 8. Initiative Standards and Practice Indicators

KEY YOUTH EXPERIENCES YE
SET GOALS. Youth set ambitious but realistic goals.
(I1) Youth have experiences setting challenging but achievable short- and long-term goals.
MOTIVATION. Youth develop and sustain motivation by doing work that matters to them.
(I2) Youth develop motivation as they: a) form connections with collaborators; b) build skills and confidence; and c) see the value in the work for their futures (adult roles and career), their communities, and the world.
PERSEVERANCE. Youth have experiences persevering through the ups and downs of difficult work.
(I3) Youth have repeated experiences of persevering through strenuous tasks and challenging work. (I4) Youth experience the satisfaction of accomplishment and social acknowledgment of their efforts and achievements.
STAFF PRACTICES SP
SCAFFOLDING. Staff provide ongoing assistance to help youth develop motivation within the work.
(I5) Staff help youth develop motivation by having youth select or shape the program goals and project(s) according to what matters to them. (I6) Staff support youth's discovery of personal motivation in the program work by kindling youth's experience of belonging, competence, and connection of the program work to personal goals or societal purpose.
COACHING. Staff encourage youth to persist through challenging work, making sure that the effort behind youth's achievements is recognized.
(I7) Staff give youth opportunities to persevere through challenges, setbacks, tiredness/tedium/boredom and also provide encouragement as needed to keep youth's attention focused and their effort engaged in keeping the program work moving forward. (I8) Staff help youth see the progress and successes that come from their effort and perseverance.



KEY YOUTH EXPERIENCES

SET GOALS. Youth set ambitious but realistic goals.



(I1) Youth have experiences setting challenging but achievable short- and long-term goals.

In all of the SEL Challenge programs, youth are involved in setting goals. The goals serve as a frame for youth experiences and staff practices that support social and emotional growth across domains. The goals youth set vary across programs. Staff work with youth to make sure the goals they set are challenging but achievable.

Goal setting takes different forms. Sometimes goals are personal goals. As Victoria Guidi, program director, Boat Build and Sail at Philadelphia Wooden Boat Factory (PWBF), explained:

No one knows you better than yourself, and we help them to be reflective about who they are and where their value system lies and seeing that their daily practices are aligning with that. We sit down with them and set up goals with them. That's something that we did at the beginning of the year and that we revisited halfway through. Setting up short-term and long-term goals for them, both personally and professionally.

At Voyageur Outward Bound School (VOBS), youth set goals for themselves that they will work on within the program activities. Laura Greenlee Karp, program coordinator at VOBS, illustrated how youth choose goals that are meaningful to them:

So maybe somebody really wants to work one specific skill, such as by the end of the program being able to tell their uncle that he's important to them. That student can set that goal with the instructor and that instructor can really work with them so that they can achieve that goal on their own.

At AHA!, staff work with youth to identify personal goals for self-change. Jennifer Freed, co-executive director, described the process:

Some of the questions we ask in different ways throughout the semester are, "What do you need help with? What are the biggest things you're having to overcome from your past? Where in your life right now do you feel like you're off course and need support to get back on track?" We'll ask a question like, "If there was one thing in your life you could really transform, what would it be—a habit, something you're doing that you're not proud of?" We say things like, "What's the thing you have the hardest time talking about?"

In a number of programs, youth set the goals for the projects they will do. For example, at YOB, youth make decisions together on what the focus of their action campaign will be for the year. Rachel Gunther, associate director, elaborated:

They are deciding what campaigns are relevant to them. If half of our program participants are English language learners, they are more likely to say we have to have more support for English language learners in the public school system. Charter schools are another good example. If there are people who've had negative experiences with charter schools, that ends up forming the work. The Boston Student Advisory Council (BSAC) also hear stories from their peers that they share with the group. It is both their experiences as well as what they see and hear in the world.

Staff help youth learn to set goals that are attainable. This includes both short-term and long-term goals. Andrew Cintron, an alumnus of PWBF who is now a Program Assistant, shared the importance of youth setting goals for what they will achieve and that are within reach for each program session. Trying to get too much carpentry done in one night, for example, only leads to frustration:

We don't want to give the student so much on their plate that they feel as though their nightly goal is too much. We have to set the right amount of goal for them that night.

Victoria Guidi from PWBF built on the idea of helping youth to set realistic goals:

We help them develop goals by questioning how they will do it and if those goals are realistic or lofty.

In addition to this ongoing coaching, many of the programs have curriculum content around goal setting. Wyman has training modules designed to teach youth to create SMART goals: specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time sensitive. VOBS uses a system of checklists to help youth define and stay on track towards goals. YOB and YWCA Boston (YW Boston) offer skills-based workshops on goal setting.

MOTIVATION. Youth develop and sustain motivation by doing work that matters to them.

YE

(I2) Youth develop motivation as they:

- a) form connections with collaborators;
- b) build skills and confidence; and
- c) see the value in the work for their futures (adult roles and career), their communities, and the world.

In all of the SEL Challenge programs, the youth must find the motivation to attempt to reach the project goals they have set and maintain that motivation over the long haul. The motivation youth tap into can come from different sources. The emotional connections youth have with their peers and staff in the program are one source of motivation as they desire to give to people they care about and want to support collective goals. Relationships with other members of a group are very powerful, energizing, and motivating⁷¹. Shared goals provide powerful reinforcement for motivation. Youth from PWBF explained:

It was a good work ethic. I didn't want to be the one person who didn't have that work ethic. So even if I hated it, I did my part because everyone relied on me to do my part.

It's really about all of us coming together. I have to keep my mind on that when I'm frustrated and don't want to work.

You have the motive—everybody around here has it. It's friendly. So they're going to motivate you to do things.

Youth's growing sense of confidence and pride as their skills improve is another source of motivation. In fact, confidence isn't just a source of motivation, it's a prerequisite for initiative⁷². Brett Hart, Executive Director at PWBF, described the strength-based process by which they address this obstacle. He also described how increasing skill and motivation reciprocally reinforce each other:

We hear students frequently state that they are "no good" at something, perhaps when math turns up in building or sailing. How can one be motivated to do more, when they feel they are "no good"? Our program uses a strength-based approach to youth development. Adopting this approach required subtle but important changes in our interactions with youth. The basic concept is to find strengths and create new competencies, and then to embrace these areas, holding youth to high expectations. The actual gains may be modest, but through focusing on the work accomplished, students' pride soars—sometimes they literally beam—and this legitimate pride translates into motivation to explore more, push further. Small successes beget increased effort in a feed-forward loop. Our staff members understand that youth are experts in their own situations. Motivation can't be delivered in a fancy speech or learned from someone else. If we try to affect change through "good advice" based on our own expertise—no matter how insightful or emotionally charged—rather than through empowering youth, we negate their autonomy and potentially undermine their competence.

Another important source of motivation is when youth see that their work in the program matters or that it has meaning. They may see that they are developing skills that will later translate into a job or be valuable in adult roles. Or they may see that the work they are doing in community action projects can change their community for the better. Dawes and Larson⁷³ found youth's experience of these two forms of mattering—mattering to their future or to others in their community—had powerful effects in fueling youth's motivation and engagement in program activities. The power of youth discovering that the work mattered to their future was demonstrated in several programs. Andrew Cintron at PWBF, recalled:

I was really motivated because I like hands-on work and had never built a boat before. I completed something that really meant something to me. I didn't know it was going to ignite a fire. Doing this work, I figured out what I want to do with my life. If you do a nice sheer line, a boat can be really sexy—just the curves on the boat—and we built that ourselves. Now I want to go to a school for boat building. I had a hard time in school, but now I want to build boats or work with youth.

Youth's discovery that their work mattered to their community also became a powerful motivator: They gained a sense of purpose. Natalie Cooper, Senior Director of Social Emotional Learning at Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Milwaukee (BGCGM), talked about the importance of youth being heard in their community:

I think the point where the kids start talking to us about their future and their collective community being a part of that vision is huge as well. Their lens has changed, and it's not about the autonomy itself, but about the community and how they can impact their community.

For other youth, the sense of mattering to their community came from making a positive difference for their peers. At BGCGM, a particular group of youth became motivated while serving as models to younger youth. Natalie Cooper explained how former staff member Kaleel helped boys in the program organize in a city campaign called Saving Our Sons that promotes black male achievement in Milwaukee:

So some of the boys have taken on that role and the positive feedback that we're getting for our film from the few people who have previewed it is that we really portray African American boys in a positive light. Our boys made sure that happened. At first the boys were like, "Nah, I don't want to share that. I'm going to look weak." But now they're secure enough to have it viewed by everybody who's going to be in the audience.

In this example, as the boys saw what a positive impact their work had on the community, they became more comfortable being involved to promote the message of their film.

The greater the personal connection youth have to their work, the more powerful their motivation and cognitive engagement becomes⁷⁴. Below, Natalie Cooper related how an emotional memory for one youth sparked passion in creating change in the community:

It was emotional because his uncle was killed, but it really became a discussion about how that issue has impacted their personal lives. "What can we do? What is it that we can do to make a change?" Then it came up, "Well, there ain't nothing we can do. People gonna get shot every day, nobody cares." I was like, "But if we don't do anything, how does that change anything?"

One youth from YW Boston commented about the importance of being able to direct emotion towards positive change:

Knowing all the details was much more helpful than having the raw emotions. The raw emotions fueled us to stop the inequality, but the knowledge was the tool to apply that.

PERSEVERANCE. Youth have experiences persevering through the ups and downs of difficult work.



(I3) Youth have repeated experiences of persevering through strenuous tasks and challenging work.

Having an initial burst of energy and action toward a goal that matters is not sufficient. Directed action must be sustained over time and in spite of challenges. The previous standard was about developing intrinsic motivation. This standard focuses on sustaining action and persevering with a difficult task over a longer period of time. Angela Duckworth refers to this as grit⁷⁵.

Participating in a long-term, challenging project is essential to learning perseverance. The SEL Challenge projects, such as building a boat, creating a film or theater production, or planning a community action project, are challenging, multi-step endeavors that are carried out over weeks or months. Engaging in a long-term project provides multiple opportunities for youth to push through external challenges or internal



resistance. Experiences of perseverance, of setting goals and reaching them, of seeing oneself as having not given up, have a cumulative and reinforcing effect within youth that builds their capacity for grit and tenacity⁶. Some youth succeed with dogged persistence at a task. Others learn to get back into the saddle after failure or discouragement, a facet of resilience. Both strengthen their capacity to consistently work to accomplish their goals.

Shorter-term activities such as VOBS's day-long outings and physical challenges also require persisting with difficult tasks. At VOBS, staff use a process of experiential education in order to help youth to gain resilience. Here, Elizabeth "Poppy" Potter, director of operations, explained the process:

They gain it firsthand by needing to use grit in our experiences as they push through something that is difficult. This may be a physical challenge, like scaling a rock face; a social challenge, like resolving a conflict with a peer or adult; or an emotional challenge, like understanding how self-doubt stops them from exceeding their potential. When they apply grit in our program, our staff uses different techniques to help the students acknowledge how they used grit and how it helped them experience success. The staff then process with the students to help them identify other life situations they can apply grit to.

Boat building also presents opportunities for youth to persevere through challenging work. The cumulative nature of the work requires that tasks be completed sequentially. If any individual task is unsuccessful, it affects the rest of the project. Such setbacks are part of the learning process, though. Victoria Guidi at PWBF explained:

When a piece of wood splits, or we plane down too much so that now we're under the line and our piece of wood is going to be too small or too thin, these are constant setbacks that we have to work out and work through. There are constant mistakes going on and we discuss them.

Learning to accept setbacks as an inevitable part of pursuing a goal is a valuable lesson in developing initiative.

Youth can also get tired, especially toward the end of a long-term project. This is where they may rely on each other to stay focused, or where staff may need to step in to provide encouragement. A youth participant at YW Boston shared how the group keeps its members moving toward the goal:

It's a long process, but we know we have to go all the way to the end when we actually do our presentation. So we constantly meet with each other and talk about the goal.

Youth also gain encouragement from staff when they lag towards the end of the year. La'Ketta Caldwell, senior program manager of social emotional learning at BGCGM, said:

It happens every year; we get to the point where they're tired. So we have to say, "We're almost there." That reinforcement builds them up because by the end of the year they're so tired.

(I4) Youth experience the satisfaction of accomplishment and social acknowledgment of their efforts and achievements.

In SEL Challenge programs, youth learn sustained effort results in accomplishment. This concept that learning and accomplishment are a result of that hard work, not innate ability or chance, is the “growth mindset” studied by Carol Dweck and colleagues⁷⁷. This plays an important role in developing initiative and sustaining it over time. Youth see that their continued effort is meaningful, and less emphasis is placed on initial or easy success. As youth gain success that requires effort, they begin to understand what it means to push through something hard and discover that there’s something deeper within them that can get them through difficult tasks.

This experience can occur on a small scale. Elizabeth “Poppy” Potter at VOBS, shared how climbing a difficult rock face served as a physical challenge with a tangible result:

When a person is rock climbing there is typically a point in the climb they get to that’s a little bit more difficult than the others. Once the climber discovers they can move through that, the rest of the climb will be a little bit easier. We call that a crutch move. There have been countless times when I’ve seen a young person get to that spot on a rock climb, know that they have set their goal a little bit higher than that, and they push through it. Each responds to that time where they have to push through a little bit differently. Some of them respond well if the rest of the group encourages them and shows them where they might be able to put their foot. Other students ask for silence because they need to work through it themselves. In any case, when they push through that moment, they have an understanding of what it means to be determined and what it means to have an important goal that they work towards.

On a longer-term scale, accomplishment contributes to changes in the self when youth realize that their sustained effort made an impact on others. Satisfaction and pride can help youth remember the rewards of sustained effort and maintain motivation for future work⁷⁸. Social acknowledgment of accomplishments can serve important functions in helping youth see the significance of their sustained and cumulative effort. This is sometimes recognized in a celebration event. Elizabeth Howard, artistic director of the Afterschool Program at The Possibility Project (TPP), shared what a culminating performance feels like:

The completion of the show—they will describe that as this incredible experience. Having people in the audience hear them, and come up to them and start talking about themselves and say, “That was my story. I’m so grateful that you guys put that on stage. That was so helpful to me.” To have the realization that what they did had an impact and it wasn’t just because they were good or because they sang and danced really well. It was beyond that. The audience got what they were intending. It has a huge impact for them around their voice and their power in the world and a lot of them will say, “I didn’t realize I could do that.” Most of our young people have not been on stage before. In fact, a lot of them would not choose to be on stage if it was up to them.

A TPP alumna described the experience from her perspective:

Having that production in front of your family members, in front of your community, in front of people you’ve never met before; knowing that you can touch somebody’s life or get someone to join the program or even that you’ve moved someone in the audience—that’s fulfilling. You’ve really done something good. Not only for yourself, but for someone else, and that’s the best part. That’s the whole thing.

The valuable narratives youth take away from these experiences are stories of their overcoming challenges. The heart of these narratives, which become salient in memory, are their persevering through personal challenges, dealing with roadblocks, setbacks, or delays caused by others, challenges inherent in the task, unrealistic goals, or mistakes made⁷⁹. They also include persevering through the feelings of disappointment, frustration, boredom, and devastation that may accompany challenging tasks. Below, Julie Thayer, InIt program manager at YW Boston, shared a memory from a conversation with youth who had completed their community action project after a trying experience:

After several months and meetings, once they had gotten social justice week approved, one of them said, “Remember when we said we weren’t going to have a project at all?” They were laughing at themselves and I said, “Yeah, I do remember that.” They felt really dejected at one point, but through the process it was clear they had realized that perseverance was a key component of doing this work. We reminded them that with social justice work you don’t always see amazing results right away. It’s a big picture change and we have to keep trying different ways of engaging people. Just because one door is closed doesn’t mean you should give up. In their graduation presentation they alluded to the fact that it was hard, but they kept trying and kept trying until something stuck.

Over time, youth begin to recognize how their persistent effort yields something they can’t get any other way. And that memory—that narrative—goes to work in future projects to help motivate them. As one veteran youth from PWBF said:

Yeah it’s hard, but you just come back every day even though it’s hard because you want to see this through and you want to be able to say, “I did that.”

STAFF PRACTICES

SCAFFOLDING. Staff provide ongoing assistance to help youth develop motivation within the work.

SP

Programs in the SEL Challenge are expertly structured, each in a unique way, to facilitate youth development of motivation. The programs start with welcoming activities that help youth feel safe, respected, and connected to a caring community of peers and adults. Consistent with motivational theory, the activities are organized around goals that matter to youth, and these goals, and the means to reach them, are clear. The activities offer youth rich opportunities for action that provide challenges that are demanding but within youth’s capabilities. As youth work on their projects, they receive direct feedback that allows them to see their progress, and the activities lead to a final product or event that allow youth to see the cumulative achievement of their work and that it is meaningful⁸⁰.

(I5) Staff help youth develop motivation by having youth select or shape the program goals and project(s) according to what matters to them.

Having clear goals and pursuing something that matters are both important to motivation development. The SEL Challenge programs have projects and activities designed with clear, concrete goals in mind (e.g., completing a social action campaign, building a boat, canoeing a roiling river). In most of the programs, youth have a say in setting the goals for the program. For instance, in TPP, AHA!, and BGCGM, the stories, voices, and experiences of the youth are the source material for the projects. In several other programs the youth have a say in selecting the focus of their projects and typically gravitate toward goals that reflect personal experience and create personal connection. This is typically a collective process where youth share with their peers and come to a joint expression that reflects collective goals. Staff help youth develop personal connection to these goals. They also help youth identify personally meaningful goals to pursue within or around the projects and program activities.

At BGCGM, youth select an issue that will be the focus of their performance. In order to come to a decision about the topic, the staff may solicit discussion around personal experiences. They may ask the youth about issues they care about or support the youth in turning the emotion around a tragic experience into motivation to address the issue of gun violence, for example, or to provide practical service to relatives of cancer patients. La’Ketta Caldwell of BGCGM said:

We have this program where youth talk about issues that are important to them. So the girlfriend of a young man who committed suicide and his best friend joined the group. They led the teams to create a PSA around suicide. The mother of the dead boy’s best friend was so grateful because her son kept leaving things. This was one of the only things he didn’t leave. He would leave school and just go walking around, but he committed to this because it’s important.

Allison Williams, senior vice president of programs at Wyman, discussed how youth at her program are similarly given the reins to shape the goals of their service learning projects:

The facilitator can really build the service learning as it makes sense for that club. “Okay, so we did that, and now what are you guys interested in doing, and how do we build upon our success?” Teams might want to stay with the same group. “Let’s keep doing stuff with the senior citizens. That was awesome. And now we think we could do this in the spring. We can go plant a garden with them because someone was telling me about that.” So you’re trying to engage the youth voice as much as possible in the planning, and you’re trying to do it in a way that is manageable within the resources that you have available.

For one community service learning project, the teens at Wyman decided to focus on the death of a former member as inspiration and direction. DeVonne Bernard, director, Teen Outreach Program (TOP), explained:

We lost one of our teens when she was killed by a drunk driver. After that, it took us a while to really get our momentum back. We kept doing TOP, but they were very passionate about doing something more. So we did some advocacy pieces, which was really our first time delving into advocacy around drunk driving. Then we wanted to try to do something in her community. It was great to do stuff in our community (St. Louis), but she lived in East St. Louis, and we wanted to do something in her community. So we did. We reached out to the agency she came from and the teens decided they were going to do a community garden there in East St. Louis.

Additionally, community context plays a big role. Wyman, with its geographical proximity to Ferguson, Missouri, had activities to help youth process the racial tensions fueled by the death of an unarmed young black man at the hands of the police. Learning more about social issues helps youth build motivation for action.

Sometimes, staff link activities to things youth care about in smaller ways. La’Ketta Caldwell at BGCGM talked about how she incorporated one of the youth’s favorite things into the program:

They’re always taking selfies, so that’s how photography came next. We ran with it. That’s awesome. They like to write, and they like hip hop, so we infused poetry. They show us what the next genre should be.

Even when larger program goals or activities are not determined by the youth, they are given opportunities to set personal goals within activities. Laura Greenlee Karp at VOBS provided a good example of a program in which activities are often predetermined (a canoe expedition), but youth formulate individual goals for themselves within the experience (see L1). In shorter activities, staff give youth choices, and veteran youth graduate to taking leadership roles:

We ask them, “We have these two options for activities, what would you guys like to do?” or “We can make one of these two things for dinner. What do you guys want to cook?” Once the group has come together and is able to function and has its own authority, the instructors will then graduate them on to Final expedition, which means the kids are in charge, within given parameters. The instructors will provide the space and the guidance and the opportunities, but the students get to own and make this experience what they want it to be.

SCAFFOLDING. Staff provide ongoing assistance to help youth develop motivation within the work.

SP

(I6) Staff support youth’s discovery of personal motivation in the program work by kindling youth’s experience of belonging, competence, and connection of the program work to personal goals or societal purpose.

Youth’s motivation is fostered by a sense of belonging as they form connections with their fellow collaborators, by the feeling of competence gained from growing skills and confidence, and by the recognition that program work has societal purpose and significance for their personal future goals. Staff see their role as cultivating youth’s own motivation rather than taking responsibility for charismatically creating motivation at every moment and in every activity. They do this largely through the design of the program and supportive interactions with youth that link program goals to things that matter to youth and that provide experiences that develop a sense of belonging and competence.

According to Paul Griffin, founder and president of TPP:

One strategy that encourages youth to follow through is to build connection to the program and the people in it. This sense of belonging is a precondition for taking on responsibility for anything or anyone.

Building community and a sense of belonging is the focus of the Teamwork domain. However, harnessing that source of motivation helps sustain initiative, as Elizabeth “Poppy” Potter described:

We hope to build the community, the culture of that group, so they have the support they need and want from each other. It’s a positive support group in helping each other achieve those goals and reminding themselves and each other when they’re falling away from their goals.

Staff bolster youth motivation by helping them develop skills and grow in competence. Elizabeth “Poppy” Potter from VOBS said:

We’re building their confidence to help them realize they can do it. Students lose motivation because they think something is impossible.

Confidence is also gained by helping youth learn and master the skills, as Beth Chandler, vice president of programs at YW Boston, described:

So everybody comes in at a different level and a different understanding of what the topics are. Julie and Kristy [staff members] will spend time talking about either the content or a particular skill. They’ll provide youth with an opportunity to practice on that skill and then, depending on where youth are, some might spend more time practicing and others might be able to work on or do something else in that time.

Staff also strengthen youth’s motivation by bolstering self-efficacy. The idea that youth’s self-efficacy (i.e., feeling like they are capable of making a difference) grows as they have successes has been established in the research on motivation⁸¹. To help youth build this confidence, Victoria Guidi from PWBF undergirded the importance of staff tying youth’s success to their devotion of effort:

We’re careful about making sure that it’s a confidence that’s grounded and that’s not inflated but is based on the efforts that they’re putting in.

DeVonne Bernard at Wyman shared her view:

For me it’s really just around encouraging them. A lot of times I think we’re our worst critics. I think that’s what I see a lot in adolescents. So we encourage them that they can do whatever they decide they want to do and whatever they choose.

Research shows that input from educators needs to provide accurate information. Indiscriminate praise and inflating youth’s sense of what they can achieve can undermine motivation⁸². This reinforces the setting of realistic goals, as discussed in section L1.



Staff may encourage personal connections by exposing youth to careers and professionals from various fields and talking about how skills learned will apply to other parts of their lives or futures. For La’Ketta Caldwell from BGCGM, exposure to professionals and community leaders is a big part of the learning youth do in *Can You Hear Us Now?*:

I not only partner with the Police Department, but I also partner with the *Journal Sentinel*. It’s exposing them to different careers. So they might want be journalists, learn how to impact social change through journalism, film, all kinds of careers.

At YOB, staff ensure experience gained through participation in the projects youth have shaped and invested in are translated into the next steps of preparation for future careers and life plans. Seeing older youth make steps toward college or other life plans may motivate younger youth by making the link between program content and experiences to future plans more concrete. YOB’s Rachel Gunther expounded:

We have engaged alumni members to serve as interns and mentors and we bring on recent college graduate fellows to provide BSAC students with academic support, including helping with college applications and essays, homework, and developing a post-graduation plan for students who are following alternative paths. We ensure that every graduating BSAC senior has some sort of plan in place, so that none of our motivated and energetic organizers fall through the cracks after leaving the Boston Public Schools system.

COACHING. Staff encourage youth to persist through challenging work, making sure that the effort behind youth’s achievements is recognized.



(I7) Staff give youth opportunities to persevere through challenges, setbacks, tiredness/tedium/boredom and also provide encouragement as needed to keep youth’s attention focused and their effort engaged in keeping the program work moving forward.

Youth must be given challenging, long-term projects and the opportunity to experience failure if they are to learn to take initiative in the face of difficulties and setbacks and to persevere in spite of struggle, tedium, or fatigue. Helping youth to process mistakes and setbacks becomes an important part of the staff’s role. Laura Greenlee Karp at VOBS explained how staff give space for the youth to make mistakes, and ask for support from staff if they need it:

I think that it depends, but the majority of the time it’s the students who are addressing the mistakes or the failures and the instructors help them have a productive conversation about it. It’s important to allow the students to have their own space to make mistakes because that is when they learn. They are learning to ask for help and not be embarrassed about needing help. They learn to say, “I made a mistake. I need some help. Can you help get us back on track?” Our instructors help them get back on track and push them to continue doing what they were doing.

For staff at PWBF, learning through failure is an important credo of the program. Building a boat presents a lot of opportunities for youth to take initiative and learn from the mistakes they make. Staff encourage initiative and perseverance by framing failure as opportunity. PWBF’s Brett Hart said:

Students have tons of experience with failure, but what we want them to do is to fail well. We want them to have the chance to use failure as an opportunity. Not like, “Geez, that sucks. I failed. I can’t wait till I never have to do that again.” That’s not what we’re getting at here because they’re here to do it in the first place and, frankly, it goes on the boat. The boat looks wonderful even though there are scratches in the varnish. The boat looks amazing. If she’s ever going to build another boat again, she knows that she can sand a little longer. So she gets to succeed and fail at the same time. It’s a really beautiful thing.

Although staff try to give youth space to take the initiative to learn from their mistakes, they also recognize that there are times when encouragement is helpful or when other kinds of limited interventions may be needed. The staff encourage perseverance by supporting the youth through challenging experiences and fostering a norm of persistence. A youth participant at VOBS admitted carrying 40-pound backpacks and setting up camp was hard for him as a novice. He said:

[Youth:] At first I thought it was going to be real, like, smooth and easy, but during the first and second day, I just wanted to go home because it was a lot of work that I wasn't used to. The people in my group weren't complaining about it. I learned that even though it will be hard sometimes, you just stick through it.

[Interviewer:] How did you learn that?

[Youth:] We went around a circle and said what was hard for us, and the instructors gave us ways to try to overcome it. They never gave up. So I'm trying not to either.

The staff act as coaches who know what will motivate each individual, who will respond to pushing and those who will need a gentler approach. Bolstering motivation and providing support is the counterbalance to pushing or emphasizing grit or toughing it out. A youth from BGC&M described how the staff motivate as well as provide practical coaching and practice on how to handle the anxiety of answering questions in front of a crowd:

Ms. Janay put that motivation into me, and Ms. Sherry helped us. She blackmailed us, too. When I didn't want to go, she said, "You can't go to the retreat." We were practicing these pieces like, "What if they ask you these questions?" She would ask and we could answer. So people would be scared and she would just tell us to look at her and do something. Look and smile. She said look at the crowd when talking.

Maci, an alumna from AHA!, explained how staff members know the personality of individual youth and know the mix of challenge and encouragement that will be effective for each youth. She shared how staff member, Isis, used tough love to help Maci stay focused:

Persistent, that's the word. If we start a project at AHA!, we're going to finish it. They see how frustrated I get. Isis uses tough love. She pushed me, and I said, "I don't want to do this. It's too complicated." She'd say, "Maci, you're going to do it. You can do this. Tell me why you're scared or don't want to. Is it because you're lazy? Are you feeling it today, is that why you don't want to?" She'd say it with a grin, like, challenging me. That would make the situation seem smaller than what it was and made me feel bigger than what I felt. They made me feel capable of doing what I didn't think I could do. That was really amazing.

For Maci, Isis listened to her feelings and built up her self-efficacy. In both of the previous examples, staff were able to build on their relationship with the youth and provide the right amount of friendly but no-nonsense push.



Another way staff support youth persistence is by working side-by-side with youth and interacting with them in the moment. At PWBF, Victoria Guidi stated:

I am just physically in the shop seeing them at work. Andy and I are constantly floating around, checking in with the students. Team leaders are also checking in with their team members to make sure they're okay. Being in the shop to make sure they're on task and engaged, that they can articulate what it is that they're doing [is important].

Occasionally, staff might step in to take over momentarily in order to keep youth on track. Victoria Guidi from PWBF provided an instance of how it's important to balance success and failure:

As staff, we have to be aware that students need to see success. It's important for balance so they don't get too frustrated and overwhelmed. To keep the project moving forward, we have to let the kids experience failure and frustration but know when we need to work it out and fix it. Otherwise, it could be constant setbacks and we want to make sure the kids are seeing their progress, too.

Or staff might remind youth of the bigger picture: the project's end goal and what they're trying to accomplish together. Elizabeth Howard at TPP responded to the youth:

I respect you guys, and I believe this is where we can get to, and we're not going to get there if we're all just hanging out and everyone's accepting our second best because we're tired today. We're going to push ourselves, and the reason we're pushing ourselves is because we have something big to do together.

Staff may let youth struggle and experience setbacks, but they also debrief with the youth and help them figure out what to do differently to get back on track. The staff acknowledge the disappointment, boredom, and other emotions that can undercut persistent effort. They prod, push, monitor, circulate, and check in. They model contagious enthusiasm, determination, and fortitude. They balance serious work with fun to help youth avoid burnout⁸³.

COACHING. Staff encourage youth to persist through challenging work, making sure that the effort behind youth's achievements is recognized.

SP

(I8) Staff help youth see the progress and successes that come from their effort and perseverance.

It is important that youth are able to see their progress. This is part of the reason VOBS uses daily checklists as goals for what needs to be accomplished that day. Laura Greenlee Karp explained the role the checklists have in memorializing youth's progress at VOBS:

They're absolutely celebrated. It's a big deal. On our expedition, we have what's called a group journal that holds all of the information, hopefully, that the students need to be successful. One of those things is a checklist that the kids can physically check off to graduate from Training to Main and Main to Final. It's something that they are well aware of that they need to meet, and once they meet it, it's a really big deal because it marks accomplishment and growth in competencies and gives them confidence. It's important for these students to have a level of autonomy within the expedition.

At AHA!, where the participants are focused on learning more about themselves and their relationships, it is important for staff to reflect back to youth the progress they've witnessed. Jennifer Freed shared:

Part of the mirroring we do throughout is letting them know the positive behaviors that we see. We often check in with the girls about what they are noticing about how each of them is becoming more powerful and more who they want to be. They reflect to each other. We reflect to them. That's a big part of our culture every week.

Transforming losses into wins is a strategy used by staff to help youth see progress even if they haven't been completely successful. For YOB, whose multi-year campaigns often outlast the tenure of the youth participants, this becomes critical. Rachel Gunther explained how identifying and celebrating periodic successes is essential to maintaining momentum over the long term:

We definitely had a vision for some things that didn't go as we had hoped. What do you do when that happens? How do you redefine success so you feel successful even if it didn't feel that way at first? How do you change goals in a way that feels good and moves in a positive direction? A huge piece is not being discouraged by what feels like a loss. How do you sort of pick up where you are and move on, move forward, and figure out new ways to make change in a way that still feels good to you?

Staff make salient the achievements that come from youth's sustained effort through official celebrations, reminding youth of their impact. Here is how some staff described the importance of celebration:

La'Ketta Caldwell at BGCGM: We have a summer celebration to look back on what we've accomplished. It's amazing what they've done, and it's a fun time. The celebration is a lot of excitement and laughter. It's amazing how often young people don't believe you'll do what you say you'll do, because they've been let down a lot. So they'll say, "I can't believe we did that." We give them the opportunity to reflect and talk about what they've learned.

Elizabeth "Poppy" Potter at VOBS: One piece that is critical is the collaborative meal in December. The students build it as a celebration dinner with their families. We've intentionally built these rites of passage into the academic year as well as the graduation at the end of the year. It's important in acknowledging their growth and having them acknowledge their growth and what it means to them. They start to see, "If I'm feeling like I'm struggling or challenged in school, a relationship, a job, or whatever it may be, I know I have the skills I've used in this setting and I can use them here, too." The rite of passage promotes transference.

Rites of passage and taking the time to celebrate, to recognize skills gained and progress made, helps cement youth's view of themselves as someone who can accomplish, who can persevere, who can overcome. Youth can then bring that experience of initiative and accomplishment with them to future endeavors within the program and beyond.



2.7 Problem-Solving Practices



Abilities to plan, strategize, and implement complex tasks.

INTRODUCTION

Programs for high school-aged youth are often ideal contexts for young people to develop real-world problem-solving skills⁸⁴. The skills in this domain are those for creating plans, ensuring actions are progressing toward desired ends, and solving the challenges and problems that stand in the way. The projects youth conduct within the SEL Challenge programs, from working to change their schools to building a seafaring boat to completing a 50-mile canoe trip through the wilderness, are rich opportunities for this learning. They require learning to plan, strategize, manage uncertainty, and modify designs when a new challenge or problem stands in the way of youth achieving their goal.

These skills for real-world problem solving are vital for important life tasks, including being able to adapt to life changes and maintaining mental health⁸⁵ and for many jobs (jobs involving rote labor are paying less and disappearing)⁸⁶. But these skills can be difficult to learn and not easily taught in a traditional classroom context. They are skills for navigating the complex, knotty, and sometimes seemingly illogical challenges that surface in pursuing real-world goals. These challenges include dealing with uncertainty and unexpected events. If youth are trying to reach a goal that requires working with people or institutions, the challenges may include figuring out implicit rules, dealing with adults who may appear to have inconsistent rules and behaviors, or trying to communicate with two groups of people with divergent values and ways of thinking. These kinds of everyday complexities can easily leave teens or adults feeling powerless and confused.

In effective out-of-school programs, youth learn to navigate progressively harder real-world challenges under the guidance of experienced staff and peers. Often youth begin by learning some of the task-specific knowledge and skills (e.g., vocal projection, knot-tying, speech-writing) needed for the type of projects they will work on later. As they start doing projects, they begin learning the process of real-world goal pursuits: planning, anticipating things that can go wrong, learning how to talk with the different groups of people they need to work with (e.g., school officials, police, children), learning to ask questions, and learning to develop and implement backup plans⁸⁷. They learn that it is normal to have to practice new skills repeatedly until mastery is achieved⁸⁸. As youth experience repeated opportunities to solve real-world challenges, they begin identifying patterns in what works and why. SEL Challenge programs are good contexts to learn these problem-solving skills because they provide many opportunities for youth to refine their skills through reflection, not only on their own experiences but also on the collective experiences of many group members, current and past.



Table 9. Problem-Solving Standards and Practice Indicators

KEY YOUTH EXPERIENCES	YE
SET GOALS. Youth engage in projects that involve organizing actions over time.	
(PS1) Youth build project-specific knowledge and skills (e.g., carpentry, leadership, public speaking). (PS2) Youth conduct projects that require organizing multiple, cumulative steps of work (e.g., creating a work of art, planning an event or a service project).	
PLANNING-ACTION CYCLES. Youth learn through cycles of strategic planning, execution, responding to emergent problems, trial and error, and reflection on outcomes.	
(PS3) Youth engage in planning, including: a) brainstorming and generative planning; b) thinking strategically about the purposes, methods, content, and outcomes of the project; c) anticipatory thinking, if-then thinking (e.g., about how the work and various constraints interact), and contingency planning. (PS4) Youth have multiple opportunities to practice implementing the same skills to achieve greater success (e.g., by trying and trying again). (PS5) Youth grapple with adjusting short- and long-term goals and strategies to emerging challenges and changing circumstances in their work.	
OUTCOMES VERIFY SKILLS. Youth reflect on how outcomes of their work provide information that helps build and verify youth skills.	
(PS6) Youth reflect on the outcomes of their efforts at all stages of the work to identify mistakes and successes, note progress, and identify current challenges. (PS7) Youth's sense of self-efficacy, accomplishment, or confidence grows as outcomes demonstrate their developing skills, and they critically evaluate how their actions influenced outcomes. <i>See also Initiative.</i>	
STAFF PRACTICES	SP
STRUCTURE. Staff provide sufficient structure to youth-driven projects.	
(PS8) Staff provide training experiences for youth to help them learn project-related skills. (PS9) Staff place a high priority on youth having latitude to make choices and learn from experimenting within their projects. (PS10) Staff set high expectations and structure projects that are achievable (e.g., by setting goals, setting timelines and deadlines, setting boundaries).	
MODELING. Staff create opportunities for youth to observe models of successful work.	
(PS11) Staff model skills youth need to learn for their projects (e.g., carpentry or speaking skills, skills for planning and problem solving) and expose youth to models of successful work that set high expectations (e.g., youth learn about projects from prior years, novices work with veteran youth or expert staff).	
SCAFFOLDING. Staff provide assistance, as needed, to help youth learn and solve problems on their own.	
Staff scaffold youth progress on projects by balancing: (PS12) stepping in to provide assistance and input as needed to help youth solve problems and learn (e.g., helping youth develop strategies when stuck or unsuccessful), and (PS13) stepping back to support youth's increasing independence in their work as their skill grows and to allow youth space to struggle with challenges.	
REFLECTION. Staff offer youth opportunities for reflection on project outcomes.	
(PS14) Staff ensure that youth have opportunities to reflect on the processes that led to the outcomes of their work and to evaluate the impact and meaning of completed projects for both the youth and other stakeholders.	

KEY YOUTH EXPERIENCES

SET GOALS. Youth engage in projects that involve organizing actions over time.



(PS1) Youth build project-specific knowledge and skills (e.g., carpentry, leadership, public speaking).

All of the SEL Challenge programs have youth learn specific skills in order to tackle the projects and tasks of the program. These might be boat-building skills, outdoor survival skills, or skills necessary for producing a theatrical piece, creating a film, or conducting a service learning or leadership project.

Andrew Cintron, program assistant at Philadelphia Wooden Boat Factory (PWBF): I never used a band saw before this. I never used the table saw before this. I didn't know nothing about tools. And then they introduced me to this tool that's called a bevel gauge and gives you bevels. The table saw, the chop box, the band saws, they taught me how to use things like that.

Elizabeth "Poppy" Potter, director of operations at Voyageur Outward Bound School (VOBS): If we are conducting an orienteering program, our instructors walk the student through a demonstration about how to use a compass and what each of its parts indicate. The same with the maps. Then the staff will bring the two elements together in an experiential activity to help the students build a skill base for their orienteering program.

La'Ketta Caldwell, senior director of social emotional learning at Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Milwaukee (BGCGM): With theater, we don't just take them to a play. We teach them the vernacular of the theater. So you have a set designer, there's blocking, set direction. That's why we partnered up with the Milwaukee Film for the documentary. They learned how to set up lights. They learned how to strike a set.

The technical skills learned in the programs vary according to the projects, but each project presents an opportunity for youth to build task-specific knowledge and skills.

(PS2) Youth conduct projects that require organizing multiple, cumulative steps of work (e.g., creating a work of art, planning an event or a service project).

The SEL Challenge programs typically center around an extensive project that progresses in intensity and skill level over time, usually the course of a program or school year. In the context of the project, it becomes evident that specific skills and tasks have authentic value. Projects lead toward a goal and involve an arc of work over days, weeks, or months⁸⁹. First steps involve building relationships, learning skills, and planning. Whether the project is a community service learning project, theater production, or video, youth engage in deciding on a topic or direction. Relationship building and skills training are typically among the first steps of the project.

Later aspects of the project build on this early foundation. The completion of one step sets the stage for the next, perhaps necessitating a new set of skills and activities. For instance, after identifying an issue of concern for a community service project, youth must decide a specific goal for their project. Next, youth may work on fundraising, organizing, or building community relationships before undertaking their primary objective. Over time, the plans are executed, often resulting in a culminating event, such as the launch of a boat, the public debut of a theater or video production, or a personal outdoor final challenge. For VOBS, the project time span is shorter, but the progression is similar as youth participants engage in a week-long wilderness trip involving learning survival skills and taking on increasing challenges. All SEL Challenge projects involve difficult real-world challenges, such as managing multiple components of work, learning new skills, communicating and coordinating work with team members, interacting with community members, navigating competing considerations, and identifying and overcoming technical problems. For details on the cumulative nature of the projects at each of the SEL Challenge programs, see the individual Case Narratives.

- (PS3) Youth engage in planning, including:
- brainstorming and generative planning;
 - thinking strategically about the purposes, methods, content, and outcomes of the project;
 - anticipatory thinking, if-then thinking (e.g., about how the work and various constraints interact), and contingency planning.

Youth often help plan their projects, deciding on specific action steps toward their goals. They learn to anticipate project requirements and challenges and develop appropriate plans for them. Implementing their plans sometimes involves repeated practice and trial and error. Inevitably, unexpected problems and challenges emerge as plans are executed. When this happens, youth must reflect, evaluate, and plan again, figuring out how to overcome obstacles to get back to their original plan or how to modify goals or strategies. In short, an iterative process of plan, practice, adjust forms the planning-action cycle.

Projects in the SEL Challenge programs typically include extensive, multi-faceted planning and preparation. Planning may include generating ideas for selecting and designing the project and figuring out how to carry it out. At Wyman, initial planning begins formally with a needs assessment before generating ideas for a community service learning project. For Wyman, community service learning is a process in which youth are engaged from the beginning to the end of the volunteering experience. Facilitators or teachers guide teens through identifying a need, planning an activity or project that addresses the need, taking action, reflecting on the experience, and celebrating their success. Allison Williams, senior vice president of programs at Wyman, said:

Preparation is the planning and organization done prior to the service. Teens might conduct a needs assessment to determine what needs exist in their interest area, select an issue and project they would like to work on, and receive necessary education or training around the specific knowledge or skills required.

Youth leaders may also use their own experiences to generate ideas for projects and assess plans, as one Wyman alumnus reflected:

We were researching things for our younger kids to do or even just thinking about it and brainstorming. What are some things we used to do when we were kids? Is this something we're going to be interested in, like making a paper bird or coloring a page? Outweighing the good from the bad to see what works and what doesn't. It was all about teamwork because everyone has ideas they're trying to incorporate. It's all about trying to compare and contrast and put them together so that it works.

In addition to brainstorming ideas for a project and selecting it, youth also must think about processes, strategies, and details and anticipate how the pieces and ideas will fit together. In planning events, this includes strategic thinking about what should be included, resources needed, and the detailed strategies and methods to carry out their plans. At BGCGM, the youth planned a celebration at a park. La'Ketta Caldwell recalled:

They researched the parks, the cost, called the bus company and figured out how much the bus was going to cost and helped plan that. They planned roles for the emcee and for the community presentation. They helped write the script. They also had to decide who would go to the offsite interviews. Who's going to help with lighting and holding the microphone, the boom mic? Who's in charge of those sorts of things? Who's going to help lead the icebreaker?

In another example of event planning at Wyman, one youth spoke about organizing the details of a cooking project:

It's making sure we're well organized, that we have everything we need for each station in the bin. To look and make sure we have all the seasonings and all the onions and the knives; that we have everything to take to the American Cancer Society to cook. If we separate it out, we'll know we have everything.



At The Possibility Project (TPP), planning involves complex and strategic thinking. One alumna from TPP explained:

So formal planning and seeing the plot and how we're going to set up the play are important, like which scene should go first, and why should this scene go first? Why is it most important? Who is the narrator, and why should they be the narrator? How are we going to process this to the audience, and how are they going to understand it, and what's the finished product going to look like? You need the right people to have the right process to produce the right product.

Planning and learning to act in authentic settings involves learning to deal with complex nuances, contingencies, and conundrums. Thinking through the logical consequences of decisions can prevent mistakes. At the time of a decision, constraints might be known and clear (e.g., budget, time frame) or dynamic and variable and not known ahead of time (e.g., the priorities, perspectives, or biases of collaborators). Youth have to ask themselves many questions to anticipate potential outcomes. An alumnus from Youth on Board (YOB) spoke:

Power analysis and strategic planning was really crucial for young people—for us to be able to learn that you don't just choose an issue and then go out and do stuff. You really have to think about who you can target. Who can change the situation? What motivates them to change the situation, and how do you use your actions to motivate them to change the situation? What does that action have to look like for it to be effective, and how do you use metrics? What's the outcome and what does success look like? Being able to be trained in those principles and then apply them for the actual campaigns that we were running was really important.

The youth have to work and plan within constraints such as limited funding. A Wyman alumnus said:

How do we raise \$2,000 to get to Chicago, and what are some things we need to do as a team to get it done? When Hurricane Katrina came, we had a problem trying to figure out some things we could do to raise money to send down there. So everybody's coming up with these big ideas, but we don't have the funds to do the fundraiser to get the money. So it was all about let's come up with some kind of fundraisers where we can raise this money we need to send down there. We all researched it, and then we all came up with different ideas. We finally had a rummage sale, raised the money, and we sent it down to Katrina. The next year we actually took a trip down there as a group.

The practice and training the youth receive help them to anticipate problems and plan for the future. They are often able to transfer what they have learned in the program to their personal lives. The learning involves internalizing a process of decision making that Allison Williams at Wyman captured in a series of questions:

Okay, so I've got this choice. What would happen if I choose A? What would happen if I choose B? What are the outcomes of my decisions?

Youth alumni from different programs shared what they learned:

Wyman alumnus: It's like breaking the problem down. You take the problem from the middle and work its way out, and I think it works better that way.

TPP alumna: You don't want to just jump to conclusions and start doing things without really having a plan. The thing about me is, I don't really like to sit down and think things through. I just go with the flow and hope that things will just happen the way they do. I kind of learned how to plan things out. With my college applications, for example, I planned what colleges I could apply to, which were a stretch and which were my safeties. Those particular things have really helped me to understand the importance of how to plan and then take action from that plan.

PLANNING-ACTION CYCLES. Youth learn through cycles of strategic planning, execution, responding to emergent problems, trial and error, and reflection on outcomes.



(PS4) Youth have multiple opportunities to practice implementing the same skills to achieve greater success (e.g., by trying and trying again).

Repetition is critical to learning action skills. Applying the same skills over again to the same or to slightly varying situations deepens learning⁹⁰. Building a wooden boat, for example, requires performing the same actions over and over again with each board: selecting, cutting, sanding. Brett Hart, executive director at PWBF, said:

Our featured Factory One Design was specifically created for our program after an extensive dialogue between the naval architect, our students, and staff. The concepts of learning through failure and the ability to iterate and evolve were central. The materials we use in this traditional wooden boatbuilding process provide their own feedback loop. The construction techniques inherent to this type of construction—10 planks to hang on each side of the boat, and 40 frames to hold the shape together—provide the student builder the opportunity to participate in a process, make mistakes, and improve in the next round.

In addition to repetition, PWBF also intentionally allows youth to try some new skills on their own. Andrew Cintron, a former participant and now Program Assistant at PWBF, described how he learned a number of things by trial and error: carpentry skills, dealing with broken parts, and docking a boat. One example was trying to draw angles for a bevel joint on the boat without using a tool to create the angle:

So me drawing lines and trying to get that—I was just going by eye, and looking at it and I was literally there for two days. It could have been done in like an hour. So with trial and error it ended up working out. Or once I was drilling something and my bit broke. So now I have a stuck bit inside there—like what do I do? So just working around things like that. I tried, and some things worked and some things didn't.

By going through this tedious process, he learned it more deeply. That made the process personal and valuable:

I never sailed a boat. So docking, for example: if the current is going fast and you're going faster to the dock, you might break the boat, scratch the side of the hull, or get a hole. So the first time I ever docked a boat it went really bad. Like the boat didn't sink, but I scratched it. They told me afterwards what I was doing wrong, but not on that day. So I learned that I was coming in too fast. When I tried the other way, I slowed way down coming to the dock. So I figured out that just trying it the other way was going to be better than coming with the current.

Elizabeth "Poppy" Potter at VOBS, described examples relevant to camping experiences:

If a student decides not to wear their rain gear, the consequence is pretty natural. There could be longstanding impacts, at which point the staff would intervene for safety reasons. Another example is when a group is not watching their map closely and pass their campsite. The instructors will allow this to be a teachable moment, which could mean the group has to continue paddling for several more miles, depending on the availability of campsites. Having to continue to paddle is a natural consequence that will help them learn from their mistake. This becomes a powerful lesson, especially if it has already been a long day. Tomorrow is a new day and a new opportunity to practice and refine the skills from the previous day's learning. It's likely they won't make the same mistake again.

Other skills are inherently learned by practice, which includes trial and error. Public speaking, dancing, poetry—all types of performance skills—are learned through practice and repetition. Improvisation, a form of live theater

in which the plot, characters and dialogue of a game, scene, or story are made up in the moment, is by its nature a matter of trial and error, and a particular feature of TPP training. In this case, there is not exact repetition of a static scene but learning how to become more adept at creative invention by trial and error and practice.

Some of the SEL Challenge programs view the concept of learning by trial and error as such an important part of the learning process that they embrace what may be perceived as failure. Paul Griffin, founder and president of TPP, explained how failure is an integral component of his program:

One of the theories in improvisational theater is “fail big.” When you’re creating out of improvisation, the goal is to not say the right thing or to get the scene right. It is literally to just do whatever comes to your mind and to fail big because when you do, it leads to the next action and you can create from it. We want our young people to take risks and “fail big” so they can move forward, and we encourage that because that’s where creativity comes from.

For more on this concept, see the curriculum feature Safe Space.

PLANNING-ACTION CYCLES. Youth learn through cycles of strategic planning, execution, responding to emergent problems, trial and error, and reflection on outcomes.



(PS5) Youth grapple with adjusting short- and long-term goals and strategies to emerging challenges and changing circumstances in their work.

As real-world circumstances throw plans off-kilter, youth need to be flexible and adjust their goals according to what the new circumstances will permit. Delays may push back deadlines. In community service learning projects, goals must be adapted to the desires and cooperativeness of others and availability of resources. When youth are not able to realize a goal as they had envisioned it, reframing a “failure” as a learning opportunity and a stepping stone to success is crucial:

Rachel Gunther, associate director at YOB: Every week there are situations like that. We say “Oh, we passed this state law and it’s so great!” Then the way it’s written or implemented is not the way we envisioned. So we say, “Well, okay, we can’t change what just happened. How can we improve the situation and people’s lives through implementation?” It gets complicated. There are still ways to make positive change even if the original goal wasn’t met. We work hard to think creatively about the positives.

Victoria Guidi, program director, Boat Build and Sail at PWB: Like days we’d come in and the wood was breaking at the bend three or four times. It would push our deadline back, but the students are dealing with it as a team. It helped us all because we turned it from a negative thing into a way to rally and get together and make it work. Let’s just go to plan b, to plan c. Let’s all put our minds together so we can fix this and move on.



When YWCA Boston (YW Boston) youth were trying to persuade school administrators to allow a day of silence to raise awareness for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer issues at their school, they had to revise strategies many times to overcome setbacks. The YW Boston staff helped them think through the concerns administrators raised and how to address them:

Beth Chandler, vice president of programs at YW Boston: They kept having to go back to the administration to talk about what they wanted to do. Then they kept getting delayed, and so every time they'd set a date, there was another delay. They kept having to move the date forward which was frustrating. But they continued to go back to the administration to find out what the specific concerns were and how they could address them so that the administration would feel comfortable in letting the activity go forward.

Julie Thayer, Int program manager at YW Boston: One group I worked with kept coming up with ideas that were shot down by the school. The administration didn't want the students taking time away from reading or studying. They were so frustrated because they had bought into how important these conversations were and really wanted to engage their fellow students and the administrators were saying they couldn't. So I told them what a great idea I thought they had and validated it. but said that it didn't necessarily fit with the school's culture or schedule and they'd have to think of another way of engaging the students. I kept throwing out ideas and made sure at the end of the meeting that they had concrete steps to take because when faced with a challenge like that, it can be hard to stay motivated.

When faced with emerging challenges, youth may decide to take a new course of action. Different courses of action may involve different trade-offs or obstacles. Youth at VOBS described how they tackled a literal obstacle together:

Well, we figure out problems that we can't figure out alone. Like when we were trying to cross a river near Lake Superior on a backpacking trip. We didn't want to go the long way because it would take up too much energy and time. So instead, we just made a rock bridge by coming together and helping each other out; making our own little pathway across the river.

OUTCOMES VERIFY SKILLS. Youth reflect on how outcomes of their work provide information that helps build and verify youth skills.

YE

(PS6) Youth reflect on the outcomes of their efforts at all stages of the work to identify mistakes and successes, note progress, and identify current challenges.

Outcomes provide feedback on the planning, speculating, anticipating, and scenario building that youth engage in at the beginning of and during their work⁹¹. Youth learn from authentic outcomes, such as seeing the impact of their work on others, including community members⁹². This can be a moving and transforming experience, something both youth and staff talked about:

La'Ketta Caldwell at BCGCM: We look back and we talk. The biggest thing is emotion, it's excitement and laughter. It's a lot of, "Well I can't believe that we did that."

DeVonne Bernard, director, Teen Outreach Program (TOP) at Wyman: So it was really good to hear them talk about how much they'd grown from having the opportunity to work with younger children. And for somebody to just say, "Thank you." That kind of threw them because they were not expecting it.

Deliberate reflection at the end of a project can be particularly valuable in helping youth discern the processes of cause and effect that shaped their work. Examining mistakes and failures is important to learning:

DeVonne Bernard at Wyman: It was raining and they knew what they had planned didn't work. It was not the best community service learning project, but they learned a lot. When we started our RDA [reflect, debrief, application], they said, "We have to have a contingency plan. This was crazy! We should have planned for rain. We planned for and had everything outside and planned nothing for inside. We should never be in that place again." So they learned from the experiment and really worked through it. I was surprised and excited that we didn't have any conflict because usually when there's a challenge they kind of turn on each other. But they

didn't that day. It was kind of amazing to watch them. They really thought it through and talked it through and we just sat back and let it happen. They did a great job working through it.

La'Ketta Caldwell at BGCGM: For over a year we've had a videographer who's been to a majority of our classes and field trips. Each week we'd watch the video and discuss, "What do you see here? What did you learn from this session?" They were able to see themselves from the week before and acknowledge their growth.

Elizabeth "Poppy" Potter at VOBS: At the conclusion of the paddle expedition, the experience is closed with each student participating in a Personal Challenge Event; scaling a 70-foot rock climbing face at Taylor's Falls. This climb helps each individual realize the confidence they gained on the river. Climbing gives them the opportunity to apply their newfound confidence as they set goals for themselves on the climb. Combined, these elements create a powerful course that offers a significant achievement for each student, as is acknowledged in their "pin of excellence" graduation ceremony.

As highlighted in the PARC method (plan, act, reflect, celebrate), celebrations are a critical piece in SEL Challenge programs. From affirmations that are small acknowledgements of progress made to extensive celebration events, programs make sure to celebrate progress and success. For some programs, the public debut of their work is a celebratory finale (TPP, BGCGM). YW Boston has a graduation ceremony at the end of the year where each group of youth shares about their project. VOBS celebrates at the end of their challenge week but also has a midway celebration. These celebrations serve many functions. Midway celebrations reinforce motivation and build self-efficacy. Highlighting what one did right and building on that is central to strength-based learning and has been shown to promote learning and growth⁹³.



Elizabeth “Poppy” Potter at VOBS: One piece we have that is really critical is a collaborative meal that the students make in December. It’s meant to be a celebration dinner with all of their families. Rites of passage are very important in having them acknowledge their growth and what they’ve learned and what it means to them.

Jennifer Freed, at AHA!: We’re constantly letting them know the positive behaviors that we see. We often check in with the girls about what they are noticing about how each of them is becoming more powerful and more of who they want to be. They reflect to each other. We reflect to them. That’s a big part of how we imagine the culture every week.

Youth at PWBF spoke about their commitment to the project, putting in long hours over several months, and the satisfaction of seeing the emerging progress that was the result of their labor:

I dedicated a lot of hours for my short time into the program. I used to come on Saturdays from 10:00 A.M. to 3:00 P.M. to work on our boat. It was a great experience just seeing it coming to life after it just being nothing, slowly building part after part and just dedicating each hour to pushing past, Like, what I thought that I could do as a person, I just kept getting better and better at it.

OUTCOMES VERIFY SKILLS. Youth reflect on how outcomes of their work provide information that helps build and verify youth skills.

SP

(PS7) Youth’s sense of self-efficacy, accomplishment, or confidence grows as outcomes demonstrate their developing skills, and they critically evaluate how their actions influenced outcomes. *See also Initiative.*

The outcomes often instill in the youth a sense of self-efficacy, that when they think and act in strategic ways they are able to effect change. Natalie Cooper, senior director of social emotional learning at BGCGM, says the youth “recognize that they have power.” Finishing the program and overcoming challenges instills a sense of pride and accomplishment. Elizabeth “Poppy” Potter at VOBS shared this story of one young man:

I just worked with a group of adult African American young men. This young man’s probably 22 years old, and we completed a high ropes course and we presented certificates as a way to celebrate their success, which we call diplomas. And this young man said, “I haven’t accomplished anything in four years. I didn’t finish school. I don’t have a job. I haven’t done a thing, and you’re sitting here asking me to take this diploma and for the first time acknowledge that I accomplished something.” That is very powerful. The VOBS certificate of completion was the first diploma he’s ever received in his life. He felt and expressed the moment with emotion as he expressed what he learned through that high ropes experience. Our students are able to share these moments with their peers who are also sharing about their positive experience. This creates a shared experience that begins to lay the foundation for students to approach other situations with newfound skills. Because they shared this positive experience together, they can support each other in continuing this healthy growth and learning.

Brett Hart at PWBF: Our students are developing two things. They’re developing an idea of themselves and where they can go that they hadn’t realized was possible before. But they’re also developing a toolkit of skills that will help them get there.

Youth may not believe in themselves, their skills, or the caring of the staff until the end of the project; achieving their goal really proves it to them. La’Ketta Caldwell at BGCGM said:

Sometimes they don’t see it until the community presentation. That’s when they have the opportunity to get up and speak. When we did the Speak Out at UWM against sexual violence, there were over 500 people. They were able to do interviews with the news—the news show and an article in the *Journal Sentinel*—they saw the fruit of their labor. We tell them “You’re doing such a great job! You’ve grown.” But they don’t get it until they’re actually able to show up and have the mayor present them the proclamation, then they’re like, “Whoa, Miss La’Ketta wasn’t lying.”

STAFF PRACTICES

STRUCTURE. Staff provide sufficient structure to youth-driven projects.

SP

(PS8) Staff provide training experiences for youth to help them learn project-related skills.

The staff must provide sufficient structure and training within their programs if youth are to have a successful learning experience. As previously mentioned, projects often require or involve learning project-specific skills: the how-tos of leadership, cooking, theater performance, canoeing, etc. The youth are also given instruction and training in the mental processes and actions involved in problem solving and other social and emotional skills. Some training is structured within a preparatory period before launching into the primary program activity. Other training is ongoing and sometimes impromptu with guidance and explanation supplied as the need arises.

At YW Boston, explicit preparatory training is provided during training workshops. Workshop topics include:

- **Community Learning**—examining the impact of race, gender, and class on health, education, and safety;
- **Leadership Development**—meeting with Boston leaders and developing leadership skills;
- **Community Service**—volunteering with disability programs, homeless shelters, food banks, and urban farms;
- **Personal Skills Development**—self-awareness, critical thinking, listening, dialogue, and public speaking; and
- **Workplace Skills Development**—workshop building, asset mapping, public speaking, time management, leadership/communication styles, and fundraising skills.

Staff at YW Boston shared in their SEL Challenge application:

Our teaching method is a three-step process, which includes explaining the skill, giving the students time to practice the skill, and providing peer feedback. Delegates that are already familiar with a specific skill can use the practice time to work on a different skill or aspect of their community action projects. Staff facilitate learning through guided exercises during program day workshops. On a biweekly basis, they work one-on-one with each delegation of students as they identify and implement community action projects. During these meetings staff provide any necessary guidance and skill reinforcement.

At TPP, the first few months of the project year are devoted to training and preparation for all participants. Students participate in acting, improvisation, dance, movement, voice, singing, and playwriting workshops at each rehearsal. Emphasis is placed on the improvement of performing arts skills and the development of excellence as a personal and group standard for production. TPP also provides extensive training to returning youth who lead the upcoming year's production. Paul Griffin described:

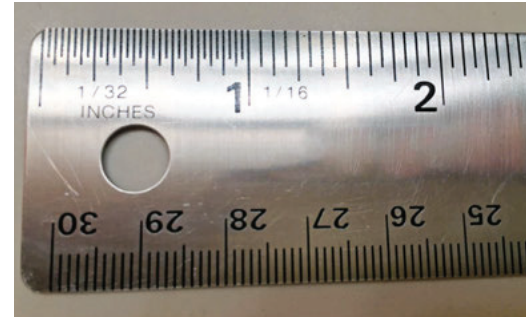
A Production Team of six to ten returning youth are responsible for the overall vision and oversight of their program. They are selected by the Production Team from the year before. Prior to the start of the program year, they take part in six to eight pre-production training sessions to develop their leadership abilities. They then meet weekly for three hours until the end of the program to set policy on issues involving participants; assess and plan rehearsals; oversee staff and artists; and communicate regularly with other youth.

Understanding what types of training are needed is key to successful implementation. YOB does this assessment intentionally, as Rachel Gunther described:

Depending on the year and the needs we do an assessment of what kind of training is needed. It could be public speaking. It could be communication skills with policy makers. How do you ensure you get enough airtime at meetings with adults? How do you speak to them in a way that they're going to be listening? It may be as simple as knowing what's appropriate to wear. How do we make sure youth show up to meetings on time? Just very basic functioning in this world. They don't have any experience with this and are being put into situations that most 15-to-17-year-olds are not. They do incredibly good jobs, most times much better than I do.

And although the primary purpose of these programs and the projects is not to work on academic skills, staff frequently keep academic skills in mind. At BGCGM, in their research for their performance “The Block is Hot,” youth worked with the editor of the “homicide review” section of the newspaper to learn more about the violence in their community. La’Ketta Caldwell expressed how this research helped with their comprehension, and vocabulary. At PWBF, Brett Hart shared the importance of mathematics as a carpentry skill:

With measurement, one of the first things we do with the students is use a couple of different techniques. We have some props that help us do this like blowing up an inch down to the 32nd. This is one of my favorite things to teach because students are amazed at how quick they get it. I’ll get the students to the point where they can recite the inch to a 16th without looking at anything. So they’re seeing it in their head and/or getting it mathematically. I don’t care which way they’re doing it, but they’re doing it. That’s one of the first thing you need to get across: without mastery of measurement you’re not going anywhere with carpentry.



STRUCTURE. Staff provide sufficient structure to youth-driven projects.

SP

(PS9) Staff place a high priority on youth having latitude to make choices and learn from experimenting within their projects.

The idea that youth must have agency and ownership over some or all of the decisions within a project is fundamental to many of the SEL Challenge programs. In order to maximize youth agency, staff are intentional in adjusting their position of authority. They often emphasize equality in the relationship and position themselves as co-learners. Across the board, program staff believe in giving youth autonomy and leeway to learn, practice, and make mistakes on their own. They want the youth to feel ownership so, as youth become more confident, the staff gradually lessen the amount of structure and guidance they offer:

Victoria Guidi at PWBF: The students are really the ones leading it. In the beginning we had to do the modeling for it; set it up and then let the students take over. It’s the environment we’ve been working to create, that this is their space.

Brett Hart at PWBF: We’re going to work with them as partners. We’re going to do it with them rather than to them. Bottom line is that we have safety measures in place, but it’s still dangerous. You have to show that you’re proficient in using a tool before you’re able to use it on your own. Once they’re past that, there’s no holding hands. The students are doing everything. They’re running things through chop boxes, table saws, thickness planers, band saws.

Allison Williams at Wyman: The Hope Lodge service project has taken place at least twice a year for the last couple of years. The staff has observed significant growth and development in the teens over that time. The teens have become skilled at planning out individual and team responsibilities, organizing the work, and collaborating with one another. They have refined their menu planning process by reflecting on what they learn about the residents—adjusting the menu and delivery options as needed. They became more efficient and skilled over time in their cooking skills. Over time the staff involvement in the project has become minimal given the teens’ level of skill development and ownership for this process.

STRUCTURE. Staff provide sufficient structure to youth-driven projects.

SP

(PS10) Staff set high expectations and structure projects that are achievable (e.g., by setting goals, setting timelines and deadlines, setting boundaries).

While continuing to support youth's decision making and agency, staff also monitor youth's work and provide feedback. This balance helps youth ultimately succeed with high quality work. This helps reinforce self-efficacy and future motivation. In social action programs, there is an emphasis on starting with "easy wins." Allison Williams from Wyman described the balance of providing structure and latitude within projects:

Staff are responsible for guiding teens through a community service learning project utilizing the PARC [Planning, Action, Reflection, Celebration] model. Teens are engaged in CSL [Community Service Learning] and practice skills. They feel that they have choice, ownership, and leadership in the CSL process. The facilitator's role is to determine general resources and boundaries for CSL, and support teens in practicing skills and building self-efficacy. In addition, facilitators scaffold PARC activities according to teens' developmental abilities. For example, in preparing and serving dinner at the Hope Lodge, facilitators supported the teens' planning process by asking questions, or reflecting needs back to the teens. Their questions were as general as "What should we think through in our planning process?" This question often sufficiently launched the conversation in the right direction. If the group was struggling with some of the planning tasks, a facilitator was more direct, "So, for our meal preparation, we'll need to buy all of the ingredients. How can we make sure our meal fits within our budget?"

MODELING. Staff create opportunities for youth to observe models of successful work.

SP

(PS11) Staff model skills youth need to learn for their projects (e.g., carpentry or speaking skills, skills for planning and problem solving) and expose youth to models of successful work that set high expectations (e.g., youth learn about projects from prior years, novices work with veteran youth or expert staff).

In the SEL Challenge programs, staff provide examples of the skills youth are learning. There are always adults who are experienced experts in the fundamental skills of the program, whether it be designing and building wooden boats, developing outdoor survival skills, or learning to overcome fears of public speaking. Staff can intentionally model skills by having youth join them in authentic, real-world situations:

Rachel Gunther at YOB: Teena was doing a project on a youth participatory budget in Boston, and she brought two students who were interested in this project with her to every meeting. Those two students got a particular exposure that no one else did. There are a few students who are learning and they are the experts and go to those meetings.

Sometimes modeling skills is woven into a mentoring relationship. YW Boston stated in their SEL Challenge application:

We recruit staff and volunteers with experience as mentors and facilitators capable of relating to our youth and building trusting relationships. This mentoring relationship is critical as staff will lead youth through sensitive issues and challenging self-discovery.

Modeling is both part of explicit training and something integrated into ongoing daily experiences. Staff assist youth by modeling both problem-solving and facilitation skills. The more experienced youth then learn to help problem solve by adjusting tasks with newer youth. DeVonne Bernard at Wyman said:

We really had to adjust our approach in some areas, even with facilitation, which helped the teens adjust. As they saw us adjusting, making sure that we were helping where we could, they really started doing that as well. It's almost like they kind of took on some of those roles.

In at least half of the programs, older or more experienced youth serve as role models for newer youth. Staff cultivate a culture of action in which novice youth learn from veterans and exemplars of successful work are highlighted. The presence and involvement of veteran youth participants helps to reinforce the culture and expectations for the novice youth. This concept is enacted in various ways. At TPP, the Production Team is a group of returning youth who make decisions about the production, help to facilitate rehearsals, and write the script. At YOB, the Working Group is a smaller team who apply to be leaders and are responsible for making decisions about the campaigns and activities for the larger Steering Committee. At Wyman, youth join the program in sixth grade

and stay through high school, allowing older youth to serve as models for younger youth. At PWBF, returning youth work together on more challenging designs. They are in the same space at the same time as the novice groups and sometimes mentor the novice apprentices.

At Wyman, youth alumni have watched staff give lessons and run activities and can use this as an example when they facilitate sessions for younger youth. DeMarco, a Wyman alumnus and current staff member, reflected on the staff's example:

So it was all about compare and contrast again. So what were some things we need to do or what are some of those same steps we need to follow to get it done, you know, for us to do it properly?

In at least half of the programs, older or more experienced youth serve as role models for newer youth. Staff cultivate a culture of action in which novice youth learn from veterans and exemplars of successful work are highlighted. The presence and involvement of veteran youth participants helps to reinforce the culture and expectations for the novice youth.

SCAFFOLDING. Staff provide assistance, as needed, to help youth learn and solve problems on their own.

SP

Staff scaffold youth progress on projects by balancing: (PS12) stepping in to provide assistance and input as needed to help youth solve problems and learn (e.g., helping youth develop strategies when stuck or unsuccessful), and (PS13) stepping back to support youth's increasing independence in their work as their skill grows and to allow youth space to struggle with challenges.

The leaders in the SEL Challenge programs strongly emphasized the importance of scaffolding. Scaffolding indicates providing dynamic, temporary, and individualized supports until learners can stand on their own. Scaffolding begins with training and modeling and supplying sufficient structure as described above. Staff sometimes help steer youth away from things that may not succeed, for example, by involving youth in discussion of whether a task is beyond their current skill set and what to do about it. In some programs, staff position themselves as collaborators. In others, their role is more of a coach, judiciously leading from behind (e.g., stepping in and stepping out as needed) to help keep youth on track, yet ensuring that agency and ownership remain with the youth. Staff tend to provide feedback to youth in ways that minimize adult authority and support youth agency, for example, by posing guiding questions, suggesting options, and emphasizing that the final choice lies with youth. However, they will exercise adult authority when needed to ensure youth's physical and emotional safety and prevent projects from creating legal or other problems for the youth organization. Overall, the staff provide input that balances letting youth learn from trying things (including mistakes and failure) with not allowing them to become overwhelmed or frustrated.



Natalie Cooper at BGCGM, highlighted the evolving nature of scaffolding as it changes over time:

The way that it progresses is that it's more like a teacher in the beginning and as it evolves it becomes more like a coach or a counselor. In the beginning, it's really just establishing things. It's very structured, but it changes as the kids become more comfortable. La'Ketta can step back and let them do more of her role. The more confident they feel in their decision making, the more they're willing to take leadership roles. It doesn't require an adult to step up and be a leader. Towards the end we're saying that they are our bosses. They're telling us what they need from us and holding us accountable to get the job done.

Elizabeth Howard, artistic director at the Afterschool Program at TPP, described the arc of increasing independence as the months proceed:

I'm sort of upfront a lot more in this first three months, and as they start turning the corner and building the show, I'm much more in there with them as opposed to kind up front leading.

Paul Griffin at TPP cautioned that the progression needs to go from more control to less control and greater autonomy:

The staff have to be quite detailed and do a lot of work early on to establish things, but over the course of the year they need to let go. By the end of the year they're actually doing less than they are in the beginning. I've watched our artistic directors get this completely wrong where at the front end they're all supportive with open ears and eyes and arms. Then they start directing the show and become a little tyrant to get it done, and it's a disaster because they've totally flipped the script on our young people. You know, it doesn't work. You have to take the opposite approach: direct the process and facilitate the production.

This gradual letting go is a consistent pattern in the SEL Challenge programs. Laura Greenlee Karp from VOBS said:

Once we feel the students have met the basic training skills, we allow them to move on and have a little bit more independence. The instructors do less micromanaging and allow students to start setting their own goals. We ask them, "We can do one of these two activities. What would you guys like to do?" Once the group comes together and it functions with its own authority, the instructors will graduate the students to final expedition. This means the students are in charge. They have the responsibility, and the instructors provide the space, guidance, and opportunities; but the students get to take it on as their own and complete the experience with pride and confidence because they made it theirs.

However, sometimes staff can misjudge how ready the youth are, and then adjustments need to be made:

Victoria Guidi at PWBFB: There have been many nights when we started some task and then realized, "Wow, this is way over students' heads and we've got to come up with Plan B fast." In that case, it's about bringing them back to the table and saying, "Hey, how are you guys feeling about the way this is going? Is this a real struggle for you?" Then we have a discussion and throw out ideas. "Where should we go with this? What should we do to make sure that we don't fall apart as a team?"



Laura Greenlee Karp at VOBS: On our last Launch program day we were trying to plan our menu and learn how to set up a tent. So we gave students the tools and the checklist. One of the checklist items was putting up a tent, but it was too much for them because basically we just said, "Here's a tent, see if you can set it up, and here's the food, see if you can put together a menu." And they just couldn't do it. They weren't at a place where they could put those pieces together. So the staff stepped in because nothing was being accomplished. It was a little chaotic for everyone involved. It was almost like the students were waiting for the staff to step in and help a little bit.

Staff support youth to stretch their problem-solving skills by engaging side by side with youth who have a problem to solve. At YW Boston, for instance:

A delegation at one school wanted to create social justice workshops for their classmates. They felt unable to gain support from the school administration and were concerned they would not be able to build enough student participation in the workshops. At a biweekly meeting, InIt staff helped the delegation walk through a critical thinking process in which they matched the resources available to them to the needs of their project. Through this process they identified a teacher who they could use as a faculty liaison. They also created a plan for building student participation (reaching out to affinity student groups (ex. Gay/Straight Alliance), using their personal networks, and a social media campaign.

In this way, by walking them through the critical thinking process, staff demonstrate a problem-solving method that also serves as scaffolding for the youth to learn a tool that they can use next time on their own.

There is a sensitive and individualized balance between assistance and autonomy that staff learn to adjust as needed. At PWBF, where staff allow a lot of learning by trial and error, staff do adjust when they see they have assigned tasks without support. With the boat building, for example, when youth had hit a wall, Victoria Guidi recognized that stepping in at the right time could be beneficial to the learning process:

As staff, we have to be aware that students need to see success. It's important to have balance so they don't get too frustrated and overwhelmed. To keep the project moving we have to be aware of that. We let the kids experience failure and setbacks and know when the right time is to fix it and come in afterward and say, "Hey, we worked this out." It's finding that balance.

On the other hand, Paul Griffin from TPP emphasized letting youth figure it out:

The empowerment or agency approach is where we say "no help, no fix, no save," and that means that we don't do for our young people what they can do for themselves, and they can usually do a lot more than most people anticipate or are willing to expect from them.....Over the first four weeks the Production Team typically adds two first-year members so they have that perspective represented on the team. The team participates in all the activities, and that ranges from warm-ups to social change activities to creating scenes and writing. Their participation means authorship and creativity. When it comes to the show, they're responsible for writing their own performances. If three youth are in a scene and have a song, they are responsible for working with the musical director to get it done.

Brett Hart at PWBF described how challenging it can be for staff to find the balance and be willing to let the youth make mistakes:

It means they have to learn to let go of control. Victoria, our program director, has responsibilities. There are expectations that in May, three new boats will be launched. Foundation X is coming to visit the shop, so it should be clean, and everyone should be engaged and smiling. Victoria has to empower students. She has to help them build competencies. Celia (student) has to learn how to fail at her joinery techniques, and sometimes that means a destroyed cockpit coaming, which costs time, lumber, and energy. Celia also is now demoralized because it was her second shot at making the coaming and her second "failure." Victoria has to let it happen. She can't take control because of a benchmark or a deadline. Victoria has to balance feedback so that it neither falsely encourages nor demoralizes the student. For Victoria, it's a balancing act between the expectations adults are accustomed to in professional life, and the program's real needs. To be clear, she gets this right most of the time, but that doesn't mean it's easy.

The key to successful scaffolding is to keep challenge and frustration at levels that support growth and perseverance and to relate to youth in a way that empowers them. Victoria Guidi at PWBF uses several strategies to encourage youth to persevere towards a goal. No matter what, she remains firm with her expectation that they can do what is asked of them. She may cite examples from other times where she's seen the youth complete a similar task or reassure them that she's not giving up on them. If youth are visibly frustrated, Victoria might check in with them and begin a conversation, helping them to evaluate their progress or performance, keeping the feedback focused on the work, not the individual:

So if they think they're doing well, it's like, "What makes this good? Explain it to me further. What do you see going on here?" They might say what they see, and then I'd be matter-of-fact about the work. Make it about that and not about them or their ability to do it. Sometimes I need to step in and help finish a step to get them to the next. We work with each kid to keep them moving forward. Some I know I can just have them do it again. I know their frustration level, and I know that I don't need to do any work to finish that step. To keep them going I can just use questions and encouragement. Sometimes I'll pull over another student who's encountered a similar problem or that I know is a cheerleader or coach to the group.

REFLECTION. Staff offer youth opportunities for reflection on project outcomes.

SP

(PS14) Staff ensure that youth have opportunities to reflect on the processes that led to the outcomes of their work and to evaluate the impact and meaning of completed projects for both the youth and other stakeholders.

SEL Challenge programs all provide opportunities for youth to reflect on where they are and what they have learned. This reflection often is structured and regularly occurring. Guided reflection is critical because youth may not always understand all the factors and processes that influence the successes and failures of their work, including hidden processes and the role of chance⁹⁴. Staff can play critical roles in helping youth understand that what might look like an unsuccessful outcome may in fact represent important and remarkable achievements.

At PWBF, each evening youth are asked to articulate the processes they've used and record progress for the next evening's apprentices. Ending each session with affirmations or gratitude, as AHA! does, is a positive form of reflection. Wyman has an intentional process of reflection build into its community service learning activities. Other programs have their own way of conducting reflection exercises.

Allison Williams at Wyman: The CSL component of TOP involves four specific steps, known as the PARC method: preparation, action, reflection, and celebration. Reflection is interactive, interesting, and an ongoing process where teens identify how their preparation and action has impacted the issue and individuals served, their own growth and learning, and that of their peer TOP club members. Intentional reflection is used throughout the service project to "bring it all together." Reflection often occurs spontaneously during a project to capture meaningful, teachable moments for teens. During the reflection, teens process their accomplishments and review additional new life skills and healthy behaviors they've practiced. Teens also reflect on what did not go according to plan, how they adjusted, and how they can improve in the future. The reflection also integrates curricular content with skills practiced during CSL. One purpose of the reflective process is to increase teens' sense of self-efficacy related to working in groups, taking on challenges, and contributing to their community.

Elizabeth "Poppy" Potter at VOBS: Their goals are an opportunity for the students to self acknowledge learning or dynamics that are going on in the group. It's an opportunity for students to own their experience and own their learning from it. Staff often use multiple ways to do that reflection. Many times it's conversation, but sometimes it's an activity within that conversation or journaling or a pair/share. Our philosophy is that if all that learning just stays within a person and they don't have the opportunity to share and own it, then the likelihood of the transference of the transformation is much less. Even if they write it down and don't share with another person, the likelihood of that learning and confidence transferring is much greater.

Teena-Marie Johnson at YOB: We do a lot in the form of debriefs, pluses and deltas, and key learnings. After a meeting takes place we'll debrief it and talk about what could have been done better. What went great? What could I have done? What could you have done? A lot of things come up like, "Hey, I could have spoken up more," or "I could have looked at this piece more." That's where staff comes in and says, "What do you

think about having done this more? Do you think that would have helped?" We definitely designate a time for framing pieces that way. That is where we get to have the opportunity to learn from and build on what we could have done better and what was great.

Reflection about meaning includes promoting transference of the problem-solving skills youth learned in the SEL Challenge program to other parts of their lives:

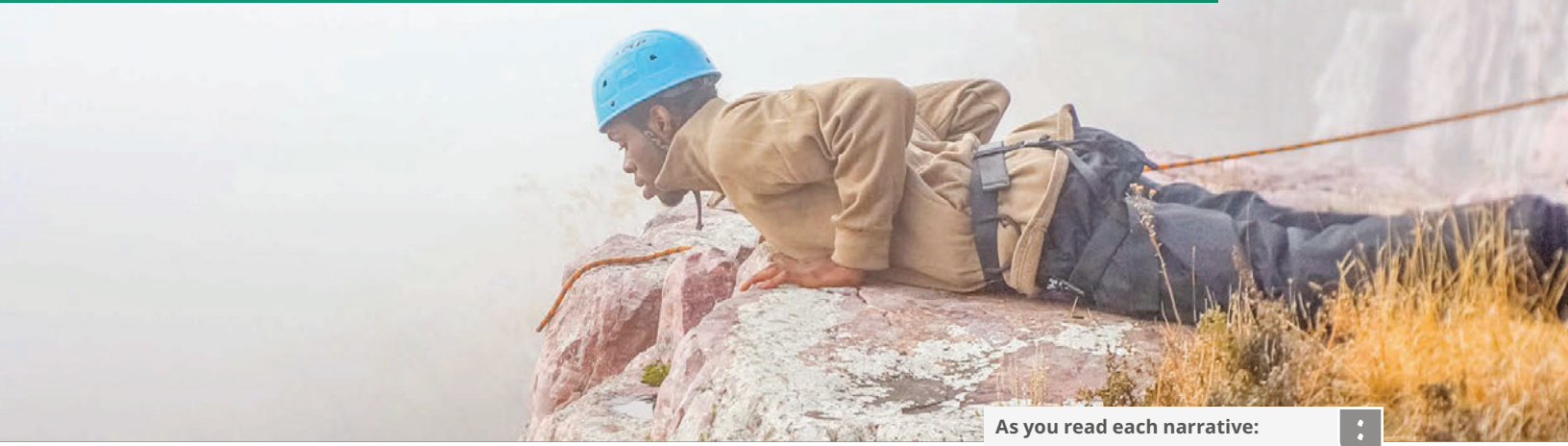
Allison Williams at Wyman: The reflection, debrief, and application really take them through the questions of what, so what, and now what. Whether they're doing this through reflection activities or simply by talking through, "We're going to walk through those questions today. What did we learn? What definitions did we learn?" "We learned about short term and long term goals." "Okay, what differences did we find in those?" So young people explain that. We ask, "Why is that important?" They say, "You know, when I think about if I want to go to college, I need to start thinking now about whether I want to take algebra or other math. That might be my short-term goal and college is my long-term goal." We're getting kids to talk about why it's important. Often it is not until looking back at the end of a project that youth see that what they didn't trust could happen really did happen.

Teena-Marie Johnson at YOB: We hold retreats for our support group. Group retreats are where the entire focus is to think about where you are emotionally and how that impacts the work that you do. How do this work and your emotions impact your life, home, school, and work?



PART THREE.

CASE NARRATIVES



As you read each narrative:

- » Consider how the structures and practices staff employ support the development of social and emotional skills in the youth participants.
- » Observe how the project content sequence and SEL content sequence interact throughout the year.
- » Take note of the elements of the content sequence that are similar to what you do in your program, and reflect on practices and structures you could adopt that might increase your SEL effectiveness.

The case narratives for the eight SEL Challenge programs that follow tell a story of both successes and challenges programs have found integrating social and emotional learning into their curriculum. Find information about the work of each organization, followed by a summary of the program offering we included in our study, which is also represented graphically. Additionally, we describe the role youth participants and staff play in the delivery of the offering, while capturing the essence of the activities and structures that the staff employ to make the program offering what it is.

AHA! (ATTITUDE, HARMONY, ACHIEVEMENT), SANTA BARBARA, CA

AHA!'s program runs year round serving teens and families in Southern California. Their programming focuses on creating a community of socially and emotionally intelligent adolescents who are committed to compassion, character, positive creative expression, and the celebration of diversity. The Girls' Relationship Wisdom Group's innovative, experiential curriculum guides teens to set goals and to stop bullying and hatred. The curriculum is delivered in a group mentorship setting, with one or more facilitators always present for every six teens.

BOYS & GIRLS CLUBS OF GREATER MILWAUKEE, MILWAUKEE, WI

Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Milwaukee's (BGCGM) Can You Hear Us Now? (CYHUN) program is a youth-led advocacy program that provides teens with an artistic platform to express themselves. Through the program, youth learn how to address and deal with difficult issues by creating art and media that reflects how they feel. Each year the youth decide to focus collectively on a timely issue, learn the technical skills associated with a particular artistic medium (e.g., videography, photography, poetry), and develop an artistic expression of the issue that is presented to their community.

PHILADELPHIA WOODEN BOAT FACTORY, PHILADELPHIA, PA

The mission of the Philadelphia Wooden Boat Factory (PWBF) is to engage the city's youth through hands-on, experiential programming inspired by the heritage of the sea. The Boat Build and Sail Club runs year round for three and a half hours a day, three days a week after school. Teams of youth apprentices build boats in the shop during colder months and sail the completed projects during the summer. Through project-based learning clubs, students develop motivation, coping skills, agency, self-awareness, and confidence.



THE POSSIBILITY PROJECT, NEW YORK, NY

The Possibility Project (TPP) brings together vastly diverse groups of teenagers who meet weekly for a year to transform the negative forces in their lives and communities into positive action. Through a combination of issue-oriented discussions, trainings in diversity, conflict resolution, leadership and community activism, and instruction in performing arts, youth work together to write, produce, and perform an original musical based on their lives and their ideas for change. In addition, they design and lead community action projects on issues of concern to them in order to take their creative vision for change into the world.

VOYAGEUR OUTWARD BOUND SCHOOL, ST. PAUL, MN

The mission of Voyageur Outward Bound School (VOBS) is to change lives through challenge and discovery. VOBS programs engage teens and adults out of two bases: one in the Ely North Woods and one in the Twin Cities. The Strive Forward program provides a unique opportunity for African American male middle school students attending the Open World Learning Community School in St. Paul, Minnesota. Through the program, young men learn wilderness canoeing, backpacking, leadership expeditions, skiing, and rock climbing. The students meet bimonthly for single-day Insight programs and in-school Launch Leadership sessions to debrief on their experiences.

WYMAN, ST. LOUIS, MO

Wyman's Teen Outreach Program (TOP®) is an evidence-based program that uses a combination of group discussion and community service learning opportunities to empower teens to lead successful lives and build strong communities. The SEL Challenge focused on the TOP program in the Near South Side neighborhood, which is located at a public housing complex and draws most of its participants from the local community. TOP participants from the Near South Side plan and deliver a number of community service learning experiences including cooking meals for family members of cancer treatment patients, providing child care services for a local elementary school during parent-teacher organization meetings, and maintaining a community garden dedicated to a former TOP member who was killed by a drunk driver. In addition to running programs in St. Louis, Wyman supports a network of certified replication partners who facilitate TOP throughout the United States.

YOUTH ON BOARD, BOSTON, MA

Since 1994, Youth on Board (YOB) has been a leader in the field of youth organizing in the Boston area and beyond. YOB promotes youth voice, trains student leaders, and creates programming that empowers young people to develop the knowledge, skills, empathy, and agency to succeed inside and outside of school. The Boston Student Advisory Council (BSAC) is the YOB project selected for the SEL Challenge. BSAC brings together high school leaders from across the city to make youth-directed change in the Boston Public Schools. Young leaders in BSAC define issues that are most relevant to them, educate their peers about those issues, and develop collective solutions through school-based, local, state, and national campaigns.

YWCA BOSTON, BOSTON, MA

The mission of YWCA Boston (YW Boston) is to eliminate racism, empower women, and promote peace, justice, freedom, and dignity for all. The Youth Leadership Initiative (InIt) consists of a week-long summer program and 10 full-day Saturday events for a group of youth delegates from high schools across the Boston area. Staff provide students with coaching and support throughout the year through biweekly meetings at their schools. The youth build their abilities to work across differences, and ultimately design, implement, and engage other teens in a community action project that addresses an inequity in their school, community group or neighborhood.

3.1. AHA! (Attitude, Harmony, Achievement)

Santa Barbara, CA

GIRLS' RELATIONSHIP WISDOM GROUP

"It's the ruptures that actually create the possibility of us becoming whole people." —JENNIFER FREED, PH.D.

AHA!

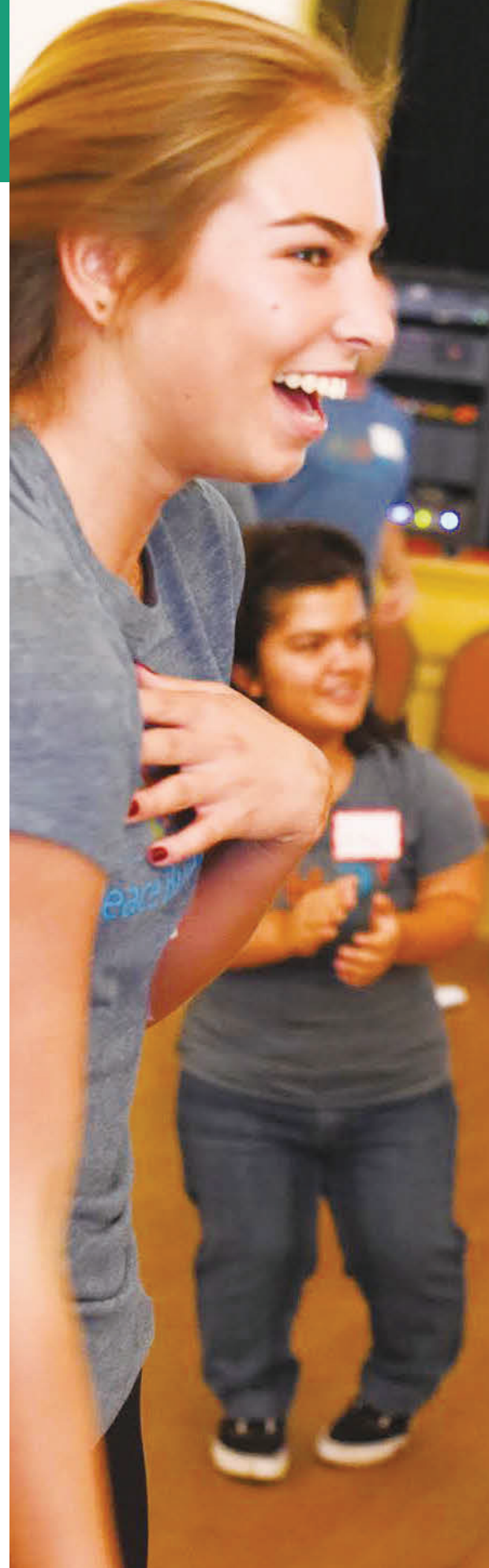
Attitude. Harmony. Achievement.

In 1999, Jennifer Freed, Ph.D., and Rendy Freedman, MFT, co-founded [AHA! \(Attitude, Harmony, Achievement\)](#) in response to the Columbine High School massacre. Together with a group of friends, they ran a summer program for local teens to develop relational skills through group process and the creative arts. The program received so much positive feedback from adults and youth alike that Jennifer and Rendy decided to develop it further. Since that summer, the program has grown to serve thousands of youth throughout Santa Barbara County, California.

AHA!'s mission is to develop character, social and emotional intelligence, imagination, and social conscience in teenagers. In order to achieve this, AHA! provides a range of services to teens and families year-round through after-school, summer, and in-school programs in Santa Barbara County. Some of the groups include the Creative Group, The Ally Leadership Group, Girls' Relationship Group, Guys' Relationship Group, Talk-It-Out Group, Peace Builders Group, and the Sing-It-Out Group. Youth can also participate in AHA!'s outdoor programs and learn surfing, horseback riding, and kayaking. AHA! collaborates with the schools they serve, the Santa Barbara Teen Coalition, Just Communities, Anti-Defamation League, and other organizations. Supportive community leaders include School Superintendent Dr. David Cash and Mayor Helene Schneider. AHA! provides services to the communities with an annual budget of \$1 million.

AHA! uses surveys and anecdotal feedback to measure the impact of its after-school groups. Results from these surveys in 2015 found that, on average, more than 80 percent of youth served reported significant improvement in 10 or more problematic areas of their lives, such as issues with school, parents, family, relationships, law enforcement, and substance abuse. The majority of others saw improvement in more than five problematic areas. In feedback gathered from the same year from all AHA! after-school program participants, students shared that they had stopped doing drugs and self-harming, learned to control anger, developed effective stress management techniques, created lasting and deep friendships where they could truly be themselves, and felt accepted and supported in the AHA! groups. On multiple occasions, AHA! after-school participants stated that AHA! was literally a life-saver.

University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB) outside evaluators also provide research-based pre- and post-tests for the AHA! Peace Builders Program. Recent findings indicate that youth Peace Builders show significant improvement on markers such as feeling more positive, preventing bullying, feeling connected to others, and managing emotions. From 2013 to 2015 at Santa Barbara High School, dramatic drops of 50 percent or more occurred in disciplinary referrals and suspensions.





ORGANIZATION

Total number of full-time staff	16
Number of volunteers	20–49
Annual operating budget	\$1M

FOCUS OFFERING

Total contact hours	39
Duration of the program period	October–June

FOCUS OFFERING YOUTH (FROM YOUTH SURVEYS FALL 2013)

Number of youth	16
Age	14–18
Gender	100% F
Ethnicity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6% Arabic • 44% Hispanic • 6% Native American • 56% White
Percent currently attending school on a regular basis	94%

FOCUS OFFERING STAFF (FROM STAFF SURVEY)

Number of staff	4
Level of education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 25% Some college • 25% College Degree • 50% advanced degree
Years of experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 12.88 in youth development • 7.63 in this program
Staff program content expertise self-rating (1=Novice, 2=Experienced, 3=Expert)	2
Staff SEL expertise self-rating (1=Novice, 2=Experienced, 3=Expert)	2.25

YOUTH AND STAFF CHARACTERISTICS

Youth

For the SEL Challenge, we focused on the Girls' Relationship Wisdom Group, also known as Girls' Group. In this group of 14 to 18 females, 70 percent are nonwhite, 23 percent come from Spanish-speaking homes, 42 percent have parents who are divorced or separated, 21 percent have a family member suffering from addiction, and over half experience ongoing financial struggles (reflects 2013-2014 participants).

Youth find out about AHA! largely through word of mouth. Those who have participated in a group may tell their friends, social media followers may see an announcement online, or parents, therapists, and school counselors might recommend youth attend the program. AHA! also conducts informational meetings for potential participants and their families. Jennifer Freed, co-executive director, described two different types of youth who join the programs:

One group is the youth who have heard of us and are naturally excited to be part of a progressive and inclusive community. We do group interviews and we're looking for youth who say, "Yeah, I want to be here" We're not a disciplinary program, and we don't want to be. The second group is the youth whose parents bribe them or bring them to the group interview. They have no interest in being in AHA!, but we know they really need it because they're the marginalized outsiders and they don't have other options. They have yet to understand what's possible for them.

During the group interview and an informational orientation, staff are looking for signs that the young women will be committed to the program. Jennifer emphasized that they want to "make sure people know that this is a voluntary activity and that it's not discipline oriented, so we want people to come on their own volition and interest to be part of the community."

Girls who are being pressured to participate by parents, social workers, therapists, etc., are generally not chosen. In addition, AHA! turns away youth who are in need of individual or intensive therapy. Jennifer elaborated:

We can't accept people who are actively addicted to substances or have a full-blown eating disorder or people who need to get more extensive treatment because we are an education program, not a therapy program. We can't accept people whose parents want them to go, but they hate it and don't want to be there. It just won't work because, again, we're not a discipline-oriented program. Now, of course, teenagers end up



having all kinds of issues, but we don't at the onset accept people who are extreme cases because we are not a therapy program. If we find out—as is true with about 60 percent of the youth who come through—that they have all these different issues, then we have to attend to them as best we can by making sure that in addition to AHA! they have therapeutic referrals.

Isis Castañeda, senior facilitator, described the youth who attend AHA! programs as “eager to feel connection, and hesitant to be vulnerable.” She explained how their recruitment is focused on serving a group of youth that is representative of the full socio-economic spectrum. She commented:

Recently, we've been more heavily weighted with the Latino and lower socioeconomic groups because there is such a deep need, so we are focusing on increasing our numbers of middle and upper-income Caucasian teens. Not only do we want to have this diversity in our program, but it's because these social and emotional skills, this connection, this group process is important for everyone. If teens can really see the perspective of everyone, they will be more understanding. It will benefit them as adults as well as helping them with the struggles and angst they experience now.

Staff

What sets AHA! apart from other nonprofits is its leadership model.

Jennifer Freed and Rendy Freeman are co-founders and co-directors of the organization. Jennifer passionately explained the philosophy behind this model:

“Over time, we've learned that this really needs to be a calling, not a job. That's a huge distinguishing factor of why we have the amazing staff that we do.”
—Jennifer Freed, Ph.D.

We think having co-executive directors is a much more social and emotional-oriented model because it requires mutuality, and it also requires that relational skills are used to share power and leadership. The partnership models comes from the very top, and when we pass our positions on, it will be a co-executive director position. I think that for us, most societal ills come from the power-over, winner-takes-all model, and so from the onset the partnership model is what defines us. It's throughout our structure and programming and the way we work in every group—there's not one leader. People get modeling from the ground up and the top down about what it looks like to be in relationships in leadership.

As they depend on each other to co-facilitate groups, staff at AHA! form deep interpersonal relationships. In order to meet the dynamic social and emotional needs of the participants in their programs, AHA! only selects the most qualified staff to work with youth. More than half of all staff hold master's degrees in psychology, and several are therapists working toward licensure. The staff-to-youth ratio is one staff per every six youth. Most of the time there are four or five adults leading a group together.

Jennifer Freed added:

What we're looking for is somebody who is committed to their own personal growth and is mature enough to handle that on their own. We don't want to be mothers to them. We're looking for people who have real, dynamic, charismatic personalities because Robert Brooks really talked about how youth thrive in an atmosphere of charismatic adults. They need to have somebody or something to look forward to instead of the dull pedantic adult world, which is not always inspiring. So the people who work at AHA! have to have this kind of intrinsic, passionate availability. We're always looking for more diverse cultural role models in our staff. When we're hiring, we look for who we need to round out the field. We're really looking for people whose life work is walking this talk. Over time, we've learned that this really needs to be a calling, not a job. That's a huge distinguishing factor of why we have the amazing staff that we do.

AHA! also provides its staff with opportunities to work with outside experts to increase skills. Most of the staff receive an international certification in emotional intelligence and/or are trainers in restorative approaches. They have quarterly training and staff retreats, which focus on continuing social and emotional learning training. Continuing education between formal trainings also occurs in the form of book recommendations and relevant scholarly studies. Finally, there are weekly supervision meetings that serve as another forum for continued social and emotional learning for staff.

OFFERING CURRICULUM

Offering Content

For 100 minutes every Monday, participants in Girls' Group become aware and empowered agents of their own lives. At AHA!, the work the youth are engaged in focuses on self-exploration and development of relationship skills. Jennifer described the purpose for the program:

By the end of the year, what we want more than anything is for the girls to take away a sense of agency in their lives. To move from a victim identity, an oppressed identity, into a powerful, choice-driven identity where they're the source of their experience and direction. We're connecting them to their bodies, their authority, their creativity, their ability to have supportive relationships with both males and females. We want them to have pride and authenticity about who they uniquely are.

"To move from a victim identity, an oppressed identity, into a powerful, choice-driven identity where they're the source of their experience and direction. We're connecting them to their bodies, their authority, their creativity, their ability to have supportive relationships with both males and females."

—Jennifer Freed, Ph.D.

The Girls' Group meets every Monday from October through June. Staff members describe the program year using a relationship metaphor. The first several weeks of the program are the beginning parts of a relationship. Participants are new to one another, polite and excited, but a bit reserved. By the middle of the program year, participants feel much more comfortable with one another, and conflicts arise out of familiarity. Staff use this as an opportunity to check in with the participants around goals and aspirations for the group. Finally, the end of the program year is a sentimental time for the participants as they prepare to end this dynamic relationship and take the lessons learned into other areas of life.

Offering Sequence

ORIENTATION

GROUP CULTURE

BECOME YOUR BEST SELF

INTIMACY IN THE MIDDLE

SAYING GOODBYE

Orientation. Once the youth have been selected for the program, they attend an orientation on the Saturday before the program starts. The orientation accommodates all after-school group participants—about 50 to 75 youth—and their families. The day serves as an opportunity to get to know the youth and to introduce them to the AHA! style, which is about “playfulness and vulnerability and authenticity.”

Group Culture. Girls' Group begins immediately on the Monday following the Saturday orientation. The first few weeks consist of setting the culture and the norms between the 15 to 17 young women and the four adult facilitators. The girls develop a list of qualities and needs that will create the best group culture. Jennifer Freed said:

We talk to the girls right from the onset about what kind of culture they want to create in that group. We make a list of the qualities and needs they have to have for it to be the best kind of group they want to have, and what things are going to be helpful and what would be hurtful to having a safe and thriving group culture. So they decide, but we also get to weigh in.

At the beginning of each new session, Girls' Group staff members administer “About Me” questionnaires to get a general feel for each participant's family, peer connections, socioeconomic situation, specific problem areas, strengths, and areas of growth potential. In groups, staff integrate a great deal of weekly getting-to-know-you activities to promote everyone's understanding of where people come from emotionally, socially, and historically. Additionally, staff members make themselves available to parents and guardians who are interested in discussing the program and/or their child's involvement. Questions often arise around Girls' Group topics, processes, or their child's reaction to the group experience. Staff members welcome these kinds of discussions, as they provide informal ways to further develop relationships and gather anecdotal information about the youth who are participating in the program.

Become Your Best Self. The Girls' Group uses a workbook curriculum from the *Become Your Best Self* series developed by Jennifer Freed and Amanda Waldman Lake. Topics in the workbook include Defining Values, My Body, Sexism, Unmet Needs, Protection, My First Time or Next Time, Sexual Wounding, Sexual Healing, Sexual Bill of Rights, Virginity, Affection, and Sexual Wisdom. Jennifer explained how the staff members facilitating the Girls' Group have this curriculum as a resource and draw from it to plan for a month or more of sessions at a time:

Basically, we are responding to what the girls bring into the room. We have our architecture. We have thousands of exercises and skill sets that we have at our disposal, but we really think of the youth as the consumers who are looking for a certain body of work that suits their needs at the time. Teenagers have really changed in the 30 years I've been doing this. So when we meet these girls for those first three weeks, we're going to really be assessing what are the challenges in their life where they feel powerful and powerless? Where are they in their own experience of their sexuality and their agency around that? What kinds of emotional skills are they bringing into the room? And we are going to ask them right off of the bat in the first few weeks, "What do you want to learn? What's important for you in order to become a fully expressed powerful woman?" It's a fine dance between overlaying what we want them to learn and finding out who the group is. Every group has its own personality and set of needs. They define their needs and create their culture when they walk in the room, so it depends on who the constituents are.

Staff use the curriculum as needed to design experiences that help participants do the following:

1. Identify and name emotions
2. Role-play situations that require emotional management; learn strategies for coping and healthy outlets
3. Listen deeply to others as they share about their emotional states
4. Learn how to tolerate intense emotional states and release emotion in a positive way
5. Engage in creative exercises such as writing, acting, singing, and movement to express emotions stored in the body
6. Learn how to set a positive attitude; where necessary, by moving from a negative mindset to a mindset of possibilities, while still taking time to fully feel one's current emotional state
7. Learn how to express appreciation, acknowledgement, and gratitude as a standard of everyday life
8. Learn how to ask for help when one feels stuck or unable to process their emotion
9. Learn how to identify primary needs, and how to say yes and how to say no when appropriate; how to use emotional cues as information to support this process

"It's a fine dance between overlaying what we want them to learn and finding out who the group is. Every group has its own personality and set of needs. They define their needs and create their culture when they walk in the room, so it depends on who the constituents are."
—Jennifer Freed, Ph.D.

Jennifer Freed discussed the topics that are included in the curriculum over the course of the session:

Well, we're going to talk about, "How do we deal with sadness? How do we deal with our anger? How do we deal with fear? How do we express ourselves in our unique and authentic ways when people are criticizing us? How do we deal with our inner critic? How do we explain the right to have pleasure in our own bodies and not have it be in relation to what somebody else wants from us?" These will be things that no matter what, we're going to cover.

We're going to talk about what their dreams and hopes are in their lives and what gets in their way achieving those. We're going to talk about how to say yes when you want to say yes and how to say no when you want to say no. We're going to work on what stories we make up that are powerful stories and what stories we make up that are victim stories and keep us bound to old past definitions of ourselves. We're going to work on female friendships and how we gossip and how that hurts each other and what it's like to commit to gossip-free interactions. We're going to talk about standing up for women and each other in terms of when people are being talked about in a disrespectful way, how we, with curiosity and humor, intervene. We're going to work on how do you get support when you're in a dark hole and you really don't know how to get out of it?

Who do you turn to?

And we're going to talk about—and this is huge—how do you know what you're feeling? So really helping girls start to identify this cue that they have in their bodies around anger and fear. We're going to do the work around the healthy expression of anger versus the destructive expression of anger. We're going to work on fear and how to self soothe when you get in an anxious state. We're going to do work on laughing and humor. You know, I can go on and on because we do it all!

These are some of the curriculum topics introduced over the year, and they are covered repeatedly in group sharing sessions, too. Social and emotional skills take time to develop and repeated “presencing” (centering yourself in the present surroundings) over the course of weeks to months. AHA!'s approach holds participants in a safe space with trusted mentors where they can develop the openness, mindfulness, and willingness to take risks that are required to shift into healthier emotional expression.

Intimacy in the Middle. Just about halfway through the sessions, it is typical for the group to begin to experience a “storming” period:

Psychologically that's really important because the middle is the time that most people really start acting out and getting a little bit feisty and uncomfortable. So we really talk about intimacy in the middle in terms of, you know, now that we're getting comfortable with each other, there are certain ways girls start to challenge each other, challenge the leader, start showing issues around their own authority or rebelling against authority.

And we take all of that as, “Hooray! Brace for the middle! Let's look at what we're getting or not getting in this group.” We start checking in the middle about how satisfied or dissatisfied they are, and what they want and don't want in terms of deepening the group and putting it in their hands. We do a lot of what we call making the implicit explicit, which is saying, “So now it seems like as we're sitting here, people are getting really bored and distracted, and so what is missing that would get more of your attention toward each other?”

Saying Goodbye. The end of the program is an important learning experience for the girls as well. For many of the young women who attend the Girls' Group, the relationships they've established through the group are deeper (and possibly longer) than any relationships they've previously had. AHA! staff are careful to help youth process what the end of the program means and what they've learned that they can apply to future relationships:

We talk about endings, not just of this group, but about how in life endings are usually botched up and leave people incomplete. We talk about what it takes to be complete and expressive in a relationship. We talk about what kind of risk it requires to not hold things back and how resentments get in the way of completion.

We talk about how hard it is to say goodbye and what it takes to have a really fulfilling goodbye. That sometimes we will stay connected and sometimes we won't. That's the reality, but the point is: what are you taking with you regardless? We emphasize the skills they take with them that help them connect with people, period, as opposed to suggesting that the people in the room are the only ones they can be attached to. We see there is a toolbox of skills that give them the opportunity to connect to women and men for the rest of their lives.

Offering Session Structure

Each program day at AHA! follows a similar structure that complements teen brain development. “Consistency, reliability, and ritual really help the youth feel more contained, and also feel like they are owning their own experience.” Each individual session begins with a warm-up activity and a re-establishment of group expectations. The group then moves through the curriculum for the day before closing with a time of reflection and appreciations.

Mindfulness. Each session begins with a mindfulness exercise, which Jennifer described as, “a couple of moments of just breathing and paying attention to our breath, and learning how to fill the mind.”

Thorns and Roses. After mindfulness, the girls discuss their thorns and roses, the negative and positive experiences that they've experienced since the last time they were together.

Main Activity. The staff selects an activity from the Be Your Best Self curriculum or other source that meets the youth where they are in their development and helps them progress to their goals.

Appreciations. The facilitators close the sessions with youth and staff sharing gratitude for each other's contributions to the group that day.

Staff Supports

The staff at AHA! have formed close interpersonal relationships, like those you would find among family members. Before each daily session, the group leaders meet for about 15 minutes to connect with each other, discuss their own thorns and roses, advocate for their needs, and offer support for each other. This pre-session planning meeting is one of several structured times where staff are experiencing similar supports to the ones they're providing for the youth. They also have weekly staff meetings where, along with discussing the progress or emergent issues of individual youth, they are able to deepen their interpersonal connections and further develop their own social and emotional skills. Jennifer Freed spoke about the importance of building these deep connections between staff and opportunities for growth:

"We emphasize the skills they take with them that help them connect with people, period, as opposed to suggesting that the people in the room are the only ones they can be attached to. We see there is a toolbox of skills that give them the opportunity to connect to women and men for the rest of their lives."

—Jennifer Freed, Ph.D.

It helps them be their best at work. More importantly, all the research shows that people feel happiest when they feel known and recognized and acknowledged by others. We have tons of rituals that do that. So that work isn't differentiated from a good feeling in life. They feel really valued and loved, not as work objects, but as colleagues. So that's a huge part. An overall life enhancement is what we're about. We don't want anything different for our staff than we want for these teens, which is to have joyful, meaningful lives.

AHA!'s Co-Directors invest in their staff in other ways, too. They provide regular opportunities for professional development "because that's what energizes and motivates and helps them. They need to keep learning." They also offer the benefit of several weeks of vacation time for all facilitators, which they are encouraged to take. They have also, on occasion, offered therapy sessions to staff who were experiencing their own life challenges. Jennifer Freed believes deeply that in taking care of the staff, she is helping them to have better lives, and thereby improve the lives of others they come into contact with:

We want to make our distinction be that our staff are the best-treated staff in any nonprofit. We call it community profit. We changed the frame because, if we profit, then the community profits.

YOUTH TESTIMONIAL

This testimonial is from a 19-year old Latina youth who was in various programs of AHA! as well as the Girl's Group. Tina comes from a background of family violence and substance abuse and came to AHA! full of despair and rage, acting out with self harm and not going to school. She transformed all of that with two years of steady participation in AHA!'s afterschool programs including the Girl's Group.

AHA! has really helped me see my own light and wholeness from within and to continue to seek out individuals who are interested in being authentic and in relationships that grow. If I did not have the AHA! program, I do not know where I would be, but I know that I would be lacking in a lot of positive support and great role models that have inspired me to carry on and keep pursuing my wholeness and realize my potential—not only for myself but for my community and society as well. The AHA! program helps prevent hatred, prejudice, and bullying by encouraging tolerance, understanding, and compassion. By being part of a tight-knit community with Mexicans, gangsters, preps, rich kids, gay kids, potheads, and straight edges, we were able to see the unity in all of our diversity and really appreciate a wider array of human beings. Each one of us brought something unique and special to the group, and I left feeling like I knew people on a deeper level from all walks of life, which certainly makes it difficult to generalize or stereotype an individual based on their outward appearance or lifestyle choices. I grew to tolerate, appreciate, and embrace individuals from different groups, which makes it nearly impossible to hate others, bully, or hold prejudice against groups or individuals. What it encouraged was careful curiosity and a desire to get to know and seek knowledge about that which we do not understand and ask questions instead of pointing fingers or turning away.

3.2 Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Milwaukee

Milwaukee, WI

CAN YOU HEAR US NOW?

“When kids are loved and validated, magic happens.” —LA’KETTA CALDWELL



BOYS & GIRLS CLUBS
OF GREATER MILWAUKEE

In 1887, when Annabell Cook Whitcomb transformed two basement rooms at Plymouth Church in downtown Milwaukee into a club for boys the Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Milwaukee (BGCGM) was born. The organization now serves more than 40,000 young people, both boys and

girls, at 38 locations across greater Milwaukee, making the clubs the oldest and largest youth-serving agency in the area. BGCGM’s mission is simple: to inspire and empower all young people, especially those who need it most, to realize their full potential as productive, responsible, and caring citizens.

In order to support the unique needs of youth, and with a \$25 million operating budget, BGCGM offers hundreds of programs within six core areas: Education and Career Development; the Arts; Adolescent and Holistic Health Initiatives; Sports, Fitness, and Recreation; Outdoor Environment and Education; and Character and Leadership.

BGCGM’s Can You Hear Us Now program is a youth-led advocacy program started in 2011 at the LaVarnway Boys & Girls Club that serves approximately 50 teens between the ages of 12 and 18 each year. The CYHUN program provides teens an artistic platform to express themselves through media and art and the guidance to address issues that are affecting them. Each year the youth collectively decide on an important issue to focus on and learn the technical skills associated with a particular artistic medium (e.g., videography, photography, poetry). In 2011, youth wrote and performed a theatrical production titled *The Block is Hot: The Victim’s Perspective of the Impact of Gun Violence*. In 2012, youth participants organized several community events, including an open mic night called *SPEAK OUT: Survivors and Advocates Against Sexual Violence*. And in 2013, youth were the focus of a documentary entitled *The Voice: The Power of Youth Voice in Changing Society*, as well as a public service announcement about the impact of suicide. In her own words, one youth participant reflected on the work CYHUN does: “A lot of people in the country think that teenagers’ lives don’t matter. Like they think we’re always doing ignorant stuff. So our group, we are positive, and we talk to other teens.”





ORGANIZATION

Total number of full-time staff	780
Number of volunteers	1290
Annual operating budget	\$24.8M

FOCUS OFFERING

Total contact hours	41
Duration of the program period	September-June

FOCUS OFFERING YOUTH (FROM YOUTH SURVEYS)

Number of youth	24
Age	12-18 (13.67)
Gender	29% M
Ethnicity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 96% African American • 4% Prefer not to disclose
Percent currently attending school on a regular basis	96%

FOCUS OFFERING STAFF (FROM STAFF SURVEY)

Number of staff	3
Level of education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 33% College degree • 67% Advanced degree
Years of experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 11.33 in youth development • 4.33 in this program
Staff program content expertise self-rating (1=Novice, 2=Experienced, 3=Expert)	2.67
Staff SEL expertise self-rating (1=Novice, 2=Experienced, 3=Expert)	2.33



YOUTH AND STAFF CHARACTERISTICS

Youth

When asked to describe the young people who attend CYHUN, Natalie Cooper, senior director of social emotional learning, said:

CYHUN is a team of young people with promise who are courageous enough to find their voice to impact their environment; a group of young people who want to leave a legacy of love and greatness for the generation that's following them. These youth are secure enough in who they are as individuals that they are able to work within different groups to find a purpose and cause that can change the world.

The majority of participants in CYHUN grew up in the Lindsay Heights neighborhood of Milwaukee, where violence, poverty, and trauma have been a part of their daily lives. Most of these teens are youth of color living in single or foster-parent households and take on the responsibility of caring for younger siblings or helping their parents financially. Often they do not feel they have someone to turn to in dealing with their experiences as teenagers. This accumulated stress can take a heavy toll on a young person. CYHUN youth are resilient and eager to move beyond their circumstances and create their own positive futures as well as make a positive difference in their communities.

BGCGM staff recruit youth to the CYHUN program in a number of ways. Here's how Natalie described them:

Janay, our Teen Program Coordinator, will say, "Hey, I think this would be a great group for you." We do information sessions to talk about the program and give opportunities for kids to sign up. We have kids who've been referred by agencies. We use social media, text messages, leaders of the week. We have signage in the teen center and the club. We make everyone familiar with the awesome nature of the program from the front desk clerk to the coat check person to the security staff. Everyone who participates in any way is kept involved, and that's why we have such a high retention rate.

CYHUN is different from the drop-in "gym and swim" programs that nationwide Boys & Girls Clubs are known for. For the program to be successful, youth must commit to attending the weekly sessions on a regular basis for the duration of the program year (which corresponds to the school year). Natalie underscored how she communicated to youth that their commitment is important to the success of the program:

You don't get to come for one or two sessions, or start coming in towards the end and then have the glory of everything that happened. We need your full commitment from beginning to end. If you have other components of your life that will cause you not to be committed, we can't give you the leadership role you're accustomed to because it's critical for you to be present for us to accomplish our goals.

The structure of the program and the commitment required make CYHUN attractive to young people and parents who might not otherwise be involved in activities at BGCGM. The hope is that this also impacts how they interact within the greater club outside of the CYHUN program:

Because of our structure, we get a different type of kid who is willing to try CYHUN. It's family-friendly. A parent can walk in and know that this program has a start and an end. It has core values and outcomes delivered within each program session and a culminating event where they can see the work. We have top-of-the-line staff, so some of the kids aren't really part of the [Boys & Girls] club culture and are coming to the club just for our program.

Still, whether the youth are die-hard BGCGM members or newcomers, CYHUN "gives a format for those who are normally rendered silent to have a voice. But I think the program is beneficial for so many to have a voice."

Staff

Natalie explained the important role that staff play in the lives of the CYHUN youth:

In CYHUN, staff members represent constant, positive figures in teens' lives. At the core, they are someone the teens can trust and confide in, and the youth fully understand that staff members have their best interests at heart. For many of the participants, this trust between themselves and staff takes time and often, it is the repeated exposure and presence of staff alone that gains this trust. For kids growing up in Lindsay Heights, abandonment and broken commitments are far too constant of a reality, and they are often weary of adults who come into their lives. Our Senior Program Manager always says that the teens are at once 'greeted with love and validation.' Our staff in CYHUN are constantly telling the teens how important they are and that their experiences and what they have to say matters and they are always given the platform to have a voice. Sometimes this is the first time they've had someone in their lives validate and encourage their emotions. Once this relationship is established, participants in CYHUN begin to seek out and develop positive social relationships with other adults and their peers.

"Sometimes this is the first time they've had someone in their lives validate and encourage their emotions. Once this relationship is established, participants in CYHUN begin to seek out and develop positive social relationships with other adults and their peers."

—Natalie Cooper, BGCGM

Facilitators must be willing to commit their time to the teens and to take an active role, which means being available outside of the weekly sessions. The staff that lead CYHUN often attend activities that the teens are a part of, such as sporting events, performances, or graduations, in order to show their love and support for the teens extends beyond the program. The underlying theme for CYHUN is love. The youth experience the staff caring for them in a way that they may never have experienced before. La'Ketta Caldwell, senior program manager of social emotional learning, elaborated:

Natalie is our director, but she still went out in the cold to see a student play football in the rain. Who does that? We know that by showing up the kids feel loved. Showing up outside of our program makes a difference.

The staff have deep connections to the work they do and find their motivation in the experiences they've had. La'Ketta expressed:

I know young people. Teens are my favorite. They're complicated. It takes a lot. But with teenagers, you've got to work. They keep the work challenging. It's a beautiful challenge. It's not easy. I can't just show up; I have to constantly study, constantly prove myself to them.

Natalie Cooper was initially moved to action when she saw the need for a community platform to hear the voices of their young people. The event that made this need perfectly clear occurred at the funeral for a club member at another location. A brawl broke out at the funeral and the police were called:

Some of us found ourselves in the face of assault rifles while trying to calm kids down. There were kids jumping off balconies to get in the middle of the fight. It was just horrible. At one point the casket got turned. It was just a tragedy. It was so loud. It was negative energy, but was also the passion and the pain of the loss, and it just clicked for us that we have to do more to hear the voices of the young people. There are a lot of issues in the city of Milwaukee with our young people and how to positively engage with the police. So to see all of our kids being handcuffed, to see kids forced on the ground, being mistreated, we just felt we needed to protect them. Where nobody else was listening, my team and I were listening. We talked one-on-one with the kids. Like, "What is going on with you all that you feel that this is the best way to express what you're feeling?" We discovered they felt that the adults had failed them. So that was kind of my click moment that we have to really provide a platform that will force the communities to hear from the voice of our young people.

For CYHUN, it is critical to have a team of staff who are able to relate to and serve as mentors for youth. The team consists of La’Ketta Caldwell, senior program manager of social emotional learning; Janay McClain-Kelly, teen program coordinator; and Jamar Willis, program coordinator. La’Ketta explained that Jamar was added to the team to “engage the voice of the boys, and also to validate their ‘hood’ component, which is so critical to this group because they need the familiarity of somebody who not only knows their story but has lived their story. So it was really critical for us. Big Homie, that’s what they call him.”

All of the staff working in CYHUN have a background working with at-promise (rather than at-risk) youth. To fully support the teen members, staff attend workshops and specific trainings that relate to social and emotional learning. CYHUN staff are trained to work with at-promise youth and are prepared to deal with strong emotions. Staff will provide teens with additional resources, such as contact information for a counselor or further support groups, if they feel it is in the best interest of the youth.

OFFERING CURRICULUM

Offering Content

CYHUN’s artistic workshop model provides youth with experiences to increase their self-awareness and uses the arts as a medium to communicate with the larger community about issues that affect their lives. La’Ketta described how she explains this to the youth:

My role is to get you to where people can hear you. What you have to say when you’re mad, they need to hear that. I’m going to help you polish it up in a way where they will hear it, and they’ll feel it, and it will change. If you can get to the heart of the people, they will change.

Through participating in the program activities and by sharing their emotionally charged experiences with the group, youth gain the necessary skills and confidence to appropriately advocate for themselves and make positive changes in their lives.

CYHUN runs from September through May with one session per week. There are also a variety of field trips offered throughout the year that expose youth to adults in a variety of professions related to the chosen issue or media genre. The program topic changes each year and are developed by the youth. The following is a description of the program sequence that CYHUN follows across a program year.

Offering Sequence

Weeks 1-3: Building Trust and Community. Before the program starts, staff have a presence at the club—playing chess, hanging out in the teen room, volleyball games—in order to get to know youth and get them

CYHUN’s Offering Sequence

WEEKS 1-3:
BUILDING TRUST
AND COMMUNITY

WEEKS 4-11:
UNDERSTANDING
MY COMMUNITY

WEEKS 12-13:
EXPLORING
THE ISSUE

WEEK 14-15:
RESEARCH

(THROUGHOUT):
TECHNICAL
TRAINING

interested in joining the CYHUN program. Once the program begins, staff and youth participants have fun building the community. They play lots of games and use theater improvisation techniques to get to know each other, establish boundaries and group norms, and staff expectations:

Many teens who enter CYHUN hesitate trusting adults at first. For children dealing with trauma or who have had a lack of adult role models in their life, this kind of open relationship can take some time. CYHUN staff spend the first three weeks with the students working on building the team and creating a safe environment. Often this means just spending time with the youth and doing things they like to do, such as playing video games or just hanging out. Staff always allow teens to voice their own needs throughout the program and will take their input to create a safe space where they feel comfortable sharing.

This focused time on team building is essential to welcoming new youth to the program and also to rebuild the bonds between the returning youth who may have lost touch over the summer.

Weeks 4-11: Understanding My Community. As youth continue to get to know each other, they begin considering the things happening in their community that impact their lives. This is a brainstorming period and provides youth opportunities for sharing personal experiences with each other. La’Ketta Caldwell framed this period through a series of questions:

What’s going on right now in the community? How does that connect with what’s going on in the nation? What do you see on the news? We focus on understanding what is going on. Why do you think this is happening? Why do you believe our community is changing? What are some things going on? What are some things you see in the community that you wish you could change? What frustrates you?

During this time, no topics are off limits. Youth are encouraged to discuss and share the experiences that are important to them and to other youth in their city.

The 2014-2015 project was to perform a “choreopoem”—a live performance that combines poetry, dance, music, and song. The group was reading Tupac Shakur’s book of poetry, *The Rose that Grew from Concrete*, “to get the kids to think about community and think about themselves.” In one of the early sessions, La’Ketta recognized the power of using the hip-hop icon’s words as a vehicle for the youth’s expression:

I recognized that even the kids who didn’t speak as well, they were confident when they read Tupac’s words. So I didn’t hear any of the stuttering. People didn’t have their books up in front of their face. So I thought, “Hmm, so Tupac’s words will speak. They’re just not at the place right now to share their work or their story. So I’m going to let them tell their story through ‘Pac.”

In this way, youth were provided a safe space where they could begin to express and process their emotions relating to their life experiences.

Weeks 12-13: Exploring the Issue. From the brainstorming and discussion over the previous weeks, youth select an issue that is of importance to them that will become the focus of their project for the remainder of the year. Natalie Cooper explained:

We take the kids on a journey to start exploring things. That exploration may be anything from a group activity, to research, to exposure. Then the kids have to hone in collaboratively and collectively to identify one voice that will emanate across all the groups. So everybody has a voice, everybody wants to be heard, but for the sake of the project, we have to identify what that unified voice is.

WEEK 19-22:
COMMUNITY
PRESENTATION
PLANNING

WEEK 23-24:
COMMUNITY
PRESENTATION
LOGISTICS

WEEK 25-28:
COMMUNITY
PRESENTATION
PROMOTION

WEEK 29-30:
COMMUNITY
PRESENTATION
OCCURS

WEEK 31-32:
DEBRIEF
AND
CELEBRATION

During this stage, youth learn as much as they can about their chosen issue by reading news articles, reviewing statistics, and conducting Internet searches. They also participate in activities designed to help them further unpack the issue. Natalie added:

Once that unified voice is identified, it's about coaching them, working with them, and prepping them through different leadership-building capacity sessions. They have to learn about differences, tolerance, oppression, empathy, self-awareness, peer accountability, decision making, their role as a responsible citizen, things of that nature. They can learn to identify their role as an individual and how it impacts the broader community.

Week 14–15: Research. As youth begin to research the issue for their project, they might go on field trips, host speakers, and conduct interviews. Through this process, youth are exposed to relevant careers and practice articulating and crafting questions. As they conduct more interviews, they become more confident. La'Ketta said:

This is not just the traditional type of research; it is also collecting data from peers, from their staff at the club, having conversations with their teachers about the topic. They're looking for the voice of the people. A lot of the people they interviewed for this year's project were their peers. They went out into the larger community to ask their friends and adults, "When did an adult make a choice for you that impacted your life negatively or positively?"

Technical Training (Throughout): Youth learn the technical skills and terminology for the genre of their production (i.e., theater, film, photography, poetry). Experts are brought in as partners on the project to educate and work with teens to develop the skills they need to complete their projects.

Last year, when the youth were featured in a documentary, they learned how to use a camera, how to edit, how to take pictures, and how to storyboard. This year, where the project was a poetry and drama production, youth received technical training in voice lessons and performance technique. They also learned to write their own poetry using experiences in their lives.

La'Ketta uses her background in the arts to help the youth develop technical skills. Through free writing activities and theater improvisation games, La'Ketta asks the youth to gradually express more of themselves to the group and, along the way, she helps them build necessary performance skills that will be used in the final production. She said:

It's easier for them to become a character through improv and say stuff then it is for them to directly say how they feel out loud.

Week 19–22: Community Presentation Planning. The community presentation is the focus for the second half of the year. In contrast with previous years, where the same youth were engaged from start to finish, during the 2014-2015 year, new youth were invited in the middle of the year to audition for the performance. The young people who wrote the script during the first half of the year did not feel comfortable performing. The auditions meant that the group needed to re-establish its norms and expectations and build a new sense of community that appreciated the contribution of the original youth and welcomed the participation of the newly recruited youth. The group also needed to figure out how they would work with the Milwaukee High School of the Arts, which was partnering with BGCGM on the production. Youth from all groups were engaged in production decisions to ensure that everyone's voice was heard.

Week 23–24: Community Presentation Logistics. Each presentation has taken place in a different venue over the three years since the program launched, depending on the intended audience and the nature of the work to be presented. The performance highlighted in this study took place in the atrium at the Milwaukee Art Museum with its beautiful glass ceiling. As part of preparation for the performance, youth visited the museum, had a tour and a discussion on the historical context of the space, and afterwards met with museum staff to establish the technical specifications for the performance area. La'Ketta said that for BGCGM youth and staff, "it's important for them to see what goes on behind the scenes. We don't just show up and it all happens."

Week 25–28: Community Presentation Promotion. The youth played a large role in promotion of the performance. They were encouraged to use social media to invite their friends and families to the event. Youth



were also coached in how to deliver a television interview. The local news channel covered the performance and came to rehearsals the week leading up to the show to help youth prepare to be on camera. BGGCM staff worked with youth to teach them “to have the media work for them and not them working for the media,” as phrased by La’Ketta.

Week 29–30: Community Presentation Occurs. The presentation was one night only, but during the week leading up to it, there were nightly technical rehearsals. The culminating show was an opportunity for youth to present their work back to the community from which the story came. The community heard the voice of the youth asking for change. For La’Ketta, this was a central aspect of the work:

The arts are so powerful because they provide safe spaces for expression. And when the community can receive and hear it, it changes.

Week 31–32: Debrief and Celebration. Amidst the heavy weight of the topics that CYHUN addresses, they make sure to build in time for fun and appreciation. At three times during the year—halfway through the program in December, again in the spring, and at the end of the program in May—they host celebrations where youth can bring their families and enjoy each other’s company. La’Ketta explained the importance of celebrations:

They need moments where it’s just about having fun and being together with our family because looking at trauma and sharing their stories can spark triggers. We want to make sure that they have support and know that life isn’t always that heavy; to always bring in the fun elements.

Offering Session Structure

Each CYHUN session follows a routine that creates a safe, predictable space for youth to engage.

Beginning of the session: Each session begins with an icebreaker to reconnect the group and establish teamwork as well as act as a stress release for the participants. The Brotherhood/SisterSol Curriculum (brotherhood-sistersol.org) is used for this activity.

Session activity: Teens partake in an “activating activity” to provide effective communication within the group on particular topics. Because the topics are sometimes emotional, a follow-up conversation follows the activity to allow for reflection.

Closing: Each session ends with the teens forming a “Cypher Circle” to lift the spirits of the youth and further establish their sense of community.

Agape Love: Underlying the decisions staff make with youth is the concept of agape love, a compassionate and forgiving love for all people. Agape love is almost unconditional, and allows room for people to be human, make mistakes, and return to a place of healing and safety. Natalie explained what this looks like at CYHUN:

So, no matter what happens the session before, no matter what happens the day before, every day is an opportunity for you to begin again and to start fresh. If you’re having a bad day and you’re messing up our group dynamic, it’s cool, we’re going to let you have this moment, but we’re going to come back and we’re going to fix it and it’s going to be better the next time.

Abiding by this philosophy demonstrates to youth that learning emotion management strategies is an ongoing process. For staff at CYHUN, voicing and demonstrating love for the youth reinforces for youth what positive relationships look like. La’Ketta said:

A lot of these young kids, they’ve never been told that somebody loves them. From the beginning, we say that all time. It’s like, “We love you.” And they’re, in the beginning, like, “Oh my goodness. That’s just stupid.” Their faces frown up. “What in the world? Love? Whatever.” But we say it every session. So many of these kids have never said I love you without wanting something, and that’s amazing to me.

Natalie Cooper shared a time when it was discovered that a young man who had emerged as a leader in the program had been living at home without electricity for several months:

When he called me crying, I said “What is going on?” He was devastated because we’d gotten him a job and he’d given his mother every penny of his paycheck, but it wasn’t enough because she owed, like, \$3000 on her electric bill. I called La’Ketta and Janay and told them we had a crisis to deal with, we’ve got to figure out what’s going on. Because anytime a young black male calls somebody crying he’s at his breaking point. And then he broke it down for me that he hadn’t had lights since April, and this was like May or July.

The staff responded as a team, calling on their agency’s resources and working together to get the family financial support to get the lights turned on. But most important, they responded to the young man in the moment he needed it, and helped support him through the situation.

The CYHUN staff use tough love, too. Part of coaching youth through emotional situations is helping them to see that they’ll be better off on the other side of it, that persevering through pain and strife leads to better things. La’Ketta said:

I tell the kids, “It’s not that I don’t care what you’ve been through, but that’s not an excuse for you to give up. There’s a lot of work to be done, and this work is extremely taxing.” It’s rewarding when you see the transformation of the kids because you know that they were on the verge of being X’d out of life.

In the end, the youth persevere, due in large part because of the dedication of the staff who are right there with them through it all. Natalie said:

She [La’Ketta] does her Amen Hand or whatever—they know there’s a connection, be it her face turning red or a tear trickling down her face. They know staff are present and truly empathize with what the youth are dealing with. That connection is a motivating factor for the kids to stay in it through the end. They know that staff’s got them. When it’s all said and done, they have their backs. There’s no question.

QUIARA'S STORY

Quiara is one example of a youth who was very reserved upon entering CYHUN, but had an emotional breakthrough while participating in a session. At the beginning, Quiara seldom smiled and often spoke in a tone that indicated she was angry; she usually sat in the corner and spoke very few words. One day she volunteered to participate and read her story to the group. After sharing, Quiara broke down crying and left the room. The adult facilitating the session went after Quiara and brought her back into the group. While Quiara sat in front of her peers, each person shared how much she impacted his or her life and how much she meant to them. The following week, Quiara surprised the group with an original poem she wrote that expressed her journey through life and as a participant in CYHUN. Quiara truly flourished in front of the group and continues to show great strength and willingness to share every week.

*Growing up in these streets they raised me.
Joined the Boys & Girls Club
I think they saved me
If it weren't for them where would I be
Where would I be
I would be selling drugs or out here buying guns trying to rob people and taking their life because of my pain
Where would I be
Now days life is just waking up you can't walk down the street without worrying about your life
Life is just crazy
Where would I be
Might would have dropped out, but now I have been saved they saved me
Joined a couple of sports now life just amazes me
Where would I be
Where would I be growing up momma gone somewhere nowhere to be found daddy gone dead beat
Where would I be
Where would I be granny raised me
But the streets changed me used to think life was a joke man
Where would I be used to fight everybody to prove my granny ain't raised no punk
Teachers used to didn't pay me no mind
Where would I be
Used to didn't go to school used to didn't know my worth
Where would I be with out LBC
Where would I be
Life was crazy
Lost my granny everything went backwards stop going to the Boys & Girls Club stopped going to school
I realize I had my own future
Man where would I be
These drugs now days give away pain but not serious memories
Where would I be
Family members that think you're going to be pregnant before you hit high school
I guess I'm gone be prove them wrong
Where would I be
Used to keep everything in till I joined Can You Hear Us Now?
Finally I think somebody can hear and feel my pain real life has changed me
Where would I be
My poem has no periods because I thought my life had bad memories
Would never stop
Can You Hear me now
Can You Hear me?*

—Quiara

Quiara's Video:

<https://vimeo.com/89708166>

3.3 Philadelphia Wooden Boat Factory

Philadelphia, PA

BOAT BUILD AND SAIL CLUB

"Our role and challenge is to provide space, materials, expertise, and love, and then to get out of the way." —BRETT HART



How better to foster initiative and teamwork than by building a sea-faring vessel with your hands? The mission of the Philadelphia Wooden Boat Factory (PWBF) is to engage the city's youth through hands-on, experiential programming inspired by the heritage of the sea. The program began in 1996 as an opportunity to provide underperforming and economically disadvantaged youth with meaningful activities to promote academic achievement and well-being.

PWBF offers two project-based learning clubs for students to develop motivation, coping skills, agency, self-awareness, and confidence. The

first, the Boat Build and Sail Club, occurs year-round for three and a half hours, three days per week after school. Teams of youth build boats in the shop during colder months and sail the completed projects during the summer. The second, the Community Row Riverguides, focuses on the importance of community action. Youth in this program learn about the Schuylkill River and provide on-water environmental education for their peers in the community. With an annual organizational budget of about \$525,000 and a staff of six, PWBF serves about 58 students in the apprenticeship boat building program and closer to 500 students through maritime educational programs. To measure the effectiveness of their programs, PWBF uses the Youth At-Risk Program Evaluation Tool (YARPET). Youth participating in the 2012-2013 academic year demonstrated a six percent score increase on the YARPET compared to previous years. In 2015, PWBF invested in the development of a database program called STAR (Student Tracking to Access Reporting) to house programmatic data, including early warning indicators, such as truancy, delinquency, and youth participant GPAs, as well as program attendance, biometric surveys, skill rubrics, and the number of counseling sessions youth participate in. PWBF also collaborates with outside organizations. They have collaborated with Jewish Employment and Vocational Services Human Services to provide SAT and ACT tutoring and parent/student postsecondary education workshops.





ORGANIZATION

Total number of full-time staff	6
Number of volunteers	10
Annual operating budget	\$525,000

FOCUS OFFERING

Total contact hours	351
Duration of the program period	September-June

FOCUS OFFERING YOUTH (FROM YOUTH SURVEYS)

Number of youth	15
Age	14-18
Gender	75% M
Ethnicity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 33% African American • 27% Hispanic • 27% white • 13% Prefer not to disclose
Percent currently attending school on a regular basis	100%

FOCUS OFFERING STAFF (FROM STAFF SURVEY)

Number of staff	3
Level of education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 33% Some college • 33% College degree
Years of experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 in youth development • 1 in this program
Staff program content expertise self-rating (1=Novice, 2=Experienced, 3=Expert)	1.67
Staff SEL expertise self-rating (1=Novice, 2=Experienced, 3=Expert)	2.33

YOUTH AND STAFF CHARACTERISTICS

Youth

Participants are drawn largely from the three surrounding neighborhoods of Frankford, Kensington, and Port Richmond, where adverse experiences such as gang violence, drug sales and abuse, crime, incarceration, teen pregnancy, physical abuse, neglect, and sexual abuse are common. The majority of the participants come from low-income, single-parent households, and many show a lack of academic preparedness, and may have experienced emotional or physical trauma. The staff at PWBF recognize that many of their youth participants face tremendous stress and often emotional and/or physical trauma in their outside lives. Brett Hart, executive director at PWBF, pointed out:

Youth employ methods for coping with stress that are often misunderstood and manifest as behavioral problems.

Each youth brings a unique need from their life experiences. PWBF seeks to meet those needs by giving youth the love and support they need to excel, add beauty to the world, build resilience, and thrive.

PWBF staff recruit youth primarily from two public high schools in the neighborhoods, where they present the programs to classes, provide information, and give interested students an application. In some cases, students express an interest in the program by showing up at the riverside workshop. There is a short interview process to help the staff have a better understanding of each applicant's unique needs and explain to the youth how the program may benefit them.

Staff

A vital part of making the work of PWBF successful is selecting staff who embrace a strengths-based approach to youth development. Staff members bring a range of expertise in boatbuilding, sailing, marine ecology, sociology, social work, special education, and environmental education. Some of the staff are recent PWBF alumni who return to the program as employees after high school graduation.

Brett Hart described his entry into PWBF and youth development after a decade of maritime work as "magic." He was asked by then-director, Geoffrey McKonly, to join a class at the woodshop. According to Brett:

The kids were running through the shop, digging chisels into the bench, throwing things, (at least that's how I remember it). Finally a kid comes up, looks up at Geoff, who's much taller than him, and says, "Can we start?" Geoff says, "Sure. You know what to do." The kid turns around and takes this piece of plywood that is going to become a canoe over the next 18 weeks, puts it on a sawhorse, calls his friend over, and says, "Come on, give me a hand with this." Other kids saw this and suddenly all of the kids were picking up, putting down the chisels, and starting on their boats. It was magic.

It was the first time I realized that Geoff had a powerful idea, an idea that as an outsider I couldn't have previously appreciated. In that long and awkward yet pivotal moment where the student wanted Geoff to assume control, Geoff instead understood that destiny and agency belonged to the student. He trusted that the student would respond, and he did. This is fundamental to strength-based work.



He was impressed with how Geoffrey empowered the youth to do something “spectacularly hard on their own.” He was hooked. After volunteering with the organization for several years amidst a few more seafaring ventures on the West Coast, he took over as the Executive Director in 2009.

Victoria Guidi, program director, Boat Build and Sail, got involved with PWBF when she moved to Philadelphia to take care of her mother. She had always loved sailing, and she hoped to find something that combined working with youth (she was a high school teacher in El Salvador for several years) and her love of sailing. Like Brett, she began as a volunteer, then gradually became a more integral part of the organization, from grant writing and administrative duties to stepping up to help design the Boat Build and Sail program in 2012.

Continued professional development plays an important role in preparing PWBF staff to work with youth. The majority of staff training content comes from the work of Dr. Ken Ginsburg, a pediatrician and PWBF advisor who has developed a strength-based curriculum in resiliency building. Dr. Ginsburg’s work focuses on the seven Cs of Fostering Resilience: competence, confidence, connection, character, contribution, coping, and control. Staff are coached to use their own expertise and resources and simultaneously recognize youth’s unique backgrounds and experiences to promote youth’s discovery of skills.

ABOUT KEN GINSBURG

Reaching Teens: Strength-Based Communication Strategies to Build Resilience and Support Healthy Adolescent Development teaches youth-serving professionals how to incorporate strengths-based, trauma-informed communication strategies, foster resilience-building, and support healthy adolescent development. Learn more at www.fosteringresilience.com

OFFERING CURRICULUM

Offering Content

Boat Build and Sail Club engages youth to build their own racing sailboats. In this apprenticeship model, youth work in teams of four and learn how to use shop machinery and hand tools to build the boats. The project consists of three 12-week semesters during the school year and a six-week summer sailing program⁹⁵. The Boat Build and Sail Club is designed so that youth are empowered, motivated, and learn through failure. There is continual iteration and evolution, and the process of boat building provides a natural feedback loop for the youth.

The choices staff make, down to the selected model of the boat youth build, intentionally support youth’s development. Brett elaborated:

Our featured Factory One Design was specifically created for our program after an extensive dialogue between the naval architect, our students, and staff. The concepts of learning through failure and the ability to iterate and evolve were central. The materials we use in this traditional wooden boatbuilding process provide their own feedback loop. The construction techniques inherent to this type of construction—10 planks to hang on each side of the boat and 40 frames to hold the shape together—provide the student builder the opportunity to participate in a process, make mistakes, and improve in the next round.

The work of building a boat is sufficiently complicated and challenging. With staff supports, though, it is realistic for youth teams to complete the project within a program year. Victoria Guidi said:

The type of boat that we’re building is not easy: it’s really challenging work, and we don’t expect it to create boat builders out of our kids. The process becomes more about building their individual selves through the demands that boat building requires, like attention, focus, responsibility, and follow-through plus teamwork and communication. It helps build all of that.

PWBF’s Offering Sequence



Offering Sequence

Growing Roots. At the start of the program in the fall, much time is spent on getting to know one another and forming bonds as a team. Youth work primarily in the boat shop developing boat plans with some time spent on the water, as weather permits. A big difference between the 2013-2014 program year and the 2014-2015 program year was that youth were able to sail in the boats built the previous year. This was a point of pride for the returning youth as well as a motivator for those youth new to the program: they were able to see what they were setting out to do.

Experimentation and Play. During this stage, youth are invited to explore the shop and experiment with some of the hand-held tools like planes, T-squares, and tape measures. Youth get their hands on scraps of wood and experiment using some of the tools for small projects.

Learning to Swim. Within the first couple of nights at the program, youth learn to safely use the large machinery (e.g., chop boxes, band saws, table saws). They start to develop skills as they're trained in the use of specific machines and practice using the equipment. One of the first things they build is a mold around which they'll put the planks that will form the skin of their boat. But first, the youth work on lofting—drawing designs for the boat in life size on the floor of the shop. They work from these plans to measure, mark, and cut the boards into the right shape. At this stage, youth are learning many technical skills, such as measurement, wood selection, and use of machinery, as well as learning how to share space and interact cooperatively on the project with their peers.

Community. At this stage, the group selects a team leader for the project. The team leader is someone who helps to keep the team on track to meet their goals and is the go-to person for other youth on the team. If the team leader is asked something he/she can't answer, then he/she brings it to a staff member. This includes technical questions and interpersonal challenges. The group also writes a group charter, a set of expectations that the team can abide by and hold each other accountable to as they set out to work on their boat.

Getting to work. In the winter, work is primarily shop-based, as youth are deep into the building phase of their boat. They're working daily in the shop in pairs or small groups towards established goals. During this time they're refining their carpentry skills and conducting tasks like Brett described here:

By the time they're doing the third, fourth, or fifth plank, the students are coming in the door and they're like, "Okay, I know the process is there in front of me, so I have to go select a couple of pieces of wood, find out where the knotholes are, and make sure the wood's going to work for the process that I'm going to do. I need to set up the scarfing and create the bevels, and I need to grab the compass and do a spiling." They know exactly what they need to do, and it allows them to make some mistakes and learn from them.

During this stage, youth are experiencing trial and error as they practice their skills through multiple iterations. Opportunities for failure and mistakes are widely available, and staff take advantage of these occasions to help youth develop.

Over the course of the year, as youth learn the necessary skills, staff are able to step back while youth start to own the work. Victoria explained:

As the year progresses we elect team leaders and the students start to take ownership. It was really neat seeing it come to life this year, where it became a student-owned, student-led project. Me and Andy, who's my program assistant, we became more of the boat building experts where we would put the tasks on the boards and all the students would know, "All right so these are the tasks," and then they would divide up what everyone's going to do. As the students became more proficient in certain work and certain skills, they would choose what they wanted to do and we were there to float around and to assist with using the plane or working with the saw or just making a compound bevel. It really was a student-led project, and we really developed like a family.

Workshops and Field Trips. Workshops and field trips help to break up the monotony of a long winter in the shop and help keep the youth motivated. Staff or invited guests may conduct workshops to guide youth through the steps of a process, and then youth work through the process on their own to completion. Field trips provide a change of scenery and an opportunity to learn more about the beauty, lore, and history of sailing. For example, a trip to Morris Arboretum at the University of Pennsylvania includes a tour with a senior naturalist who showcases the woods used

in boatbuilding. The field trips are leveraged back at the shop through workshops and group reading related to wood biology, selection, and use. Some field trips on the other hand are just for fun, like a Phillies or Sixers game.

Sailing. Starting in the fall of 2014, the PWBF acquired a new contracted space with Department of Parks and Recreation, which means they have year-round waterfront access. In the summer, youth spend most of the time on the water, sailing in the boats they designed and built in the program. Victoria transitions from master of boat-building to sailing coach as she helps the youth to learn to launch, steer, and sail the boats they've built.

Offering Session Structure

The Boat Build and Sail club follows a set of daily rituals that provide structure and routines that allow youth to check in, open up, complete tasks, and reflect each day. Victoria and her colleagues intentionally create a space that is inviting and loving. Staff spend time getting to know the youth and show they care about their lives, feelings and unique personalities.

Meal. Each evening, the group of staff and youth start their time together by eating a meal. This offers a way to ensure that the youth are receiving the nourishment they need and provides an opportunity to check in with the youth emotionally. An important aspect of the care PWBF provides is to nourish their youth. Youth and staff eat together every night as both a social activity and an introduction for students to whole foods, community gardening, and basic nutrition concepts. This aspect of the program occurs in partnerships with Children's Hospital of Philadelphia and the Urban Nutrition Initiative. Victoria said:

Students come into our shop, and they come to the table at the beginning of the night, and we try to create a very inviting, loving atmosphere where students understand that we're genuinely interested in who they are and how they're feeling, what their days have been like and how their weekends have been.

Mindfulness. Each night students gather around a central workbench and take a moment for collective meditation. They hear the same message recited daily as they meditate: "You are in the now. The next three hours are about you. Breathe the negative thoughts out. Clear your mind for the day. The next three hours are about you." This message, and the accompanying meditation, are critical for PWBF students, whose normal stress of being a teenager coupled with the toxic stress in their environment often prevents them from being able to focus on the present. This practice of mindfulness allows them to focus on themselves and their work.

"You are in the now. The next three hours are about you. Breathe the negative thoughts out. Clear your mind for the day. The next three hours are about you."

—Mindfulness Meditation

Opening up. After the meal, the staff pose a question or discussion topic not related to boat-building to get youth to open up with each other. Sometimes these discussions serve as icebreakers, and sometimes they're tied to current events or news stories that might trigger emotional reactions in youth. The discussions might continue throughout the night while youth work on their boat-building tasks.

Goals. Next, the staff review the weekly and daily goals that are on display on the board in the shop. Staff use this opportunity to reinforce the progress the youth teams have made so far and keep the excitement levels high. Once the tasks have been reviewed, youth pair off and get to work. Victoria noted, "This is where they have a lot of choice in what they want to do."

Connecting Cohorts. The closing ritual is designed to help with project planning, articulation, and connection between the various youth teams. (One group of students building a single boat is split into a group that attends on Mondays and Wednesdays and a group that attends on Tuesdays and Thursdays.) Each small team of students answers five questions, speaking into a digital recorder:

- What were my goals for today?
- What did I accomplish?
- What tools did I use?
- What were the challenges we encountered?
- What is the goal for tomorrow?



Before the next day's students begin their hands-on work, they listen to the narrative from the day before, which serves to connect them to the work of their peers and to facilitate progress in the collective work at hand.

Appreciations. Before closing for the night, the whole group gathers again for questions and student reflections. Victoria Guidi said:

Students might want to recognize someone for [helping them]. We try to model that, like, "Hey, you know, I just want to recognize Javon for really helping me out to get this longboard scarfed. It was heavy, and your help really made it a lot easier for me. Thank you for setting down your work for that time when I was in need and helping me out."

This daily structure allows the staff to get a good sense of the strengths and challenges of individual youth and allows staff to adapt their response according to the needs of the youth on any given day.

Counseling. In addition to these daily rituals, PWBF employs two MSW counselors, who are responsible for a cohort of 25 to 30 students each. The counselors serve as a conduit between the student, the family, and the school, and they coordinate wrap-around services for those in need. Each night the counselors hold 30-minute meetings with three separate students. They implement a motivational interviewing technique where the students are the experts in their own lives. The goal is to facilitate conversations that encourage the students to set goals and benchmarks for their work in the shop and their personal or academic lives. Each student is promised two, one-on-one goal-setting sessions per month. The counselors spend the remainder of the evening on the shop floor while also hosting open office hours available for students in times of crisis.

At PWBF, staff encourage young people to build initiative, problem solving and teamwork skills through the ways they interact throughout the Boat Build and Sail Club's project year. These practices may also lead to the development of grit or resilience in youth, or what researcher Angela Duckworth describes as "perseverance and passion for long-term goals."⁹⁶

Pilot Initiative

In 2015, PWBF conceived a new, skills-based, youth-mentoring-youth component of the program to address academic challenges observed among some participants. The approach reflects research that suggests that when older youth mentor younger youth in academic settings, both groups rise together at a pace that exceeds growth evident in situations where adult teachers are the sole instructors. High School Apprentices in the 2016 program will be empowered to function as academic and craft mentors for a cohort of middle-school youth who will enroll in fall 2016. The first phase of the project involves three related efforts:

- Extrapolating activities and information from boat building and sailing making that align with core skills required in grade 7 math and language arts curricula;
- Developing mini-lessons on the aligned skills; and
- Training the high school-aged mentors as coaches for younger youth.

The mentoring component of the program will be implemented in daylong sessions to be held on Saturdays, expanding the weekly service hours available to participants in this component of the program by five hours. The Saturday workshops will allow the prospective mentors to learn facilitation skills and examine best practices in teaching. Through playful and rigorous activities, these teens will hone their abilities to think sequentially and clearly articulate their ideas. They will also master content aligned with grade 7 math and language arts that relate to boatbuilding in anticipation of playing a supportive role with the middle-school youth to be enrolled in year two.

Enabling youth to make authentic contributions is at the heart of PWBF's programs. Blending mentorship into the scope of the project is a logical next step. As students develop empathy for the learning processes of their peers and their mentees, as well as a metacognitive appreciation for their own learning style, they become stronger learners, more deeply connected to themselves and their peers in the program.

KALEEL'S STORY TOLD BY BRETT HART

Kaleel was 18 and midway through his second year as a boat-building apprentice at PWBF early last spring. Although he attended a local charter school where 81 percent of graduates go on to postsecondary education, Kaleel made it clear that education, or at least traditional classroom learning, held little meaning for him. He was discouraged, regularly taking extended leaves from school. He characterized himself as being surrounded by negative energy. His friends were not supportive, and his mother did not offer the positive, adult influence he needed at home. Nonetheless, Kaleel made it clear he wanted more for himself and that he had high, personal expectations. What he found at PWBF was an environment filled with positive affirmation and strong, personal relationships. He thrived at PWBF, excelling as a woodworker and overall a responsible, passionate, and engaged participant. He even became a quiet leader, inspiring others through his commitment to the work.

Although PWBF discussed the possibility of Kaleel becoming a program assistant at PWBF following graduation—an opportunity he appreciated—something remarkable happened. Of his own volition, he asked about opportunities to further his education as a boat builder. He looked closely at the Landing School, which offers associate's and bachelor's degree programs in boatbuilding, naval architecture, and other marine sciences, and met with their CEO. After submitting an application, Kaleel learned he was not only accepted but would receive a scholarship to attend.

Through PWBF, Kaleel continued to dream and, with the support of staff, he now has the resources to realize those dreams.



JAEDEN'S STORY TOLD BY BRETT HART

In 2011, Jaeden, frustrated with school, had dropped out at the age of 16. He joined PWBF's boatbuilding program shortly after re-enrolling in high school at one of PWBF's partners, El Centro De Estudiantes, a year later. Jaeden's school experiences prior to El Centro were not positive. He also lacked positive role models at home and among his friends. His mother, a single mother, had not completed high school, and his siblings and cousins were also having negative school experiences. Though his father lived in the neighborhood, he and Jaeden were not in touch. Despite evidence of clear innate intelligence, Jaeden had not challenged himself academically, struggled with literacy issues, and was not going to be prepared or equipped to go to college or find sustainable employment. He was reserved, prone to anger, and demoralized.

Jaeden's engagement with PWBF lasted 16 months, after which time he graduated high school.

PWBF staff say what stuck out in Jaeden's experience was the great pride he developed in his own craftsmanship through the program. He responded to his newfound autonomy, competence, and positive relationships with staff. When Jaeden began PWBF, he was more than quiet. He was insular, a self-described poor communicator prone to defensiveness. When things didn't go his way, or when he felt he had "messed up," he chose a helpless narrative. The chaos at home was affecting his school life, which staff was aware of through communication with his advisor at El Centro. At one point Jaeden missed his final project exhibition due to a conflict with his family. Jaeden responded by retreating, and when we were finally able to connect again, he insisted that he would make the same choice again. Despite repercussions negatively affecting his progress toward graduation, Jaeden had skirted on big responsibilities—not because he was ill prepared or frightened, but because he had acted impulsively and irrationally. Recognizing that Jaeden was the expert in his own life, PWBF staff presented a "what if" conversation that allowed Jaeden to remain in control of the scenarios and his decision-making process, but progressed to a hypothetical outcome. Victoria and part-time Student Advocate, Zeelyna, worked with Jaeden to help him become less reactionary and learn to manage his emotions.

When PWBF staff asked Jaeden to write about his experience in the program, they weren't sure what to expect, and Jaeden was reluctant. He disappeared into the library where he penned an emotional letter. The following is an excerpt from the end of the letter:

The way I feel about this program is that it's one of the best opportunities I have got in my life so far. This place gives you so much more to offer than just building boats. Even though I learned new carpentry skills, I still learned other things, like motivation to do good at anything because each day I feel better about myself knowing I completed something at the shop. I think that anybody who likes to build and just needs something to stay out of trouble with, the Boat Factory would be a good fit for them just because it's a cool, laid back place to just be yourself and gain new skills plus knowledge for how a non-profit business runs each day. The reason I really like the Boat Factory is that first I get to build and fix things every day, with the bonus of maybe getting a job here or anywhere else. That's because I know I have the skills, experience, and supporters that got my back no matter what my decisions are. If I didn't have the Boat Factory I would probably not have been noticed or even have the motivation to do better. Having the chance to be at the Boat Factory has helped me with everyday life issues. Sometimes the Boat Factory has helped me with school projects, credits, parenting, and giving me a much better chance at getting accepted to this college I want to go to Williamson Free School. My mentors, Brett and Victoria, make me feel like there is a chance in life to still be successful even though I thought I lost my chance. So, in the end my true thoughts are this: Boat Factory is for kids and the mentors let [it] be known by always caring and giving kids a chance to do something positive in their life.

3.4 The Possibility Project

New York, NY

AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAM

“We say ‘no help, no fix, no save,’ and that means that we don’t do for our young people if they can do for themselves, and they can typically do a lot more than most people anticipate or are willing to expect from them.” —PAUL GRIFFIN

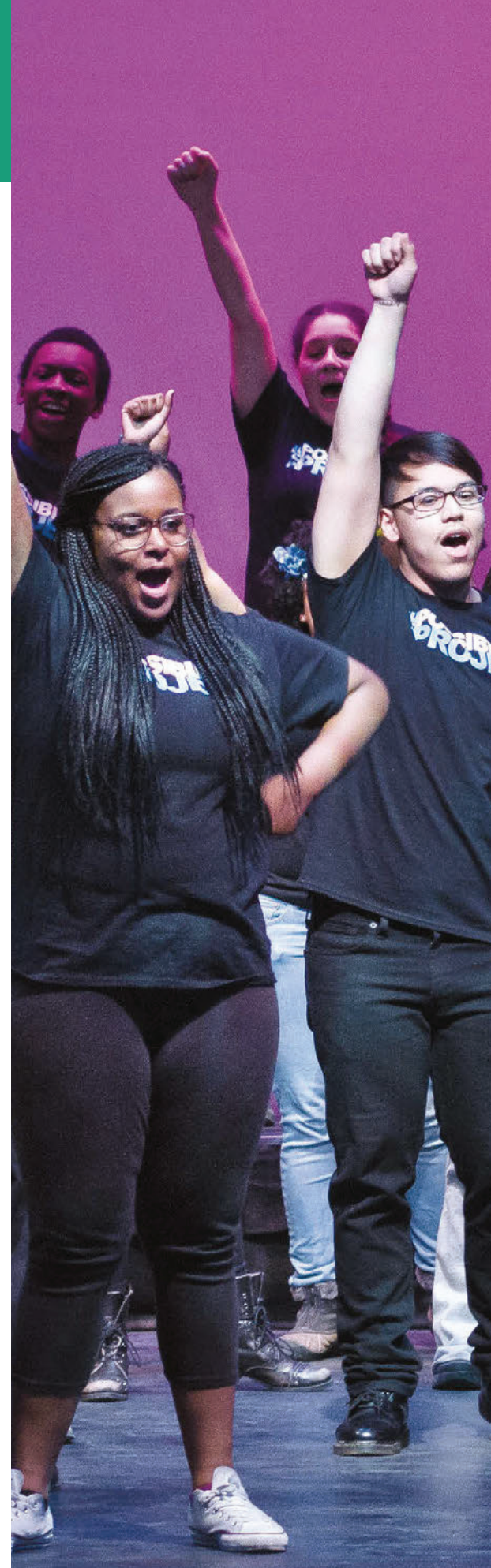


In 1994, Washington, D.C. was experiencing increased racial division and violence, earning the title as the “Murder Capital of the United States” for the several preceding years. In response, Paul

Griffin and four teenagers began a program called City at Peace, where youth wrote, directed, and performed musicals with a message of preventing violence, especially among young people, and building cross-cultural understanding. Over time, the location and the name of the organization has changed, and the mission has evolved to encompass the variety of issues youth experience day-to-day, in addition to violence and conflict.

Now located in New York City, The Possibility Project (TPP) mission is to “empower teenagers to transform the negative forces in their lives into positive action.” The program brings together vastly diverse groups of teenagers each year who meet weekly for ten months. Through a combination of issue-oriented discussions, trainings in diversity, conflict resolution, leadership and community activism, instruction in performing arts and writing, TPP youth participants develop the skills necessary to write, produce, and perform an original musical based on their lives and their ideas for change. In addition, they design and lead community action projects on issues of concern to them in order to take their creative vision for change into the world. Using the performing arts and community action as vehicles, TPP’s teenagers learn to build relationships across differences, resolve conflicts without violence, take on their responsibility to others, and lead.

With an annual organizational budget of almost \$700,000 and the guidance of three artistic directors, TPP operates four programs for diverse groups of at-risk youth living in the dense urban areas of New York City. The first two programs are available to any youth ages 13 to 19 and meet either on Saturdays or two days a week after school. The third program is only open to youth formerly or currently in foster care between the ages of 15 and 20. The fourth program is exclusively for court-involved youth between the ages of 15 and 20. The program offerings provide youth opportunities to overcome adversity by developing skills such as conflict resolution, teamwork, and responsibility. For the past 14 years, TPP participants have demonstrated the programs’ effectiveness in developing youth capacity for educational attainment, leadership, conflict resolution, and cross-cultural understanding. In TPP’s general programs, more than 98 percent of participants graduated from high school and 90 percent increased their GPA and attended college. TPP participants also reported an increase in confidence and an increased ability to resolve conflicts.





ORGANIZATION

Total number of full-time staff	5
Number of volunteers	6+
Annual operating budget	\$ 700,000

FOCUS OFFERING

Total contact hours	300
Duration of the program period	6-7 hours weekly, 10 months

FOCUS OFFERING YOUTH (FROM YOUTH SURVEYS)

Number of youth	45
Age	14-19
Gender	47% M
Ethnicity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 35% African American • 10% Asian/ Pac Is • 50% Hispanic • 5% Native Am • 10% Other • 5% Prefer not to disclose
Percent currently attending school on a regular basis	90%

FOCUS OFFERING STAFF (FROM STAFF SURVEY)

Number of staff	2
Level of education	• 100% College degree
Years of experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 17.5 in youth development • 12 in this program
Staff program content expertise self-rating (1=Novice, 2=Experienced, 3=Expert)	3
Staff SEL expertise self-rating (1=Novice, 2=Experienced, 3=Expert)	2.5

YOUTH AND STAFF CHARACTERISTICS

Youth

Hundreds of youth audition each year for a spot in The Possibility Project, however, TPP only has the capacity to accept about 120 of them; another 40 are returning participants. In addition to a non-competitive audition, there is a written application required. Artistic directors do not choose participants for the program based on talent, theatrical experience, or any other objective criteria. Rather, the directors look for youth who will be able to gain and grow from the experience. It is a primary goal to select youth who represent a wide range of cultures, experiences, and backgrounds. More than half of youth report or appear to have past experiences with trauma. More than 75 percent live in low-income households. Founder and President Paul Griffin said of the youth:

One hundred percent of our young people want a better life than they have. For the young people here in New York, I would say they are typically a little more mature than young people in other places. They interact with people of so many different ages and cultures amid the hustle and bustle of the city that they tend to be a little more socially savvy. They are a pretty lively bunch. They're a vital group of kids. I think that's true on day one, and it's hyper true by the end of the year.

Elizabeth Howard, artistic director, Afterschool Program at TPP, provided more detail on the recruitment process. She visits high schools all over the city to present the program and hold on-site auditions. TPP holds open auditions at several locations, too, so that youth can audition even if TPP didn't make it to their high school. This is what the auditions are like:

Our auditions are not performance-based. I'm really just trying to get to know the young people who come in. We do some dancing, some acting, and then I ask them questions. I ask them if there was one thing they could change in their lives and the world, what would it be and why. I'm really listening for their perspective on the world and what they're willing to say. What I'm looking for in those auditions is need; someone who needs what we offer. So maybe the person who barely does an audition I'll take, and the person who's really talented but has a lot of opportunities I won't, because they have opportunities elsewhere. I'm looking for their ability and willingness to commit. I want them to commit and stick with something.



Staff

TPP has learned to grow its own staff too. For the particular blend of artistic talent and skill in working with youth, they have found that they need to spend much more time getting to know someone, and them getting to know the program, before they can be sure it's a good fit. Paul Griffin said:

We no longer hire from résumé and interview. We get to know people, so we tend to hire from our network of people we know. Either people we know because we've seen their work or because they've come into our organization and worked as volunteers. And now we're moving to a place where, in order to lead one of our programs, you have to spend at least a year as an assistant director on the program so that when you're in a leadership position you understand how we work. What we've built is a specific culture with a very specific way of doing things.

Staff have to come in with expertise in directing and performance, as there is not time to teach these skills during the program. And, while some of the skills for understanding and working with youth can be taught or acquired over time, there are some qualities that TPP looks for in their staff. One, for Paul, is that they demonstrate empathy:

You have to hire people or have leaders who are empathic and who not only talk teamwork, but actually practice it. Then you have to have individuals who are not only capable of that, but are trained in it and believe in it and adhere to it. It would be kind of ironic to have people trying to develop empathy, but then they have all these rules that disallow them from empathizing or acting on that empathy.

Additionally, Paul said staff must be passionate about the work and dedicated to the mission:

Are they excited by the work that we're doing? Do we think that they'll own this? That they'll take it on and it will become theirs rather than just a job? That's not just because the job is so demanding, but also because if you're after creating personal and social change with young people, you will never be successful if they sense from you that you're just working a job.

For Paul, this became very clear to him personally in the first year of the program:

The very first year we did a show, one of our youth got shot, and the young people in the program asked me if I would be willing to let him come live at my home because they were concerned that the folks who had hurt him, had shot him, would come to finish it off if he went back to his home. His brother had been murdered by folks from the same area. You know, it was one of those unfortunately typical stories. And I said, "Let me think about it." When I realized that they were asking to me to commit to the same things I was asking them to commit to, I said yes because I felt like I couldn't ask them to commit to change if I wasn't willing to do the same.

Paul hasn't wavered on this commitment since the program began.

Elizabeth Howard first experienced the power of TPP when she attended a performance in the late 1990s:

I went and saw The Possibility Project in college, and what I saw on stage was something I'd never seen before. It was breathtaking. It was the courage of these young people on stage telling these amazing stories and really using their voices to try and change things. I was blown away by it, both as a person and as an artist/actor. I was like, "This is amazing."

For Elizabeth, what moves her is that the program exists to give young people an outlet for creative expression. The authenticity in the work is most important to her:

What is so special about it is really this youth voice. It's really led by the young people in the program, and their ideas are valued and used, and not in a way that sort of just pacifies them, but for a bigger agenda. It's really, truly their program to make what they want of it. I've never seen that done in a real way before.

OFFERING CURRICULUM

Offering Content

“TPP utilizes musical theater as a form specifically because of its effectiveness in engaging youth, a population that values performance, music, and dance greatly, imparting tools and skill-building for expression, and capturing their ‘voice,’ which is often difficult to do without the expressiveness the performing arts offer.”

At TPP, the stage production creates an ideal backdrop for the learning of social and emotional skills. Paul explained:

Empathy is the key component of the actor-audience relationship and is taught as essential to creating anything for the stage. Teamwork is referred to as ensemble or “working together as a cast.”

As youth are trained in technique for acting and singing, they are also developing self-awareness. Elizabeth shared:

The art training is done so that when we build the show they have a sense of what to do, but also [learn] singing and dancing and acting to allow them to feel comfortable in different parts. I’m teaching them vocal work as an actor, and then our musical director is teaching them vocal work as a singer. It’s not just so that they learn how to sing and can be heard on stage, but that they can understand the power of their voice.

Further, since the production is ultimately a collaboration among a cast of 50 youth, the young people learn to rely on each other, and, perhaps more importantly, they realize that others are relying on them. Paul said:

Their relationships and that sense of community is critically important to the work that we’re doing. The show and the working of the show is a sort of great metaphor for it. Because whereas it might not make sense to you or you could easily dismiss the fact that others don’t matter—I don’t need anybody, right?—when you’re in a show that’s not true. Ever. Because if somebody doesn’t show up—and they feel this in very real terms—or somebody’s emotionally just not present, or perhaps they’re there, but they’re having a bad day or whatever, it’s apparent to everybody. So it’s knowable; their not being present is tangible.

TPP utilizes a spiral curriculum over the course of the 10 months. This means that youth may be exposed to ideas and concepts early in the program through structured activities and discussions, and these themes emerge in the later months as youth recognize them in the stories they share and the scenes they write. One youth commented on this phenomenon:

Another thing is everything’s inclusive. In school, you may learn something one time and then the teacher will never connect it back, but when you go through workshops and rehearsals, it all leads up to something. So you could learn something in October or November and then it can be April and you realize, “That’s what that meant.” I love that feeling, that “light bulb moment.”

Over the progression of the program year, the role of staff changes. The program sequence (described below) requires that staff are more directive at the start of the program and, over time, transition the decision-making and control to the youth as they start to build their show. Paul explained the distinction as directing the process in the beginning versus facilitating the performance at the end:

At the beginning of the year, the Artistic Director’s role is to direct the process. Over time, as they’re working on the performance and moving towards the show, The Artistic Director needs to facilitate the creation of the performance.

TPP’s Offering Sequence

PRODUCTION TEAM	RECRUITMENT AND AUDITIONS	FIRST AND SECOND REHEARSALS	STEREOTYPES, POWER, ISMS	TECHNICAL TRAINING	LIFE STORIES	CONFLICT RESOLUTION	ACT OF SERVICE
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Offering Sequence

Production Team. Part of what eases the transition of staff from director to facilitator is the involvement of the Production Team, a group of six to 10 returning participants and two new cast members who develop and own the vision for the production. This team represents an intensive leadership training component of the program. They set goals, objectives, and policies, plan schedules, hire and fire the artists, solve problems, and communicate regularly with cast members and the Artistic Director.

Recruitment and Auditions. One of the first tasks of the program year is the audition process. From the moment staff meet the youth during the auditions, they are seeking to learn more about their experiences, backgrounds, and stories. They listen and observe, aiming to understand the youth they are meeting and envisioning each youth as a powerful and productive young adult in the future. No one is chosen on the basis of talent alone.

First and second rehearsals. After the cohort is selected and solidified, participants attend their first two rehearsals. Members of the production team each take personal responsibility for getting to know a small group of the cast members, ensuring that those individuals feel comfortable, safe, and supported. During the first week's rehearsal, youth are introduced to the program and are asked to understand the gravity and challenge of what they're being asked to do over the course of ten months. Elizabeth Howard said:

When we have our first rehearsal, we say to the group that we are about to do something very big together. From the moment I'm talking to them, I'm talking about them as an "us," so they know they are now a part of something. I say that very clearly. I say that if they have never been a part of something before, they are now. I set out what we're going to do, the challenges ahead for them, as a big challenge. From the very beginning, I am reinforcing that this is something bigger than them, that they are part of a team. On the flip side of that, I also say that we are going to get to know each other very well in here, and their responsibility in this room is to build relationships with everybody in this room. I set those as goals for them right off the top.

A first rehearsal activity that supports these goals is when the cast goes over the First Agreements: 14 principles that are the building blocks for developing positive relationships developed by TPP casts over the years. They include components like listening, amnesty, and taking care/enjoy yourself. During the first 3-4 weeks, building trust and a sense of community is essential in setting the stage for the rest of the program. Elizabeth underscored the use of the performing arts for building important ties early on:

We do a lot of performing arts work upfront, especially a lot of team building. Our acting and singing and dance serve as team building, as a collective experience. So everything we're doing has two or three meanings. It's not just to learn a dance, but it's to learn how to move in your body. It's learning how to collaborate with other people as you're acting, learning how to understand people's limits and different skill levels. We're teaching them all the time about being a part of something bigger than themselves.

TPP'S FIRST AGREEMENTS

1. Confidentiality
2. Amnesty
3. I-statements
4. Respect
5. Listen
6. Put-ups, not put-downs
7. No cross-talk, no piggy-backing
8. Try it on
9. You can pass
10. Be as honest as you can be
11. Take care/Enjoy yourself
12. Affection, yes/Sexual contact, no
13. No drugs or alcohol, by law
14. Accountability

TPP's Offering Sequence

SHOW OUTLINE AND
SHOW DEVELOPMENT

PREMIERE

COMMUNITY ACTION
PROJECTS

LEADERSHIP
TRAINING

ADVANCED ARTS
TRAINING

FUTURE
STORIES

LAST REHEARSAL
AND AFFIRMATION

CASE NARRATIVES
TPP

Elizabeth also talked about the high standards she has for youth, even (and maybe especially) at the start of the program. She expects them to do their absolute best in everything she throws their way:

I'm directing this process. I'm pretty hard on them as far as my standards go. I expect them to bring everything they've got to this. It's a very loving environment, but it's also an environment where I'm challenging them to be great. I want them to be great, and so I ask them to do that in everything that we're doing, in the exercises we're doing, the art training, and challenging them to push themselves. We get to a place of love and care. I'm not like a dictator, but I'm stern with them around that stuff.

The next activity that happens in the first or second rehearsal, after introductions and first agreements, is called Issues Brainstorm. Here, one youth described the experience of the activity, and how the staff creates a safe space by using anonymity:

In the beginning when you first come to rehearsal there are all these new faces. Early on we had an exercise where we wrote about the things that teenagers go through and which ones you can connect with. You get notecards to write for three different topics or one that really resonates with you and breaks you out of your shell. Everybody gets to read the notecards and you don't have to put your name on it. It's like opening up, but at the same time being anonymous. You're baring your soul on a notecard but no one knows it's you. A big thing that connects people is when we reflect after an exercise. After we read things, I want to hug people. I wish they hadn't gone through that. You're hearing it and no one has ever told you that before. Those reflections are so intense and emotional; I feel like that's what gets people to care.

Even as early as the first rehearsal, the cast is also working on creating scenes from their own life experiences. The cast of 40 to 50 is divided into smaller "scene groups" of 5-6 students with one production team member in each group. Each small group is challenged to create a scene, no more than two minutes in length, about one issue on the notecard wall that is based on the experiences of one or more of their group members. Youth begin by sharing stories of their experiences on these issues before deciding which story they want to portray (or how they want to combine more than one story) and rehearsing it. Each group then presents their scene to the rest of the cast, who are asked to listen to the scene and then respond with energy and enthusiasm, no matter how good or bad the performance was.



The act of performing is reciprocal to the act of listening, and this theme is reinforced throughout the program. So not only are youth given the opportunity to share their experiences and voices, but they are asked to listen authentically to the experiences and voices of their cast members. Elizabeth said:

We're always reinforcing a community of people where their voices are important. Their experiences, their lives, what they've gone through are valid and important, and also what's valid is everyone listening to them. You can feel people lean in and feel like this might be different than other places that they have been because they're feeling listened to. When they feel listened to, they want to listen to somebody else. They want to give that same respect to somebody else. And so that's why we set that up very early on.

Finally, at the end of the first rehearsal, the cast stands in a circle and gives "props" to fellow cast members for anything exceptional someone did that they want to acknowledge. The cast then breaks with the instruction to get hugs from at least three other cast members before they go.

Stereotypes, Power, Isms. Once the cast feels comfortable with each other, the staff begins to introduce diversity and violence prevention workshops using Paul Kivel and Alan Creighton's curriculum, *Helping Teens Stop Violence*. The trainings examine the use of power in relationships and the construction of "isms" in our culture. Combining interactive exercises with extensive discussion, these trainings provide a framework for participants to understand the value of diversity and analyze conflict in their own lives and communities. Paul Griffin described the process of understanding the societal structures that impact a person:

You're working towards the center of a bullseye, and all those rings are the social context and forces that are shaping our young people's lives. At the center of it is their personal narrative, around that are the things they belong to, and around that are macro forces of race and class that shape who they are. What we're doing is working our way down to the center, building an understanding of those forces so they have a sense of all the things shaping their lives. So that when they begin to understand themselves they're somewhat liberated from all those things that define who they are—oftentimes in negative or disadvantaging ways. That's especially true for our youth of color who are low-income, which is the vast majority of our participants.

The program activities over the course of the year, in their cyclical way, ask youth to reflect on issues, their causes, and the challenges the issues present, and then ask youth to make connections to their lives using what they've learned. These two passages from a recent program alumna provide examples:

We learned about the power struggle. So there's A and there's B. A is always on top of B, no matter what. It's never going to be, like, a horizontal line where they're on the same wavelength. There is that power struggle, and we have to fight for equality.

At the end [of sessions], Elizabeth will have us sit down and think about questions she asks. Why do people bully each other? Why do people really concern themselves with their weight? Where did that come from, and why does it happen like this? Then we'll say, "Oh, on TV or in magazines they portray it like this, so we want to be like this." And we'll see where it came from, but still think about why we believe it. She gives us all the whys.

The other important message for youth during this time is for them to shift their thinking from "me as an individual" to "me as a member of a relationship." Paul explained why:

We're trying to get our young people to stop focusing on issues of self so much and on to focusing on relationships. They're growing up more alienated and alone than ever before because they're not being raised in communities and they're constantly engaging with technology and not other people. So their ability to build and maintain meaningful relationships is low. It's a deficit. So much emphasis is put on them as individuals that relationships get lost. We try to make a shift so that their relationships with one another in the community become as important as themselves.

"It felt great. I felt empowered. My last year was really the most empowering because I really felt connected with the scene I had, and it was very in touch with me and overwhelming as well."

—Possibility Project Youth

Technical Training. Over the next few weeks, the cast begins to learn some of the performing arts skills they'll be building across the project year. They participate in acting, improvisation, dance, movement, voice, singing, and playwriting workshops at each rehearsal.

Life Stories. The next big milestone happens in December or January, and is called "Life Stories." Elizabeth explained the exercise, which spans several rehearsals so that all youth can participate in sharing and listening:

Everyone has no less than four and no more than eight minutes to tell the story of their life focusing on what makes them. Those are the only instructions they get. I always go first because I will never ask them to do something that I won't do myself, and the idea is just to be as honest as you can be and tell the story of your life. I think for most of them this is a meaningful experience.

Conflict Resolution. The cast then works on skills for conflict resolution. At this point, the cast has evolved into a tight-knit community. As they prepare to move into the next stage, show development, conflict is inevitable. Elizabeth elaborated:

As we get into the middle of the year, as far as show building goes, that's when all of the lessons we set up at the front end of the year get put into practice. We talk about conflict resolution in the first part of the year and then we put them in a position where there's going to be conflict. Writing and performing a show in three months is stressful and there's conflict. So what do you do when people aren't doing what you want or you aren't doing what they want and it makes you crazy but you still have to work with them?

Over the coming months, youth are asked to call on the skills they learned in the trainings from earlier in the program.

Act of Service. Before getting deep into the show development, youth participate in an act of service. They may select something that relates to the issues they've selected for the show. Each youth goes out into their community and serves others. They might cleanup a park, serve food at a homeless shelter, or assist senior citizens. They document what they've done and then share them in rehearsal. They examine their actions and their feelings around it. The aim is to identify the limits and values of service and the differences between service and creating social change.

Show Outline and Show Development. The Production Team holds a retreat during which they create an outline for the performance based on all of the writing the cast produced during rehearsals to date. Each participant is then assigned a role. Then, together with the production team, the cast writes their scenes, develops and explores the characters they're representing, and conducts further research on the issues that the show will work to change. This process allows youth a way to further understand their personal stories and to transform their experiences into a creative message about change to the community. Elizabeth said:

We're creating change for the things that have hurt them and things that have hurt their friends and things they feel confused about. Suddenly we're giving voice to it and we're saying it's important and we can change something about it. So what do we want to say? That's something I ask a lot, "What do we want to say about this? Not just that it happened—we know it happened. What's your opinion? What's your thought on it?" For many of them it's the first time they've thought about things that way, that it's not just about it happening or not happening, it's about creating solutions.

Show development has several iterations, and the Production Team guides the development of the scenes, making decisions about flow, message, and artistic content. The casting decisions are made by the Artistic Director (not the Production Team), depending on youth needs. A participant will never be cast in a role that depicts his or her life. He or she will take on the responsibility of portraying someone else's life story instead. During the course of the next couple of months, youth continue to create, write, rehearse, develop, and refine their performances.

Premiere. For many of the youth, the performance is the first time they've been on stage in front of an audience. The feelings of accomplishment that youth have after the show are the result of witnessing themselves do something they didn't think they could do. Elizabeth shared her observations on the performance:



Sometimes I sit in the audience and our young people go on stage and have lines and they say them loud and they're great and they're doing a wonderful job. I'm thinking the audience has no idea how big this is, that this is happening right now. You know, the cast is terrified, and I think pushing through that kind of fear for something bigger and having strength and courage is huge for them.

This was confirmed in a conversation with one of the youth:

It felt great. I felt empowered. My last year was really the most empowering because I really felt connected with the scene I had, and it was very in touch with me and overwhelming as well. Like one night, I just didn't know how the audience took my scene, and for me, it was surreal. It was, like, if I felt it, I would make sure at least one person or two felt it or that everybody felt it. That, for me, was really intense.

Community Action Projects. During the last two months, participants work in small groups to design and lead a community action project on a topic that interests them. The projects provide students with a sense of responsibility toward changing their communities and applying the skills they learned from the program to real-world contexts. Elizabeth explained how the group moves from thinking about themselves, to thinking about the cast, to thinking outside of themselves across the span of the project year:

I think that's the progression. The beginning is very much about them and each other and building this cohesion between them so that they can then have the courage to put that in front of an audience and work. They develop the courage to build something and think about things in ways they hadn't thought of before. And then to take that as a team, that accomplishment, and understand that they can do something big and then trying something else that is not just about themselves or their cast members but about the community at large.

An example of a community action project is described below. One group of students developed a monologue to remember and tell the stories of their peers who died from gun violence. The group used many of the skills they'd learned from the production in developing and performing their community action project. Elizabeth described the project:

They decided to find the names of 25 young people who had been killed by gun violence the summer before. They presented performance art pieces where they stood up and read a monologue about those kids' lives. They came to the office outside of rehearsal time and it was outside of my leadership, but they did this as a team. They stood up for something that was bigger than themselves and that affected the neighborhoods where they lived. By demonstrating things they had learned how to do like showing up on time and assigning different things to each other so everything got done, they were really working as a team. They demonstrated empathy by feeling these other stories and thinking about other people and what they'd been through. They created a project that wasn't just facts and figures, but was emotional as well, to represent this issue they cared about so deeply.

Leadership Training. This training takes place throughout the entire program year beginning with the Production Teams. Five to six weeks before the start of the program year, the TPP Production Teams meet to learn how to become effective and influential leaders in the rehearsal room as well as within their own lives.

After the premiere of the cast's show, attention turns to leadership training with the Community Action Project used as a means for applying lessons learned. A portion of these trainings can be found in Stephen R. Covey's *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. Youth are asked to set goals beginning with the end in mind. They are asked to critically look at establishing priorities. They hold discussions of proactivity and reactivity to the events in their lives. They examine how they can create better time management in order to give themselves an opportunity to focus on the things they feel are most important.

For example, in one of the activities, youth are asked to close their eyes and imagine that they are attending their own funeral. They imagine that a close family member, a close friend, a TPP colleague, and someone whom they worked closely with are speakers at their funeral. They are asked to think about what those individuals would say about them. At the end of the activity, youth are asked to write down or share what they imagine people would have said. The activity concludes by having youth write down some short and long-term goals for themselves that are in line with what they want within their life.

Advanced Arts Training. TPP hires professional actors, singers, and dancers to work with the youth throughout the ten-month program. During that time, artists work extensively with youth both as a full ensemble and on an individual basis.

After the premiere, and without the pressure of an imminent performance, these artists conduct dance, voice, music, or acting workshops that focus on more advanced technique and experimental approaches, such as the Meisner acting technique, jazz singing, or modern dance. These workshops expand the artistic range of youth and expose them to diverse and challenging forms that allow them to have fun creating.

Future Stories. Much like Life Stories undertaken in the beginning of the year, at the end of the year TPP staff want the cast to leave the program looking forward at what lies ahead. With the Future Stories activity, each participant is given no less than two and no more than four minutes to sit in a chair in front of their peers and share what they want for their futures, who they want to be, what relationships they hope to have, what they want to do for a living, and anything else that is important to them regarding their vision for their future. The activity's goals are to reinforce in specific, personal terms that the future is theirs to create, and that they have the power to determine what their futures look like. Before they are able to enact anything, though, they have to envision what lies ahead.

Last Rehearsal and Affirmation. In the final rehearsal, the focus is on bringing closure to the year by reflecting on accomplishments and looking ahead to what comes next. The first part of rehearsal may be used to finish up Future Stories or another leadership training exercise that focuses on the future, such as visioning or setting goals. In order to keep participants thinking about their future and their agency in creating that future, they are asked to write a letter to themselves that will be mailed to them a year from the last rehearsal. This letter should focus on what they want to accomplish in the next year, what they want to remember about the experiences in TPP, and what they want their future selves to know.

Another part of the last rehearsal is an activity called Positive Affirmations. In this activity, each participant has his or her name written at the top of a piece of flip-chart paper. These are then hung around the rehearsal room. Participants are given a marker, and for the next hour, they are asked to go to each paper and write positive remarks about the person whose name is on that paper. At the end of the allotted time, each participant then gets to take home the paper with the cast members' positive remarks. These affirmations often end up as bedroom or dorm room artwork for alumni.

Finally, before the end of the program year, TPP staff hold a final cast circle. In this circle, cast members are encouraged to express what this experience has meant to them and what they have learned. This is also an opportunity for the artistic director to close out the year with final thoughts on the group and the year.

The preceding program sequence represents an intentional process for helping youth and staff to develop social and emotional skills, in particular, empathy, teamwork, and responsibility.

TABITHA SHARES A MEMORY

Youth at TPP develop deep and personal relationships with each other. The Production Team, in particular, works to make sure that the cast members feel supported and connected. The following story about a particular experience from Tabitha, one of the Production Team members, really shows the extent to which the youth care for each other and how they demonstrate it:

Each of our rehearsals is issue-oriented. We focus on one issue and we have to talk about it. We break off into scene groups and each of us shares if we feel the need. Usually we all share, but sometimes people sit back because it's too hard or painful to share, or maybe the issue just doesn't resonate with them. There was always one cast member who would not share, but every now and then she would talk to me because she had a lot going on. I always knew she had something to say, but it was just too hard. One day, we're all sharing and she decided to speak. She started telling her story and halfway through, she got quiet and just started bawling. She ran outside in the freezing cold. I tried to run after her but she was still running and dodging me. I kept talking to her and she was saying, "No, please go away. I'm not worth it. It's not worth it." And I said, "Yes, you are. We're all here for you. This is what the program's about. We're all connected." It meant so much hearing her. It hurt me and I just tried to remind her why she was here, why we're all here: we're all here for the same reason. We all go through things. It hurts and it's hard, but if we push through it, we can help someone who doesn't have this program. She came back in and told her story. It meant a lot.



3.5 Voyageur Outward Bound School

St. Paul, MN

STRIVE FORWARD

"There is more in us than we know. If we can be made to see it perhaps for the rest of our lives, we will be unwilling to settle for less." —KURT HAHN, OUTWARD BOUND FOUNDER



Kurt Hahn founded Outward Bound in 1941 in response to a dire need to build tenacity and camaraderie

in young British sailors. The British shipping magnate Sir Lawrence Holt observed that his young sailors succumbed to hardships in the wartime North Sea at a much higher rate than his older sailors did. Together, Hahn and Holt designed a program of increasing challenge and skill mastery to teach the young sailors that they could persevere through difficulty, that they were resilient in the face of danger, and that they could survive even the most terrifying of situations. While today's risks are different than surviving the cold North Sea in a tiny lifeboat, many teens who participate in Outward Bound are in dire need of the same perseverance and stamina that Hahn's sailors learned through the sea in the 1940s.

More than 70 years after Hahn designed his model, Minnesota's Voyageur Outward Bound School (VOBS) continues to use the same model of progressive, experiential, outdoor challenge to build key social and emotional traits. Founded in 1964, VOBS operates as an independent 501(c)(3) affiliated with Outward Bound Schools nationwide with a budget of \$3 million. The mission of Outward Bound and VOBS is to change lives through challenge and discovery. VOBS programs engage teens and adults out of two program sites: one in Ely, MN, called Homeplace, and the other in the Twin Cities. The Twin Cities program serves students who would not typically access Outward Bounds' programs. This includes low-income, racially diverse young people, many of whom have poor school attendance and grades, behavioral problems, and some of whom are homeless. There are several programs available to a wide range of participants, from teens and adults to families and school groups. Teen programs include leadership expeditions that use canoeing, sea kayaking and backpacking, dog sledding, skiing, and rock climbing to teach social and emotional learning skills. VOBS frames SEL as helping students discover and build their strength of character, an aptitude for leadership, and a determination to serve.

In 2011, Outward Bound released the results of a one-year longitudinal research study. Students who completed an Outward Bound course said they were more likely to accomplish their goals (93 percent), believe in their ability to succeed (93 percent), and be a leader in their school or community (80 percent). One year later, the same students reported they were more successful at school or work (79 percent), more of a leader (88 percent), and believed in their ability to succeed (93 percent).





ORGANIZATION

Total number of full-time staff	18
Number of volunteers	20–40
Annual operating budget	\$3.1M

FOCUS OFFERING

Total contact hours	370
Duration of the program period	2 years

FOCUS OFFERING YOUTH (FROM YOUTH SURVEYS)

Number of youth	12
Age	12-16
Gender	100% M
Ethnicity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 86% African American • 14% Prefer not to disclose
Percent currently attending school on a regular basis	100%

FOCUS OFFERING STAFF (FROM STAFF SURVEY)

Number of staff	2
Level of education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 50% College Degree • 50% Advanced degree
Years of experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 15 in youth development • 3 in this program
Staff program content expertise self-rating (1=Novice, 2=Experienced, 3=Expert)	3
Staff SEL expertise self-rating (1=Novice, 2=Experienced, 3=Expert)	2

YOUTH AND STAFF CHARACTERISTICS

Youth

The Strive Forward program—the target offering for the SEL Challenge—provides a unique opportunity for youth. The participants are 12 middle school students attending the Open World Learning Community School in St. Paul, Minnesota, recruited by school staff because they struggle academically, behaviorally, or both. The group of 14 to 18-year-old African American young men show incredible potential for success in school and community amidst barriers of low confidence, impulsivity, and other broader societal barriers due to their socioeconomic status. The overall student body at Open World Learning Community is a racially diverse group: 30 percent African American, 30 percent Caucasian, 30 percent Asian, and 10 percent Latino. More than 70 percent of students are receiving free and reduced lunch.

Laura Greenlee Karp, program coordinator, described the youth as “charming, hilarious, ridiculous, wonderful, difficult, and endearing all at the same time.” She speaks below about the experiences youth bring to the program, and how they impact the direction staff take in leading the program:

I think these guys are very resilient. I think they have gone through a lot in their lifetimes and struggled with many things. Because of this, I don't believe I need to focus on what it means to persevere. I think it's more important to give them the tools to talk about how they're feeling and talk about how the tough things affect them. Our programs help the students process the lessons that they've learned from those things. For example, a student came to me because he was struggling in math. The reason he was struggling in math was not because he wasn't successful and not because he didn't want to do the work, but because he was struggling to figure out why math was important when he had to go home and feed his three younger siblings and take care of them while his mom was intoxicated upstairs. I don't need to put him in a contrived situation because he has more on his plate than he already needs. I need to give him an opportunity to be a kid who learns to communicate how that stuff makes him feel so he can be an advocate for himself. At the same time, our programs have to help him apply his resilience to his own goals and figure out how he can use those same skills to meet goals that will help him be more successful at school and build a positive future for himself.

Staff

VOBS staff are key to the success of the Strive Forward program. VOBS hires staff because of who they are as educators, the youth development skills they possess, and the technical competencies needed to facilitate physically and emotionally safe programs. Staff receive a minimum of 25-30 days of training annually. Senior colleagues continually mentor and train staff based on a model of advancement and responsibility. Staff training is broken down into two components: travel training and all-staff orientation. Travel training focuses primarily on the technical, programmatic, and wilderness skills the staff need to facilitate physically safe experiences.

Throughout the four and a half days of all-staff orientation, staff spend a minimum of six hours in student management and skills training. This is a core element of VOBS training, during which staff learn about VOBS history, course structure, management issues and tactics, and how to build a group culture that supports desired objectives. The student management skills training has a four year progression that grows as the staff grow in competency.

In addition to student management and skills training, staff participate in many training sessions, including:

- VOBS logic model and its implication;
- The brain and how it relates to youth development and attitudes and behaviors;
- Age-based curriculum;
- Intuition and safety;
- Adapting courses to population, pre-determined outcomes, and intact groups;
- Motivational interviewing; and
- Self-harm, mental health, and medications; defining success; curriculum design and sequencing; and building positive group culture on course.

Based at the Twin Cities Center, Laura Greenlee Karp has been working in different capacities with youth for the past 10 years. VOBS, however, has had a special impact on her and her work with youth. She shared:

Outward Bound is where the world makes the most sense to me. I personally thrive in this environment. When I was younger, I experienced programs similar to Outward Bound that solidified aspects of my personality and who I am. My purpose at Outward Bound is to help other people have similar experiences.

OFFERING CURRICULUM

Offering Content

There are three program components that comprise Strive Forward that occur in conjunction with one another: Insight programs, Launch programs, and Peer Leadership Expeditions. The progression and topics of the elements build on different skills throughout the academic year.

During the school year the students participate in eight Insight programs offered once a month. Insight programs are daylong outdoor, wilderness, or urban adventure programs such as the high ropes course, canoeing, rock climbing, or orienteering. Each program has a different learning outcome like decision-making, communication, compassion, collaboration or goal setting.

Launch programs occur monthly, two weeks after each Insight program. VOBS staff meet with the youth at their school for two hours. During this time, staff facilitate a reflection of the most recent Insight program and prepare the youth for the next one. As they process these experiences, staff help the students understand how to apply the skills they are learning during programs to their schoolwork and life.

The third component is the VOBS Peer Leadership course. Students embark on two intensive Peer Leadership Expeditions, one in the spring and one in the fall. These four to seven-day courses take place in the wilderness and require determination, perseverance, and communication to reinforce the group's collaboration and relationships. During the 2014-2015 session, youth went canoeing and backpacking.

Offering Sequence

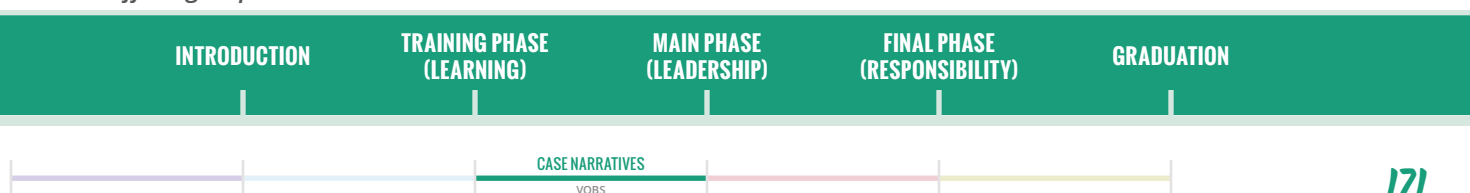
The Strive Forward program began in spring of 2014. Laura met with the young men six times before summer break. It was important at the start of the program for Laura to build a rapport with the students. She said:

They needed to be engaged and have fun. This helps them learn that they can trust me and that I will show up when I say I am going to show up. Once that rapport and trust is established, I will push them to think more critically regarding their learning, emotions, and their experience.

A gradual introduction to establish norms and trust each other took the first five months of the program. Laura elaborated:

Once they understood who I was and what I was doing there, then I could start stringing together a bigger picture with them. The program initially was, "This is Laura. When she shows up at school, we go to the gym, we play a game, and then we play basketball, and then we have a conversation about our how we are doing, our feelings and our process. When we meet her off-site, she teaches us how to do an outdoor skill, and then we talk about what we have learned and how that impacts us and our goals." The program could never start with, "This is the Strive Forward program. We're creating leaders within the Open World Learning Community over the next two years. How can you be a leader? What do you want to do for your school? Who do you want to be?" That just wasn't possible. Even though that is what was happening, I couldn't frame it that way.

VOBS' Offering Sequence



Elizabeth “Poppy” Potter, director of operations, described how the program sequence intentionally builds a set of experiences over time:

We build a progression. We start with our rock climbing Insight program, which may seem like a strange place to start. In reality it was a great place to start the school year because rock climbing focuses on taking risks, knowing your support system, and setting personal goals. And those three things tie in very well to the start of an academic year.



The next piece is an urban adventure, which is highly collaborative and creative. Imagine a scavenger hunt or the amazing race. There are certain challenges along the way the students have to solve, requiring them to work together to be successful. So again, this reinforces the support system that they need to accomplish their goals.

Our next program, orienteering, uses map and compass to identify “What direction should I go?” This lesson ties together using information that is presented to the students as well as their intuition. The map is saying go this way, but your gut tells you to go that way. What do you pay attention to and why? We can process this by asking the student why they chose to go the direction they did, how they made that decision, and if they got the results they wanted.

Throughout this progression we are building skills that move them through a process that aligns with where they will be throughout their academic year.

In addition to the content creating a set of intentional experiences over the course of the offering, VOBS uses three phases to create a graduated level of responsibility for youth. The three phases—Training (Learning) Phase, Main (Leadership) Phase, and Final (Responsibility) Phase—are stretched out over the year, with youth spending roughly three months in each phase, but progressing through them at their own pace. Laura explained that the three phases are metaphors for the stages of growth that people experience as they develop over their lifespan:

In the Training Phase, it’s like you’re an infant. Your parents do everything for you. They teach you how to use all these skills. They keep you safe. They’re making sure that you do everything that you need to do and they are very hands-on. The Main Phase is like middle school and high school where you gain independence and you feel like you can take on tasks, but your parents or your guardians want to make sure that you are still safe. They take a step back, but they are still watching everything that is happening. And the Final Phase is similar to being a young adult where you have full independence, but you also carry all the responsibility.

As the youth progress, the staff begin to step back, and the relationships change. Laura described the transition:

In Training Phase, we structure everything. We are hands-on for everything and teaching all the skills they need, from technical to interpersonal. We are involved in everything the students are doing. In the Main Phase, we transfer responsibility and foster a gained competence and confidence with the students. We are engaged, participating and helping support the structure students have come to know and trust. It’s like we are the bones and the students are filling in the muscle of what we’re doing. In Final Phase, the students own their experience and apply what they have learned. Instructors are there to make sure that everyone is safe both physically and emotionally and that we give them the space to accomplish their goals as a group.

The young men advance through the phases by meeting certain criteria in group journals and checklists developed by the staff. Laura provided more detail:

On our expedition, we have a group journal that holds all of the information the students need to be successful. One of those things is a checklist that the students can physically check off to graduate from Training to Main and Main to Final. The checklist is not something that is created by staff: it is a collaboration between the students and instructors. The students are aware of the expedition goals and, once they meet their goals, it’s a big deal for these kids to have autonomy within the expedition. This progression creates a rite of passage for the students to gain more independence and responsibility. This creates growth.

2014-2015 LAUNCH PROGRAMS AND PEER LEADERSHIP EXPEDITIONS

September 5:

Rock Climbing

September 22–26:

Peer Leadership Backpacking Expedition

October 3:

Urban Adventure

November 7:

Orienteering/Navigation

December 5:

Collaborative Meal and Celebration Dinner

January 9:

Nordic Skiing

February 13:

High Ropes Course

March 13:

Service Adventure

April 10:

High Ropes Course

May 8:

Canoe

June 6–19:

Peer Leadership Canoe Expedition

While the transition from Training to Final is designed to take most of the program year, the Peer Leadership Expeditions are intensive experiences that may present opportunities to advance from one phase to another. During the first three days of the canoeing trip, students learn technical skills, such as how to paddle, how to rescue themselves from capsizing, and how to set up a tent. Similarly, they learn teamwork skills, like how to give feedback and conflict resolution techniques. The next two days focus on exercising the skills learned during days 1–3. The students create SMART—specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-bound—goals for themselves and the team through group decision making. Instructors are available to support the group and monitor emotional and physical safety. The last day is the final expedition where the students each take on a role for the expedition. Finally, each student participates in a personal challenge event, such as scaling a 70-foot rock face, to help them realize the confidence that they gained throughout the week. This challenge offers a significant achievement for the young men.

At the end of the program year, a formal graduation ceremony commemorates the transitions youth have made. Laura Greenlee Karp described the event:

At the very end, we have a formal graduation where we award certificates and have an appreciation circle. The circle contains the students, teachers, staff, students' friends, and their parents. The focus of the circle is to acknowledge all of the growth and inspiration the students have offered other people in their world, while also giving the students a chance to appreciate each other and who they have become as individuals and as a group. This ceremony acknowledges the new responsibilities and freedom they have gained by working hard at achieving the goals they set throughout the program. As they take their Outward Bound pin, students acknowledge how they persevered through the challenges in the program and in their life, and what they learned about themselves to help them be successful in school and life. With this rite of passage we celebrate the young men and mentors that they have become and send them into the world to continue their work.

Offering Session Structure

Each Strive Forward program—Launch, Insight, and Expedition—is put together with the Outward Bound design principles in mind:

- Learning through experience
- Incorporating challenge and adventure
- Creating a supportive environment, physically and emotionally

All of the programs also follow a structure that has five clear steps, as described by Elizabeth “Poppy” Potter:

First, we frame the experience, and second, we set goals. Then we help youth develop the skills that they need to be successful in the day. At this point we are doing direct instruction. Now they are ready and practice the skills they learned to help them step up to the challenges that we present to them during the activity. Last, we close the program with a reflection circle so they can then transfer their new skills and learning.

In the example below “Poppy” walked through a typical Insight program day:

When the students come off the bus, we gather them and do something active right away to get a little bit of energy out. That moves into framing what the day is going to be, what they hope to get out of it, and any safety expectations for the day. This includes setting goals as well. We frame the experience and set goals with them, and then we move into a period that is active and develops skills. For example, if the day is an orienteering day, we walk them through how to use a compass and teach them the parts and what they mean. Next we take a look at a map. What does this symbol mean? That's followed by the experiential orienteering activity where we present a challenge to the group, and they spend the next several hours moving through that challenge or a series of challenges. The day ends with a reflection process. Often that is a conversation and maybe an activity or maybe a journaling experience, but that's the time in which we start talking about transferring something they learned from the day and moving that learning forward.

TESTIMONIAL CONTRIBUTED BY: DAEVON GUNDALE, OWL PRINCIPAL

Daevon was a second semester eighth grader when VOBS and Open World Learning Community partnered to create the STRIVE Forward program. This program was created to support male students of color in exercising mindful approaches to conflict, focus in class, respect of peers, etc. Daevon, along with nine other students, was selected by using discipline and attendance records, academic data, and teacher referrals. The group of 10 primarily contained students with high behavioral referrals, average attendance, and who were frequently getting into conflicts and disrupting classes with their behavior. The goal of the VOBS STRIVE program was to develop an outdoor leadership/adventure program where expected HOWLS (habits of work and learning) were intentionally processed while at the same time creating challenging outdoor activities such as skiing, snowshoeing, and rock climbing, that stretched each student individually through challenges they had not experienced before.

Daevon represents one of several of the boys in the STRIVE Forward program. In grades 7 and 8, Daevon would frequently get caught up in different situations that either began through social media or bantering that started in hallways and ended up in conflict in the hallways. Often it involved interactions with females and other African American boys. In fact, in one instance, Daevon and another male student got into a fight in a classroom over comments made to each other that made each student mad. In their anger, they lost control of their emotions and began fighting in the middle of the classroom. Both students were suspended for multiple days as a result.

The STRIVE forward program was not something students liked much at first, including Daevon. In fact, many of the activities such as snowshoeing and even the first overnight canoe trip resulted in complaints such as how cold and wet the student got, or, in the instance of the canoe trip, how bad the bugs were (mosquitoes and black flies). The challenge of the experiences was directly connected to the comfort level of the students. There were many times that VOBS staff had to drive to the students' homes and different parts of the city to get them to attend different courses.



3.6 Wyman

St. Louis, MO

TEEN OUTREACH PROGRAM

"I came here thinking I was going to be able to share knowledge and teach the teens whatever I could. But they show me every week I'm here to learn." —ADRIAN "TWEETY" WRIGHT, WYMAN VOLUNTEER FACILITATOR



By blending innovative curricula, positive adult supports, and community service learning, Wyman provides teens with opportunities for finding their meaning and purpose, developing healthy lifestyles, and sharing their successes with their communities. Founded in 1898 by a group of St. Louis citizens concerned about the plight of children living in the city's core, Wyman initially started as a youth camp, providing children with nutritional food and healthy outdoor activities. Today, Wyman's mission is to enable teens from economically disadvantaged circumstances to lead successful lives and build strong communities. Wyman realizes this mission by providing a continuum of positive youth development programming in its hometown of St. Louis, Missouri, as well as managing a network of national organizations that replicate their Teen Outreach Program (TOP®).

Wyman operates three mission-focused programs in St. Louis. Beginning the summer before youth enter ninth grade, and over a six-year duration, the Teen Leadership Program employs a progressive, year-round approach that supports healthy teen development, leadership capacity, college access, and college persistence. Each summer includes a significant residential or travel experience followed by integration of core content and relationship support over the course of the school year. Wyman also operates inspire STL, which provides high potential middle school scholars from underserved communities with rigorous academic preparation, support, placement into the region's best high schools, coaching throughout high school, postsecondary access and success supports, and leadership development activities. Finally, Wyman's TOP is an evidence-based prevention program that builds social and emotional skills and decreases risk behaviors, such as teen pregnancy, suspensions, and school failure. TOP uses a combination of curriculum-guided group discussion and volunteer service learning to promote the positive development of adolescents. In addition to the programs in St. Louis, Wyman manages a network of 68 certified replication partners across the country that implement TOP in their own communities. TOP is the focus of this case study for the SEL Challenge.

Wyman's TOP has seen significant growth over the last three decades. Initially developed in 1978 by Brenda Hostetler, director of pregnancy prevention programs in the St. Louis Public School District, TOP was eventually distributed to multiple organizations by Cornerstone Consulting. Wyman used the curriculum for several years in the late 1990s before purchasing the rights to the program in 2005. With a desire





ORGANIZATION

Total number of full-time staff	58
Number of volunteers	26
Annual operating budget	\$5.9M

FOCUS OFFERING

Total contact hours	66
Duration of the program period	September-June

FOCUS OFFERING YOUTH (FROM YOUTH SURVEYS)

Number of youth	25
Age	14-19
Gender	50% M
Ethnicity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 100% African American • 4% Other
Percent currently attending school on a regular basis	100%

FOCUS OFFERING STAFF (FROM STAFF SURVEY)

Number of staff	3
Level of education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 67% Some college • 33% Advanced degree
Years of experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 12.67 in youth development • 7.33 in this program
Staff program content expertise self-rating (1=Novice, 2=Experienced, 3=Expert)	2
Staff SEL expertise self-rating (1=Novice, 2=Experienced, 3=Expert)	2

to equip more organizations with the capacity to deliver quality, evidence-based programs, Wyman developed a replication model for the program in 2010. Federal funding for teen pregnancy prevention, an outcome for which TOP has shown demonstrated impact, helped to grow the network of partners implementing TOP further. As a learning organization, Wyman collects and analyzes internal data on the quality and impact of its programs on a continuous basis. In addition, external evaluations of TOP over time have shown positive effects on reduction in teen pregnancy, suspensions, and academic failure. Nationally, the program is replicated in a variety of settings, including schools, public health organizations, community-based organizations, after-school programs, residential treatment centers, and foster care organizations. These service sites are in urban, suburban, and rural settings across the country. In the St. Louis area, Wyman delivers TOP as an in-school model in three school districts and has a community-based club in the Near South Side, a downtown public housing community. The Near South Side TOP club has been operating since 1999 and is the subject of this particular case study.

YOUTH AND STAFF CHARACTERISTICS

Youth

Nationally, TOP can be used to serve youth in grades 6 through 12 in a variety of settings, as described above. Based on need, TOP partners decide which grade level or levels are most appropriate to serve within their community. TOP can be provided for just one year, or multiple years. Most national partners implementing TOP focus on services to teens from backgrounds of risk or disadvantage.

The TOP program in the Near South Side neighborhood is located in a community center within a public housing complex and draws most of its participants from the local neighborhood. To illustrate some of the challenging situations the youth face, DeVonne Bernard, director of TOP, explained:

[When] we first started doing TOP in the community, it felt like there was a drive-by shooting every week. For a long time we were faced with a high crime area. We've lost quite a few teens to gun violence who were maybe not in the program at the time but who had been in the program at one point. Other people who were in the program lost their siblings to gun violence. So that has affected the program.



Given the community-based focus of this particular club, the Near South Side program is structured so that youth are recruited into the program in the sixth grade, and it is a goal for them to remain in the program through their high school graduation. Recruitment is a collective effort involving word of mouth from families and youth. Some members conduct outreach through door-to-door canvassing and fliers. Often, all of the youth in a family will go through the program. TOP has become a rite of passage for many families in the neighborhood and a trusted community resource.

Staff

Because the relationship between the trained staff member and teen participants is the cornerstone of the program, it is imperative for staff to have professional development opportunities for cultivating specific competencies. Wyman sets national standards for the training required of staff implementing TOP (Wyman's TOP Training of Facilitators), and each partner can then add and adjust additional training content specific to their needs. Across the network, staff have a variety of educational backgrounds, often matched to the setting within which they are working. For example, in-school implementation may require full-time staff members to have master's degrees, while a community-based or after-school program may have staff who are part-time college students or volunteers. Additional competencies required of facilitators include a passion for working with youth, a heightened self-awareness, and an authentic and genuine attitude toward developing relationships with youth.

At the Near South Side implementation, Wyman provides four levels of training:

1. Facilitators are trained in the TOP model (Training of Facilitators), including minimum requirements, structures, and content;
2. Facilitators attend a training called "Safeguarding Our Youth," which provides team members with guidelines for effective, safe relationships and interactions with young people;
3. Facilitator Institutes provide a deeper understanding of adolescent brain development in relation to teen behavior, advanced content on the experiential learning cycle and multiple intelligences, and advanced training on community service learning; and
4. Facilitators are trained in Weikart Center's Youth Work Methods, interactive and hands-on courses that provide participants with practical skills that are geared to improve the quality of interactions with youth.



Staff members can recount the point at which they were hooked on Wyman and TOP. DeVonne stated that the work clicked for her when they ventured out into the community and heard the parents from the Near South Side talking about the needs of their teenagers. It was encouraging hearing the support of the parents of the program. She quoted a parent, “This is exactly what we need for our young people.” Allison Williams, senior vice president of programs, described a similar experience. She connected with the program when she heard from and saw the impact on the young people, especially in response to the community service learning experiences:

We even had families who had lived in that public housing community for a while, who were able to move out, who were able to buy a home or move elsewhere, but continued to bring their kids back to the program. And so, as we started to see that, we said, “You know, there is something really special that we have here, and there’s a formula for doing this program.”

As she continues to watch the program grow through replication, Allison strongly believes that:

It’s about doing what’s best for young people, and aligns developmentally, but we’ve got it packaged and brought together in a way that’s really accessible for people.

ROMI’S STORY

Romi, a proud high school graduate and college freshman, began TOP when she was in sixth grade. Romi is one of the first in her family to go on to college, and has ambitions to get a degree in nursing. Reflecting on her time in TOP, Romi speaks to changes she saw in herself, “I gained a lot of leadership skills in TOP. My attitude began to improve every year. My personality got softer.” Romi’s TOP facilitators note that she became a recognized leader over the years. She demonstrated persistence through regular attendance, modeling the importance of this and a commitment to school for other teens. Romi found her voice on topics, and would share even if she was alone in her perspective. Romi reflects, “Teen choice and voice was important. The facilitators listened to what we wanted. It probably would have been harder for me to do things I wasn’t really interested in.” Over time and with opportunities to give input and lead, Romi became instrumental in organizing several community service learning projects within TOP, demonstrating the ability to plan a project, trouble shoot around challenges, and engage other teens. Today, Romi stays in touch with her TOP facilitators, letting them know what is happening in school. While she is now in college three hours from St. Louis, Romi continues to tap into the social, emotional, and leadership skills she gained in TOP, as well as the positive and supportive relationships with her TOP facilitators.



OFFERING CURRICULUM

Offering Content

Wyman's TOP program design was developed to build social and emotional skills through a service learning model. TOP has three main components:

1. educational peer group meetings,
2. community service learning, and
3. positive adult guidance and support.

Throughout the program, participants experience each component simultaneously, while each intricate piece develops and builds on the others.

Educational Peer Group Meetings. The replication model for TOP requires that educational peer group meetings occur on a weekly basis for up to an hour each, for a minimum of 25 meetings, over a nine-month period, most often following a regular school year schedule. Partners can structure the meetings in the best way to meet the needs of their teens. These meetings use lesson plans on team building, values clarification, healthy relationship skills, communication, goal setting, decision-making, and self-esteem from the TOP curriculum. Weekly meetings also give youth time to plan their community service learning projects. All group meetings are anchored in an experiential learning cycle that emphasizes the importance of reflecting, debriefing, and applying key learnings from the lesson.

The Near South Side club totals 30-35 sessions between September and May. For this club, weekly sessions are structured to last longer than the 60-minute lesson and follow a routine that has been developed to most effectively support the teens. Youth arrive at 6:00 P.M. with a grace period of fifteen minutes, after which time program staff call home to follow up with youth. After everyone arrives, staff and youth check in with each other through an activity called "Current Events" or "Giving the 411." DeVonne explained:

It could be something that they heard on the news and we could talk about that. Or it could be something that is currently going on with them personally, something that happened at school.

After checking in, the group works through a piece of their community service projects, such as planning, brainstorming, preparing materials, etc. Following community service, the staff leads youth through a lesson from the curriculum that ties to the group needs and might connect to the community service work. After the lesson, there is a whole-group RDA (reflection, debrief, and application) so that youth can process their experiences. At the end of the night, snacks are served before youth head home. This ritual structure to the club meetings comes to be something the youth depend on. Some of the youth who have been attending since the sixth grade are so comfortable with it that DeVonne said, "They could probably facilitate TOP on their own at this point."

Community Service Learning. Within the replication model, youth are engaged in 20 or more hours of community service learning over the course of the program year, with an emphasis on planning, acting, and reflecting on their efforts. Each TOP partner organization can develop service opportunities that are most engaging to their teens and ideally have teen choice, support, and buy-in for the service opportunities. Direct service—service where youth work directly with the people who are benefitting from their efforts—is considered the gold standard of service in terms of impact on the involved teens. Through the community service learning component of TOP, teens develop a sense of purpose, connectivity to their community, and an understanding of their ability to positively affect others.

The Near South Side TOP club has three long-standing community partnerships that provide service learning experiences for youth. Each partnership is based on a former TOP participant's experience, and the traditions of service have been passed down over the years. For instance, the youth regularly prepare and serve meals at the American Cancer Society's Hope Lodge, a place where people from outside of St. Louis can stay while they or their family members are receiving treatments. This project began when a TOP participant had a family member with cancer. Allison Williams shared:

TOP'S RESEARCH BASE

During the first phase of national replication of the program (1984-96), Wyman's Teen Outreach Program participated in several empirical research studies to evaluate both the behavioral outcomes and the process mechanisms that lead to positive outcomes for TOP participants. Read about the findings from past research and learn more about TOP at: www.teenoutreachprogram.com/top.

Wyman continues to learn from research studies on TOP and to work in partnership with evaluators to better understand the impact of TOP in diverse settings.



The young people [volunteer] a few times a year. It's something that the club has committed to and continues to love doing, and they get great feedback. They fully plan the menu and how to keep it within budget. They help with the residents and clean up.

Another ongoing project is providing childcare support for local parent-teacher organization meetings at a nearby elementary school. Again, a former participant had a tie to the school and wanted to provide a service to them. Allison explained:

When I say they provide child care, they literally figure out an evening program for the kids who are there while their parents are in the PTO. They've gotten a lot of positive feedback about that so they continue to do it and to take a very deep role in planning.

The third ongoing project, annual restoration of a community garden, has a story behind it. Allison said:

Long, long ago we had a member who was part of the Near South Side TOP club. Her name was Precious, and one afternoon while standing on a street corner, she was struck and killed by a drunk driver. So every year, kids go back and do Precious's Garden. None of the teens currently in the program knew Precious, but they know she was a TOP member and they know that's part of what we do and what our club has committed to.

Youth continue work on these three projects every year, but they also take on new projects based on the ideas of the current club members. Staff support the youth as they identify new projects and make plans, and youth are responsible for delegating tasks, assigning materials, and carrying out the projects.

Positive Adult Guidance and Support. Through training, adult program facilitators scaffold the program content to meet the needs of the youth, foster a pro-social group environment, demonstrate caring attitudes, and deliver program content in a values-neutral fashion. Several times a year, the youth have the opportunity to celebrate the work they have accomplished. These celebrations are typically an outing of some kind that allows the youth time to relax and have fun with their peers and supportive adults. In the Near South Side TOP club, several of the facilitators have been with the program for multiple years, resulting in strong, long-term relationships with the teens and their families.

Offering Sequence

Over the course of the program year, facilitators weave together the community service learning with the curriculum content of the weekly meetings for the particular group of youth with whom they're working. They are free to sequence the activities and events within TOP accordingly and are able to draw on the resources (lesson activity plans, etc.) that are a part of the TOP curriculum. Allison said:

When you take community service learning, weekly educational peer group meetings, use of curriculum, and constant adult guidance, we really put those out for the facilitators to figure out the best way to sequence and pull all of that together for young people.

For example, if youth have been working on "I" messages in communication during the peer group meetings, and during planning for the community service learning event there are some conflicts that occur, staff might ask, "Could we practice using our I messages with each other now as we try to work through this conflict?" Or if they were working on goal setting, "Let's really use some skills in goal setting and say, "What is our goal for our upcoming community service learning trip? What are we trying to accomplish? What do we need to think about?"

In addition to the program components described above, which are found in all TOP clubs, the Near South Side TOP club has a few standing events that occur each year and a general flow to the year that is consistent across years:

Ground Rules. Ground rules are established using the ROPES framework (respect and responsibility; opportunity, openness, and "ouch"; participation and positive attitudes; education, empowerment, and escuchar—Spanish for "listen"; and safety and support) during the first meeting each year, and staff members refer back to ROPES from time to time to keep the meeting space safe and supportive.

Fall Retreat. A unique program element that helps the teens form bonds with each other is a fall retreat that occurs each year at Wyman's residential youth campus. Youth spend three days at Wyman's camp facility and a half day planning for the coming year's TOP. Activities include a ropes course, zip lining, and leadership training.

Topic Shopping. Teens start the year by "topic shopping" for an issue they'd like to address through community service. Youth take full ownership of the issues that are important to them and often select one that has a personal connection to someone in the group. DeVonne explained:

We make sure that they have a lot of voice in that. Pretty much all of the community service projects are something that they have either researched on their own or have come to a group consensus on.

Creating a Budget. When teens pick their issue and begin to plan their service learning activities, the TOP facilitators share the budget with the teens so that they can determine how to spend it across the projects. DeVonne said:

We say, "Hey guys, this is the budget. What do you want to do with it?" So when I say they have a lot of voice in what we do, we even talk about budget, share the items with them, so that they can choose how they want to shift and move stuff around.

3.7 Youth on Board

Boston, MA

BOSTON SCHOOL ADVISORY COUNCIL WORKING GROUP

“BSAC’s ultimate strength lies in its ability to balance young people’s civic engagement with their personal development.” —RACHEL GUNTHER



Since 1994, Youth on Board (YOB) has been a leader in the field of youth organizing in the Boston area and beyond. YOB was established as a program in the education department of YouthBuild USA to promote youth voice, train student leaders, and create programming that empowers young people to develop the knowledge, skills, empathy, and agency to succeed inside and outside of school. For many years, YOB trained adults and youth at participating organizations to improve how they involved young people in decision making and positive youth development practices. Though they still continue this work nationwide, the program evolved after a partnership emerged with the Boston Public Schools, and YOB was asked to revitalize the BSAC. BSAC is a project that brings together high school leaders from across the city to make youth-directed change. Their work with BSAC uses community organizing to give young people the tools to develop into civically engaged leaders, realize their self-worth and community value, and actualize their potential. The unique social change approach balances young people’s civic engagement with their personal development and builds meaningful relationships to create cohesive support systems among peers and adults.

The organizational arrangement between YOB and BSAC is beneficial to all three organizations. As a part of YouthBuild, YOB has the supports of a large organization, despite having only three full-time staff members of their own. The inside-outside partnership they have with Boston Public Schools means that BSAC is less impacted by the district’s budgetary decisions, since YOB fundraises for over half of the program’s staffing. BSAC is staffed by both YOB and Boston Public Schools; two employees of BSAC are funded by YOB, and another staff member is funded by and housed within Boston Public Schools. Jenny Sazama, co-founder and director of YOB, explained:

We get to play an outside organizing role because we’re not funded by Boston Public Schools. But, since we’re also inside, I have to be careful. But I do get to push in some of the ways that an outside organizer gets to. We get access. We meet with the superintendent twice a year. We meet with the city council, the mayor, and the school committee regularly. And we meet with them annually just as a group. So when we ask the city council for an individual meeting they say yes because they know who we are.

Part of this privilege is because of the credible reputation YOB and BSAC teens have built over time. City officials expect that YOB and BSAC teens will be prepared, professional, and well rounded, and the YOB staff believe this is due to the extensive work on social and emotional skill building that the teens engage in.





ORGANIZATION

Total number of full-time staff	3 FT, 9 PT
Number of volunteers	n/a
Annual operating budget	\$ 374,000

FOCUS OFFERING

Total contact hours	134
Duration of the program period	Year-round

FOCUS OFFERING YOUTH (FROM YOUTH SURVEYS)

Number of youth	11
Age	14-18
Gender	78% M
Ethnicity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 50% African American • 30% Asian/ Pac Is • 10% White • 10% Other
Percent currently attending school on a regular basis	100%

FOCUS OFFERING STAFF (FROM STAFF SURVEY)

Number of staff	5
Level of education	• 100% College degree
Years of experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 8.8 in youth development • 6.5 in this program
Staff program content expertise self-rating <i>(1=Novice, 2=Experienced, 3=Expert)</i>	2.2
Staff SEL expertise self-rating <i>(1=Novice, 2=Experienced, 3=Expert)</i>	2.2

YOUTH AND STAFF CHARACTERISTICS

Youth

BSAC contains two groups of youth: a Steering Committee that is open to any youth attending a Boston public high school who wishes to participate, and a Working Group (a subset of the Steering Committee) that has an annual application process to select youth who will run campaigns, make decisions, and facilitate meetings of the Steering Committee. Rachel Gunther, associate director at YOB, explained how the ideal makeup of the BSAC differs from what actually emerges:

There are supposed to be two representatives from every high school in Boston that should come to BSAC. We have never had two people from every high school. It's just sort of impossible logistically and relationship-wise.

Rachel explained the challenge of maintaining relationships with administrators or teachers in every school amidst staff turnover and competing priorities that school leaders face. Still, YOB does outreach to schools from which they do not have youth representation. During the current program year, the school district agreed to help significantly improve the representation across the city.

So how do youth hear about BSAC and get involved? Rachel said:

Sometimes, a lot of the times, young people bring their friends from their school or from their friend's school and come to a meeting.

She talked about the type of young people who join BSAC:

BSAC members are not the straight-A students or the football players or the track stars or the most popular kids. That's not who is drawn in to BSAC. It's typically students who see or have had problems or issues, and they want to make the change.

There have been several youth who have joined the program as part of a last chance before dropping out or failing out of school, or who are struggling to graduate. Rachel commented:

We have never had anyone who has come to BSAC actually drop out that I'm aware of, but we know from surveys that many of them thought about it.

Many youth who attend a Steering Committee meeting as a freshman continue coming to BSAC until they graduate from high school. The youth who attend BSAC reflect the general population of Boston Public Schools, and according to Jenny Sazama, most "middle class families have left Boston Public Schools." The vast majority of BSAC students experience a variety of structural barriers, such as poverty, racism, homelessness, community and interpersonal violence—factors that often contribute to students being labeled high risk for dropping out of school and entering the criminal justice system. They are also much less likely to encounter social and emotional learning practices in their daily lives.

Youth who are interested in doing deep work can apply to participate on the Working Group, which involves a formal application process, an interview, and a commitment to attend a two-hour, bimonthly meeting to plan and drive the campaign work. The Working Group members are paid for their time in the meetings. Jenny shared:

The people who stay and become part of the core are really just young people who are excited about student voice, being a part of that.

Staff

With their unique organizational structure, YOB has a staffing model that spans three organizations. Director Jenny Sazama co-leads BSAC with the organizational support of YouthBuild. Her counterpart, Maria Ortiz, co-leads BSAC from the Boston Public Schools Office of Engagement. Rachel Gunther, YOB's Associate Director, sits primarily at YouthBuild USA. Caitlin Donnelly spends 60 percent of her time working directly with BSAC and 40 percent working with YOB's programming administration, development, and organizational support.

Key competencies for staff and volunteers include an in-depth knowledge of the issues students face both inside and outside of school, training and facilitation skills, and high levels of energy and empathy. It is important that staff demonstrate an appreciation for a collaborative work style and a comprehensive understanding of community organizing and advocacy processes as well as the ability to engage, motivate, and have fun with a dynamic group of young people. Jenny Sazama explained:

You have to understand that your role is to get behind student voice. It's not for you. You're in charge of the structure that allows youth voice to come out, but it's not your voice -you're not the prominent factor in the room. The prominent factor in the room has to be the voice of the young people, and it has to be listening to them formulate their opinions. Your job is to be able to be skillful enough to keep the conversation going and point things out without inhibiting youth voice.

In order to keep an active community of young people engaged in the work, YOB also hires recent alumni of the program to be organizers, specialists, and program associates. The value of hiring alumni is clear for Jenny:

They understand the youth voice. They understand what we're trying to do, and they can move in.

Hiring alumni contributes to campaign and program continuity, but it also has its challenges. There is "training and talking and thinking" involved in helping the alumni "switch from being the youth voice to the adult mentoring voice." Jenny meets with the alumni staff weekly in one-on-one supervision meetings.



One YOB success story is Teena-Marie Johnson, who started with BSAC when she was a sophomore in high school at a time when she was skipping classes, running from school police, receiving regular school suspensions, and on the verge of expulsion. In order to avoid expulsion, she reluctantly attended a BSAC meeting. Learning to trust and be able to communicate her own feelings improved her relationships with teachers, peers, and her mother, and she realized that knowing how to break down communication barriers was the key to success in all aspects of her life. In one year, Teena-Marie went from near expulsion to being on the honor roll for the rest of her high school career. She became a leader within BSAC and beyond, and is now employed full-time as the project coordinator for the program.

OFFERING CURRICULUM

Offering Content

Rachel Gunther said:

Before we used the term SEL, we always talked about BSAC having two core components: support and action. The action pieces are the parts that people see in the world, ways to prepare them to be youth organizers. Then there are the behind-the-scenes pieces that provide them a place to learn and grow and support one another through both their own development and their organizing work. The end result is that they leave BSAC with a better understanding of their own emotions and relationships with one another, as well as their own efficacy as a citizen in this world and society. They have these two elements of skills that are connected to one another: both the social/emotional piece as well as feeling that they can be agents of change.

There are three types of meeting opportunities: Steering Committee, Working Group, and Bi-weekly Support Group:

The Steering Committee is the largest group of youth, open to students from all of the district's high schools. Bimonthly meetings are mostly focused on direct campaign work, such as hearing about issues, concerns, possible actions, etc. Students use these meetings to brainstorm ideas and sometimes hear talks from guest speakers.

The Working Group consists of 10 youth who must apply and be selected to participate. The group meets for at least three hours per week. During these meetings, members learn about citywide policies under consideration, work on developing the campaigns, and strategize about how to advocate for their positions. The leadership team takes into consideration the ideas from the Steering Committee meetings and strategizes about what they should focus on. The Working Group engages in ongoing leadership development trainings on public speaking, relationship building, community organizing, and communication skills. BSAC works to provide training and cultivation of five main social and emotional skill sets:

- The art of listening,
- Working effectively with adult allies,
- Developing caring relationships,
- Discussing how "adultism" and other oppressions affect youth's lives, and
- Respecting others while speaking personally.

The Biweekly Support Group is a time for the youth on the Working Group to share and listen to each other's struggles, successes, and personal and YOB-related lives throughout the school year. YOB seeks to develop emotional literacy in its participants during the support groups by providing time to reflect on their lives, where they are, how they feel about the campaign they're working on, why it's important to them, and how it connects back to their experiences at school. Both youth and staff have the opportunity to facilitate portions of the Biweekly Support Group as they discuss issues faced at home, school, or in their personal lives.

Jenny shared the impact of the groups:

We have found that this peer support group provides an opportunity for students to learn peer counseling techniques, work through interpersonal issues, and cope with the institutional barriers they face in and out of school.



Here, one youth shared what it's like to participate in the support group:

We meet once a month with our junior supervisor Jenny, and it's literally the safest space ever. We have snacks with her at her house and just talk about anything that's going on. It's really nice to just say, "These are all the mishaps and terrible, terrible stuff that's going on." It's nice because it keeps you stable being able to let it out and continue on. Even if no one else is listening, you have a group of your peers that's listening.

Offering Sequence

The sequence of meetings above continues throughout the year and extends over the multiple years that BSAC participants are typically in the program. Campaigns often extend beyond the tenure of the youth participants, and the work on certain campaigns ebbs and flows over time as the interests and priorities of the youth demand. Young leaders in BSAC define issues that are most relevant to them, educate their peers about the issues, and develop collective solutions through school-based, local, state, and national campaigns. The campaign is focused on change rooted in the students' backgrounds and interests. For example, some students may choose to work on promoting constructive feedback from students to teachers, providing adequate transportation, or making more support available for English language learners in the public school system. Here is a video about the campaign to enable students to evaluate their teachers as part of teachers' formal evaluation: www.youtube.com/watch?v=5T1EENg8bXk

YOB's Offering Sequence



The sequence of events each year depends on the demands and opportunities associated with each campaign. However, each year consists of the following recurring elements:

Fall Retreat: In order to reflect and re-evaluate their work, each year the newly hired Working Group and staff come together to strategize for the coming year. Campaigns were selected and agreed upon in the spring when the Working Group was hired. The Fall Retreat also provides critical time for skills and team building, setting expectations and norms, and, of equal importance, having fun and laughing as a group.

Training: Students participate in trainings based on their needs, such as the art of persuasive argument, building positive relationships, the art of appreciations, listening skills, public speaking, communicating with politicians and the media, and campaign development. All trainings and group activities are structured so that there are opportunities for large and small-group discussions where a trained facilitator (either YOB staff or a BSAC alumni or current member) will use supportive strategies to elicit the voices of everyone in the room. These trainings happen throughout the year as needed. Jenny shared some of the details of what the trainings do:

One of the things we really push is getting youth at the adult tables. We do a lot of work about how to handle adults. How do you push for what you want and not hold back? How do you hold your own in a conversation and participate in an adult meeting in a way that's acceptable? How do you decide to move out of that space and to the next level? What's not going to happen at those negotiating tables?

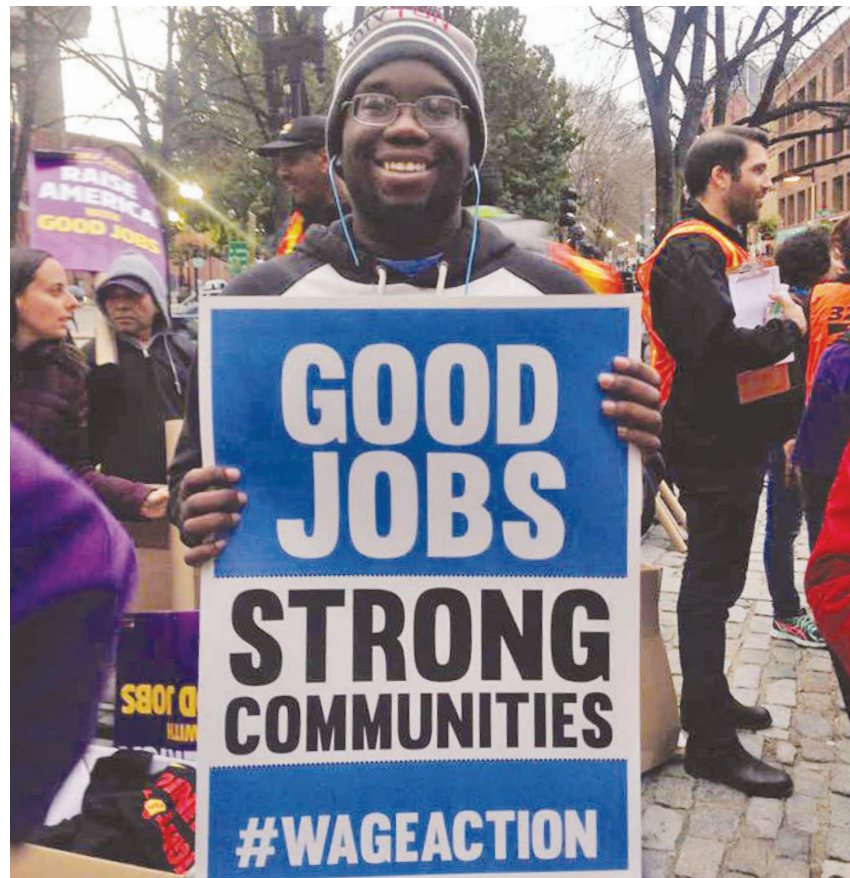
Public Events: Students may attend events such as school board meetings, other meetings with public officials, rallies, events to educate and mobilize their school peers, and other campaign-related events. For these, youth do a significant amount of planning and preparation to get their message and delivery just right.

Listening Projects: BSAC also prides itself in ensuring that they ask other young people for information about their experiences and ideas, such as conducting surveys, focus groups, circles, and interviewing. These events take time and planning, and require youth training on the interview process and data analysis. Often, BSAC attends events of other collaborating organizations. These events build positive intra-organizational relationships and build youth power throughout the city.

Winter Celebration: Staff always make time to celebrate the young people's achievements—whether that be an incremental policy victory, a successful meeting, or a newly developed idea—to encourage them to reflect on and recognize their contributions and successes at every step along the way. Throughout, the program staff make sure they are having fun and laughing. This can be tough work, but ensuring there are light moments and celebrations keeps everyone energized and moving forward.

Peer Support Retreats: These day-long workshops may focus on particular themes related to campaigns or encourage youth to consider broader topics, such as youth power or climate change. There are a variety of opportunities throughout the year in which Working Group members can participate.

National Peer Learning Exchanges: Members of the BSAC Working Group often travel nationally to learn and share about other models of youth engagement in urban public school districts. In the last year, they have visited cities such as Chicago, Philadelphia, Washington, D.C., and New Orleans to learn and share experiences around student evaluation of teachers and restorative justice practices.



ONE CAMPAIGN STORY

Several years ago, there was a group of students who started a campaign that would enable students to evaluate their teachers as part of teachers' formal evaluation. When the students first began this campaign, they were very excited. They built their argument and supporting evidence and brought it to the superintendent. At that meeting, they were rather quickly told that this "wasn't going to work right now" and were advised to go back and start again. This moment could have been devastating for the group. But instead, it made the students think about how they could still win this campaign through a different route than originally expected. This experience is a perfect example of how BSAC trains students to adapt to a shifting educational landscape and change course without losing sight of the end goal. Students went back and decided that as a first step, they would bolster teacher, administrator and union support and make the proposal something that would not be a formal part of the teachers' evaluation but instead a mechanism for providing informal constructive feedback. That piece of the project became an important stepping-stone. By re-routing their original ideas and by being patient and creative, students got teachers, administrators and the union to buy-in to the project. BSAC's efforts ultimately led the Boston School Committee to formally adopt their policy on constructive feedback, and led to widespread media coverage. Students then went to the Massachusetts Board of Education in 2010 to introduce a policy mandating student-teacher feedback in all public schools in the state. The fact that the campaign took a different route than originally envisioned in the end made the win even more impactful and meaningful to the students of BSAC. Additionally, it provided a good example of the importance of perseverance and grit. Students knew that their ideas were valid, and creatively and patiently moved forward until they reached their goal. The roles for advisors and adult allies was to support their vision and help them see that their efforts continue past their time in the BPS. In fact, their efforts could help influence the greater good of all students. BSAC provides adolescents an opportunity to think beyond their own experiences and see how their civic actions affect other people—whether in their own school, their district, their state or across the nation.

TEENA-MARIE'S STORY

Teena-Marie, 24 currently works with Youth on Board full-time through a fellowship program. She started with BSAC when she was a sophomore in high school at a time when she was feeling unheard and disengaged from her education and school. As a result of feeling disconnected and discouraged, she began skipping classes, running from school police, getting suspended, and ended up on the verge of expulsion. Teena felt hopeless and exhausted. At that point, a special teacher suggested that she go to a BSAC meeting as a way to gain some connection to her school and community. Teena reluctantly agreed to go to the first meeting as a way to avoid expulsion—but very soon her life began to change through her connections and relationships she made in BSAC.

The young people she met at BSAC inspired her and made her realize that she needed to be the change in herself and her education. BSAC made her see that school could be better and that she had the power within herself to change her life and her surroundings. She learned how "adultism," racism and other oppressions made her feel ineffectual and powerless. Once she began to trust her own ideas and was able to speak about them freely with others, a power and energy was unleashed within her. Learning to trust and be able to communicate her own feelings improved her relationships with teachers, peers, and her mother, and she realized that knowing how to break down communication barriers was key to success in all aspects of her life. In one year, Teena went from near expulsion to being on the honor roll for the rest of her high school career and became a leader within BSAC and beyond. Teena credits the incredible adult and peer support system, the bi-monthly support meetings, opportunities to travel and meet new people, and the leadership training as keys to her success.

When it came time for high school graduation, BSAC staff helped Teena navigate the complicated world of college applications and financial aid. Being the first in her family to attend college meant she needed emotional and logistical support through this process. Teena attended college and continued to work with BSAC and Youth on Board throughout her schooling and recently graduated in December of 2013. Teena's graduation from college felt like a community and family achievement. Through the travel, speaking, and leadership opportunities available to Teena through YOB/BSAC, the world opened up to her—she learned about other cultures, cities, and how to connect with high level policy makers while maintaining positive interpersonal relationships. Teena moved from being a BSAC member to a mentoring role as a BSAC alum and now is a full-time fellow. BSAC hopes Teena continues to work with the program for years to come as her insight and story is a prime example of the love, support, teaching and learning that goes on in program every day.

3.8 YWCA Boston

Boston, MA

YOUTH LEADERSHIP INITIATIVE (INIT)

“Confidence is exhibited by students’ growing willingness to express opinions not shared by their peers.”

—DONNA CLARK



The mission of YWCA Boston (YW Boston) is to eliminate racism, empower women, and promote peace, justice, freedom, and dignity for all. In a city with a growing divide among economic classes and races, YW Boston chooses to focus on the reduction of systemic racial and gender

disparities and the improvement of social cohesion in neighborhoods where health, educational, and safety inequities are most significant. YW Boston seeks to accomplish this work by partnering with beneficiaries, direct service providers, leaders, and organizations in the target neighborhoods. Throughout the history of YW Boston, there have been a variety of programs to serve youth, including a girls’ health initiative and dialogue groups between youth and law enforcement officers.

In 2011, with the support of the Boston Foundation and the Bridgespan Group, YW Boston sought to apply the national mission in the local context. YW Boston took over delivery of the social justice and leadership development programs from the Boston Center for Community and Justice. One of these programs, the Youth Leadership Initiative, or InIt, was selected as the target offering for the SEL Challenge. InIt develops young leaders with nascent leadership skills and supports them as they implement projects that further race and gender equity and social cohesion in their schools and communities. InIt’s goals are to build students’ confidence, their abilities to work across differences, and ultimately design, implement, and engage other teens in community action projects that address social inequities in their school, community group, or neighborhood.

InIt has collected data about its participants that suggests it is achieving desired results. InIt has been successful in creating socially responsible leaders. Upon graduation:

- 71 percent of InIt participants had the knowledge of how to create a social justice workshop for their peers;
- 71 percent reported speaking up when peers, parents, or friends make prejudiced comments or jokes; and
- 92 percent stated they have an above average ability to participate in dialogue with people who have different perspectives than they do.





ORGANIZATION

Total number of full-time staff	21
Number of volunteers	50-100
Annual operating budget	\$2.2M

FOCUS OFFERING

Total contact hours	152
Duration of the program period	July-June

FOCUS OFFERING YOUTH (FROM YOUTH SURVEYS)

Number of youth	35
Age	14-18
Gender	37% M
Ethnicity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 37% African American • 11% Asian/ Pac Is • 29% Hispanic • 3% Native Am • 23% White • 9% Other • 6% Prefer not to disclose
Percent currently attending school on a regular basis	100%

FOCUS OFFERING STAFF (FROM STAFF SURVEY)

Number of staff	3
Level of education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 33% some college • 33% Advanced Degree
Years of experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6.5 in youth development • 1.25 in this program
Staff program content expertise self-rating (1=Novice, 2=Experienced, 3=Expert)	2.5
Staff SEL expertise self-rating (1=Novice, 2=Experienced, 3=Expert)	2

YOUTH AND STAFF CHARACTERISTICS

Youth

InIt is comprised of a diverse group of high school students ages 14 to 19. For many participants, involvement in the program is their first experience within a truly diverse environment.

Students attended a variety of schools, including public, private, and charter schools, both within Boston and in surrounding cities and suburbs, and came from diverse family situations. Julie Thayer, InIt program manager at YW Boston, discussed why this diversity is a big part of the program design:

The students complete an application that includes a demographic form and we intentionally explain to them that as a program whose goals are to help people understand the importance of diversity, we require a wide variety of background and life experiences in the room.

InIt recruits through partnerships with schools. YW Boston staff select a group of 2-5 student delegates from each school to form a small team that will advance a community action project in their school. Often, alumni from previous years help conduct outreach to students at their schools after they leave the program. Interested students complete an application, and a committee of staff and alumni youth select the next year's delegates through an interview process. Julie Thayer explained what they might glean from an interview:

We're not looking for sort of a baseline understanding of anything yet because we really believe that anybody can have the capacity to be a leader and to learn new things. We are mostly gauging their commitment. So, just the fact that they show up for an interview shows they're more likely to be engaged for the rest of the year. We're also interested in whether or not they have an interest in talking about subjective issues and if they seem to have the emotional maturity and capacity to deal with difficult topics.

Staff

InIt is staffed by three positions at YW Boston and a team of 12 volunteers (many of whom are InIt alumni). Because of the diverse backgrounds and experiences of the participants, it is imperative for staff and volunteers to demonstrate a collaborative, supportive work style as well as the ability to listen, facilitate groups, and mentor individuals. InIt looks for staff and volunteers with a personal commitment to social equity and who are comfortable sharing personal experiences and perspectives. Staff must have experience leading experiential learning and participate in social equity training. Staff and volunteers participate in 25 hours of training together before they work with the delegates. Training includes team building activities, an overview of program procedures and policies, facilitation training, and an opportunity to engage with the curriculum. Going through the workshop curriculum together allows the staff and volunteers to have and process their own experiences before they're asked to lead a session for youth. Julie said:

The volunteers can get wrapped up in their own process, and so we provide a space for them to process. We give them tips to make sure that how they're facilitating the discussions is keeping in mind the needs of the youth and making sure that they're facilitating the experience for them.

Staff and volunteers participate in extensive social and emotional learning training. For example, in 2014, one InIt program staff member attended a three-day Adolescent and Trauma Resiliency training for youth workers developed and led by the Boston Area Rape Crisis Center and the Boston Public Health Commission. All staff and volunteers participated in a training led by Rape Crisis Center on how to respond to adolescent disclosures of abuse and sexual assault and one by Health Resources in Action on principles of Positive Youth Development.

OF THE 41 STUDENTS THAT PARTICIPATED
IN THE CLASS OF 2014-2015:

66 PERCENT OF THE
PARTICIPANTS WERE FEMALE

34 PERCENT WERE MALE

37 PERCENT IDENTIFIED AS
BLACK OR AFRICAN AMERICAN,

17 PERCENT AS WHITE,

10 PERCENT AS ASIAN,

24 PERCENT AS HISPANIC,

2 PERCENT NORTH-AFRICAN /
MIDDLE EASTERN, AND

10 PERCENT AS MULTI-RACIAL

Training on what volunteers and staff need to disclose to authorities as mandatory reporters is an important part of the preparation. The InIt program creates a safe environment where youth may feel comfortable revealing traumatic experiences that they've had, some of which may signal abuse. In these cases, staff and volunteers are required to report the case to the proper authorities. InIt staff are careful to let youth know these requirements and the limits of the confidentiality at the start of the program so that youth don't feel as though trust has been broken.

OFFERING CURRICULUM

Offering Content

InIt is designed to develop young leaders by providing them with a strong understanding of social justice and strong leadership skills, while supporting them as they implement projects that further race and gender equity and social cohesion in their schools and communities. The program cultivates self-awareness, critical self-reflection, and interpersonal skills. The program is designed to purposefully explore diversity in a respectful manner that:

- increases students' understanding of the social topics covered by the curriculum;
- strengthens their personal, interpersonal, and workplace skills; and
- teaches them to understand and value diverse viewpoints.

InIt is guided by the following approaches:

- The Positive Youth Development approach, developed by Professor Richard Lerner at Tufts University. The program draws on Positive Youth Development best practices that help youth explore and develop the five Cs: Competence, Confidence, Connection, Character, and Caring.
- To strengthen the students' understanding of social justice issues, YW Boston use the Cycles of Socialization and Liberation, developed by Bobbie Harro⁹⁷. The Cycle of Socialization helps students understand how issues such as racism, sexism, classism, homophobia/heterosexism, and "ableism" operate systemically to grant unearned privileges to certain groups of people over others. The Cycle of Liberation offers a counter narrative to help them see how education and consciousness raising can offer opportunities to take actions that break the Cycle of Socialization.
- The 4 "I"s developed by John Bell of YouthBuild, USA help the delegates recognize how social inequities are reinforced at internal, interpersonal, institutional, and ideological levels.

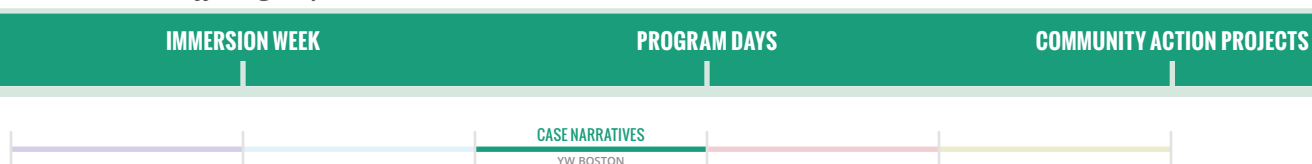
Offering Sequence

InIt is made up of three important elements: 1) Immersion Week, 2) Program Days, and 3) Community Action Projects.

Immersion Week is a week-long overnight retreat focusing on deepening delegates' understanding of society and themselves. It is held in July and August on a college campus and is the kickoff event for the 10-month program. During Immersion Week, young people explore key aspects of their personal identities (e.g. race, gender, socioeconomic class, sexual orientation, disability status) and begin to recognize how isms operate on a systemic level to grant unearned privileges to certain groups of people over others. Because this experience can be emotionally intense, staff employ a variety of strategies to ensure delegates feel safe and willing to participate.

On the first day of Immersion Week, staff and delegates play icebreakers and games in both large and small groups. Delegates and staff members share a personal object that symbolizes something about them and use it to introduce themselves to the group. These activities provide an opportunity for the delegates to get to know one another and build trust. The staff works deliberately to create and model a culture of openness, honesty, and communication. Staff establishes and ensures buy-in for ground rules (e.g., respect, using "I" statements instead of "you" statements, agreeing to disagree, active and patient listening).

YW Boston's Offering Sequence



Throughout the week, large group workshops introduce new topics and offer opportunities for the youth to learn new vocabulary, reflect on their relative privilege regarding particular identities, and learn about the experiences of people with different backgrounds and perspectives from their own. Small group discussion sessions provide space for delegates to delve deeper into issues that arise during workshops. The small groups are intentionally comprised of students of different backgrounds and who attend different schools to create bonds between youth who might not socialize with one another in other contexts. Some youth participants shared particularly powerful moments:

"We talked about what defines a person who's in a box of man or woman and what happens when a person breaks that box. After our discussion it got very, very, very emotional and the guys definitely learned a lesson about what it means to experience sexism in this society."

—YW Boston Youth

The day we talked about sex, gender, and sexuality, we engaged in an activity where we separated the guys and the girls and we filled out all these sheets about how, from our own perspective, how disadvantaged we were. We talked about what defines a person who's in a box of man or woman and what happens when a person breaks that box. After our discussion it got very, very, very emotional and the guys definitely learned a lesson about what it means to experience sexism in this society. Sometimes women are actually fearful for their lives from just because someone is walking behind them.

We had the race conversation and I was really ignorant about racism. I knew the segregation stuff and the basic things you learn from history, but I didn't know that not everybody or anyone can be racist. I learned that in order to be racist you actually have to have something over someone else, like privilege. And other things like, I used to say Hispanic or Spanish when I was talking about Latino people, and I learned that that wasn't really right. And it's just the simple things like that. Racism is a system that brings us down. Especially the stuff that happened to Mike Brown and Trayvon Martin and Eric Garner.

A powerful moment for me was when we wrote down stereotypes that immediately came to our mind about a certain group or race of people. We wrote things down about white people, black people, Hispanic people... we wrote about Asian people, and all of us did it and we put it all on the board and read everything out loud and then we discussed. We kind of realized that all this stuff we'd written down was absolutely horrific. That although this is something that was almost instinctive in our minds, it's wrong to say a lot of those things. That just goes to show how much society has imprinted and brainwashed everyone who's in it. That's not something that's under your control. It's something you experience and it's automatically instilled into your brain whether you like it or not.

Immersion Week provides a deep foundation for the work the delegates will do throughout the rest of the year. Julie Thayer elaborated:

The intensity of the week—the fact that they're all living together for that week and going through these workshops one after another—accelerates their social and emotional learning process. People come out of their shells more quickly than if we would meet once a week or once a month, and those bonds develop and the trust forms and the empathy builds in a more accelerated way. It's kind of like we create a different reality through the week. I think it would take months and months and months to get to the level where the students are with themselves and with each other if we met less frequently. So that intensive experience is really necessary for this specific type of program, and then we can have much more meaningful and higher level conversations the rest of the year because of that foundation.

Saturday Program Days take place once a month from 9:00 A.M. to 5:00 P.M. and offer workshops and community service projects to enhance delegates' skills and deepen their understanding of how social justice issues affect their communities. Workshops focus on topics such as community learning, leadership development, community service, and personal and workplace skills development. Program days include field trips to a community farm to discuss food security, a law school to discuss criminal justice, and to a hospital to discuss healthcare inequality. During the visits, youth are encouraged to reflect on the systemic issues that impact the community at large and particularly marginalized populations. Oftentimes, Saturday Program Days are hosted or attended by community partners. In this way, youth are exposed to a variety of organizations across the city and to career opportunities within these organizations.

PROGRAM DAYS 2014-2015

Saturday, September 6, 2014: Economic Justice

What Initiatives have organizations taken to address poverty? How can government policies address root causes of poverty? How have policies led people of color to live in poorer neighborhoods than white people? How can poverty affect a person's access to opportunities?

Community Partners: St. Ambrose Family Shelter, Greater Boston Food Bank, Chinese Progressive Association, Pine Street Inn

Skill-building: Community Asset Mapping

Saturday, October 18, 2014: Food Justice

What are the characteristics of the modern food industrial system? What would a healthier, more sustainable food system look like? Which communities have access to healthy, affordable foods and why?

Community Partners: theMOVE and Blue Heron Organic Farm

Skill-building: Time Management

Saturday, November 15, 2014: Education Equity

What is the historical context of desegregation in Boston schools? What impacts do race and class have on educational quality? What factors influence why and to what degree students are disciplined? What rights do students have under school discipline laws?

Community Partner: Suzanne Lee (local community organizer and teacher during desegregation in Boston)

Skill-building: Understanding Your Communication and Leadership Style

Saturday, December 13, 2014: Health Equity

What is the difference between a health disparity and a health inequity? What are social determinants of health? How do stress and microaggressions impact health? How do inaccessible environments impact the health of people with disabilities?

Community Partner: Dana-Farber Cancer Institute

Skill-building: Facilitating Effective Meetings and Workshops

Saturday, January 10, 2015: Healthy Relationships and Social Justice Arts Slam

What are the core elements of healthy relationships? What behaviors promote equality and respect in relationships? What are strategies for effectively dealing with conflict in relationships? How can we make the arts more accessible and welcoming for people of color? The Social Justice Arts Slam is an opportunity for youth participants to use the arts as a vehicle for creating social justice.

Community Partners: Boston Ballet

Saturday, February 7, 2015: Immigration

Who comprises the immigration population in Boston, Massachusetts, and the U.S.? What factors facilitate or hinder prospective immigrants from applying for a visa or seeking asylum or refugee status? What privileges does immigration status confer, especially in regarding to education and healthcare?

Community Partners: Suffolk University Law School, Project Citizenship, Student Immigrant Movement, Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition

Skill-building: Public Speaking

Saturday, March 7, 2015: Criminal (in)Justice

What is the School to Prison Pipeline? What is the Prison Industrial Complex? How do The War on Drugs and mass incarceration disproportionately impact marginalized populations? What barriers do former prisoners face in reintegrating into society? What is restorative justice?

Community Partners: Boston Student Advisory Committee, Black and Pink

Skill-building: Creating and Giving PowerPoint Presentations

Saturday, April 11, 2015: Review and Reflect

What have you learned throughout the past year? How does change happen in society? How have you been and how can you continue to be an agent of change?

Skill-building: Self-Care for Sustainable Social Justice Work



Community Action Projects (CAPs) are developed by the youth over a 10-month period. Delegates work with their school cohorts to develop and implement a community action project to address a school or community issue. This activity is designed to support the youth as they become socially responsible leaders. Youth take the lead in conceptualizing and implementing their CAPs with guidance from an InIt staff member at biweekly meetings. Early meetings are focused on goal setting and laying the groundwork for what they want to accomplish for the year. As the year progresses, the meetings serve more as a time to check in on the plan.

The skills and knowledge students develop through program workshops feature heavily in their CAPs. Youth work with their school administrators and peers to implement their CAPs, and in doing so, learn to work around the institutional barriers within their sphere of influence. Beth Chandler, vice president of programs, said:

The youth have this idea. They're really excited about moving it forward, and now they're hitting roadblocks. They finally figured out their own interpersonal stuff and now they're hitting roadblocks from the administration.

InIt staff work with the youth to troubleshoot the projects and help them line up resources to make the CAP a success. Examples of CAPs include creating a Social Justice Week or organizing around getting a gender-neutral restroom in the school. Beth described one project:

One group wanted to do a day of silence at their school, and the school had never done anything like that before. They kept having to go back to the administration to talk about what it was that they wanted to do and then they kept getting delayed, and so every time they'd set a date, there was another delay. But they continued to go back to the administration to find out what the specific concerns were and how they could address them so that the administration would feel comfortable in letting the activity go forward. InIt staff would continue to meet with the youth to help them think about what concerns had been raised, and how they might go about addressing those concerns for the administrators. Even though it was frustrating during the process, once it finally happened it was really well received by students in the school. And so they're really excited about trying to make this type of activity an annual activity. It brought students together from across the school and brought a real sense of school unity.

The May graduation ceremony is an opportunity for delegates to showcase what they accomplished through their community action projects. Each delegation gives a 4–5 minute presentation on the goals of their project, what they were able to accomplish, and what they plan on doing next.

Committees. Youth have the opportunity to serve on one or more youth advisory committees to help plan events (e.g., social justice arts slam, graduation), assist with recruitment of next year's class, and provide feedback on and input into the InIt curriculum. Serving on these committees provides leadership skill building opportunities and incorporates youth voice into the day-to-day work of the program.

Offering Session Structure

The structure of Program Days varies based on whether or not there are guest speakers or presenters or if there is an off-site service learning opportunity. Nevertheless, each program day has a specific topic of focus and a leadership skill-building workshop. They are all structured to provide some historical context on the issue, introduce exercises to get students thinking about their own privilege and perspectives, generate dialogue on personal experiences, and encourage youth to take some sort of action related to the chosen topic. A combination of lecture-style teaching, group discussion, engaging with media, and interactive exercises is used to convey information efficiently while accommodating multiple learning styles and ensuring all students participate to their full potential.

Biweekly Community Action Project meetings vary in structure based on the school, the specifics of the project, and the personalities of the students. Some of the students are highly motivated and given a lot of autonomy by the school whereas others need more support or are expected to check in with school administration every step of the way. Inlt staff tailor their guidance depending on what type of support each delegation requires. All meetings tend to include a progress update, brainstorming session, and action steps to be completed before the next meeting.

CADEN'S STORY AS TOLD BY JULIE THAYER

Caden participated as an Inlt delegate his senior year of high school, at the urging of a friend who had participated the year before. He came to the program with little knowledge of social justice issues and no previous leadership experience. Inlt welcomes such students, as long as they demonstrate a commitment to the program and a desire to learn. It was clear Caden wanted to learn, but he was so reserved that it was difficult to tell if he would be willing to engage with the challenging content and participate in the difficult conversations required to become a young social justice leader. Throughout immersion week, it became clear that he struggled with verbal communication – often stopping mid-sentence, stuttering or tripping over words, and losing his train of thought. It was also clear that this is something he had been bullied about, making him hesitant to speak up, particularly in large groups. Like a lot of other SEL programs, we use a “challenge by choice” model in many situations. We do have activities where everyone is expected to speak, but it can be as little or as much as the person is comfortable sharing. During these activities, Caden’s contributions were usually brief.

Throughout the program year, several examples come to mind that highlight Caden’s growth. He was always the first delegate to sign up for youth committees and other volunteer opportunities. In these smaller group settings, he began coming out of his shell, willing to take risks and show more of his personality. The other students who attended these events tended to be the more vocal, confident leaders in the group, yet they always created space for Caden and gave him as much time as he needed to convey his ideas. Whereas most students participate as a delegation from their school, Caden was the only student representing his school. For his Community Action Project, he took the lead on creating a workshop on school dropout after hearing that his school had a reputation for being “the last place you go before you dropout.” He conducted his own research, asked Inlt staff for resources, and asked classmates and other Inlt delegates for help creating and facilitating the workshop. In the end, he facilitated an activity and discussion at his school that educated his classmates on factors such as poverty and race that often fuel the high dropout rates, challenging the idea that it stems from students’ unwillingness to learn.

The Inlt graduation requires every student to create a PowerPoint presentation on their project and share it with their fellow delegates, teachers, parents, and YW Boston staff and supporters. For both his workshop and graduation, Caden met with Inlt staff multiple times to practice his presentation and get more comfortable with public speaking. He was open to feedback and practiced over and over again, despite his discomfort. On graduation night, I could sense that his fellow delegates were nervous for him as he walked to the front of the room to present. They knew he struggled with public speaking and didn’t want to see their friend fail. Because he had practiced so much, he delivered his presentation naturally and confidently and came off as more prepared and polished than any other delegate in the class. His fellow delegates cheered loudly when he was finished—louder than for any other delegate—knowing it took so much for him to get there.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Performance Study Findings

PERFORMANCE STUDIES

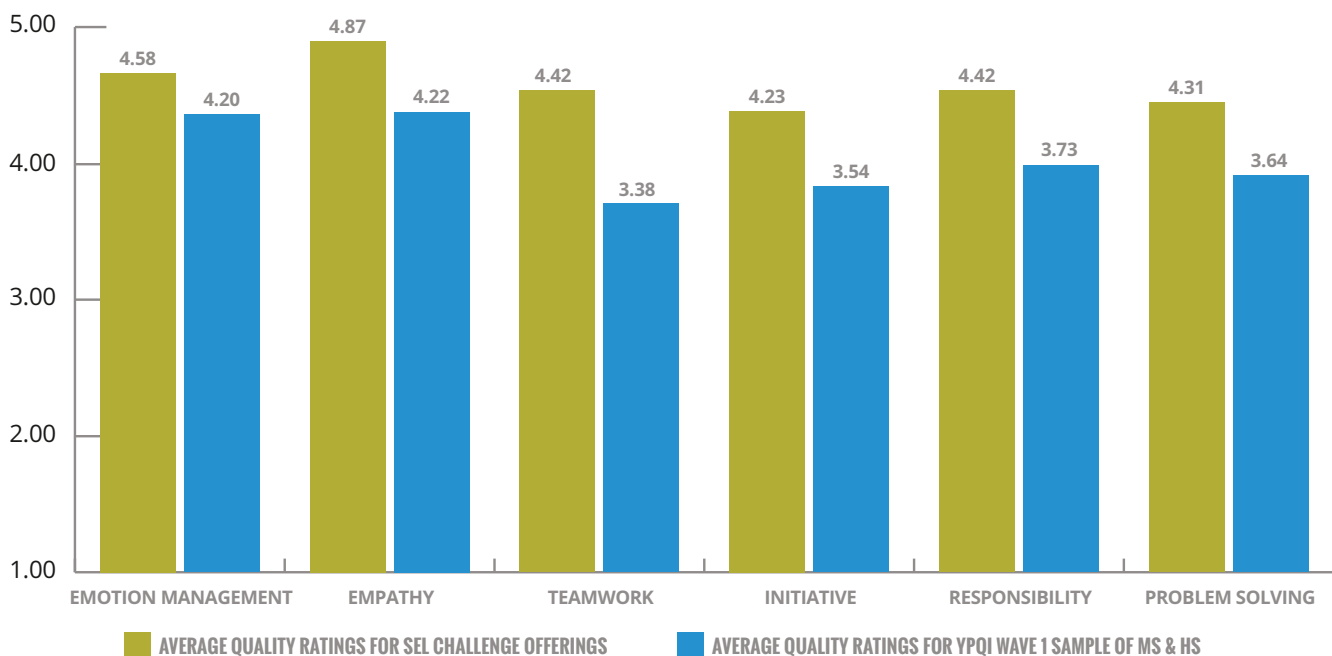
There were two key findings from the performance studies: The quality of staff practices and youth SEL skill change. These findings are of interest because they offer evidence of validation for the selection of exemplary offerings through the SEL Challenge application process and for the SEL best practice standards that were drawn from these offerings. The standards are more credible (i.e., valid) if they come from programs that are of unusually high quality and where there is evidence of youth skill growth.

Quality of staff SEL practices

We assessed the quality of staff SEL practices in Challenge programs by creating an observational assessment tool aligned with the SEL practice indicators and then comparing the scores to other samples of OST programs for older youth. We observed three times in each targeted SEL offering using the Youth Program Quality Assessment (Youth PQA). We created an average of the three ratings in each of the six SEL domains and then compared the average for the eight Challenge offerings to high school and middle school programs in another broadly representative sample of OST programs.

As described in Figure 1, the SEL Challenge programs scored substantially higher than other OST programs for adolescents, indicating that our selection of expert programs was effective and providing a normative baseline for high quality SEL programs. The alignment of Youth PQA to the six SEL domains is described in Appendix E.

Figure 1. Quality of Staff SEL Practices in Challenge Programs and Comparison Sample



SEL skill growth

We also assessed youth skills at three time points using youth survey items focused on youth beliefs about their own SEL abilities and staff ratings of youth behavior⁹⁸. Figures 2 and 3 describe average skill levels at three time points on composite measures of youth reported beliefs and staff reported behaviors in each of the six domains. All measures indicate a positive trend over time and more rigorous statistical models produce a similar pattern of results. On average, across all skill indicators, SEL beliefs and behaviors increased during the Challenge project period. Also of interest, youth who started out lower on these measures increased more over time relative to their more skilled peers, potentially indicating that these programs may have an equity effect (youth with lower skills make greater gains) and/or that Challenge programs are recruiting youth who are open to the effects of the OST experience.

Figure 2. Growth in SEL Beliefs over Three Time points

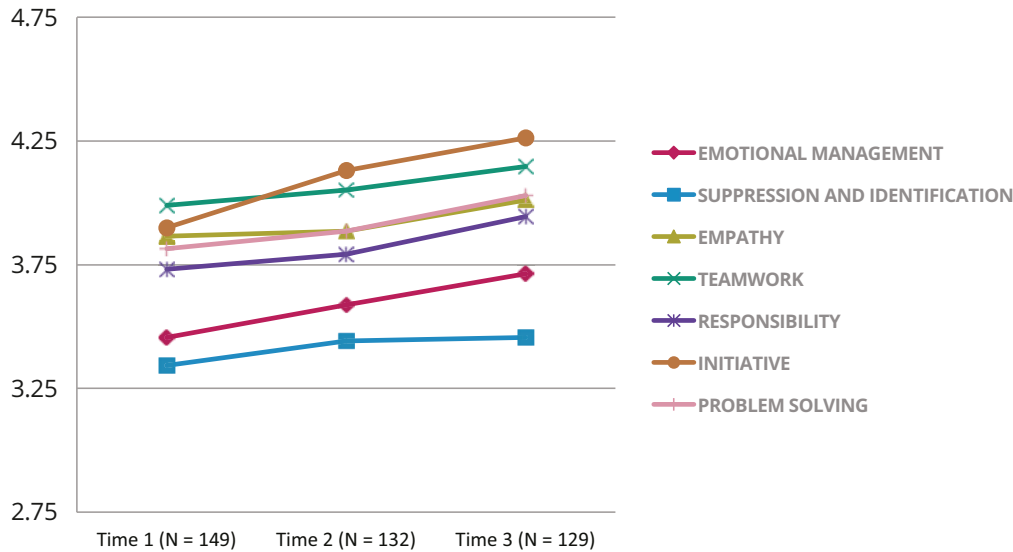
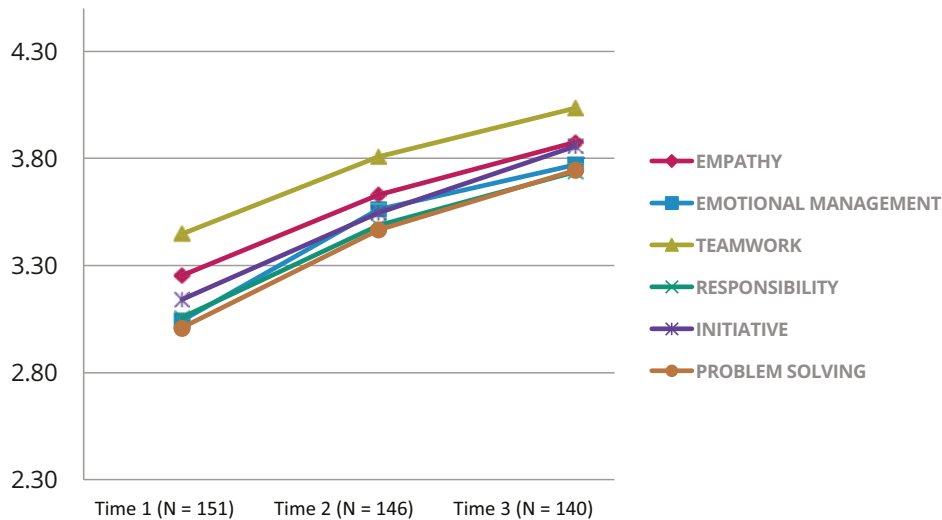


Figure 3. Growth in SEL Behaviors over Three Time Points



Appendix B: Domains Crosswalked with Prominent Frameworks

The SEL Challenge was designed around six domains of SEL practice: emotion management, empathy, teamwork, initiative, responsibility, and problem solving. Our goal in the selection of these domains was based on the Larson et al. evidence base, the Challenge program applications, priorities of the funder and a desire to discuss SEL practices and skill in plain language. Because there are so many different words and frameworks in literature on SEL, we aligned the six Challenge domains with two related frameworks from the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) and the University of Chicago Consortium for School Research (CCR).

	CASEL ▲	Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning. http://www.casel.org/				
		Self-awareness: The ability to accurately recognize one's emotions and thoughts and their influence on behavior. This includes accurately assessing one's strengths and limitations and possessing a well-grounded sense of confidence and optimism.	Self-management: The ability to regulate one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively in different situations. This includes managing stress, controlling impulses, motivating oneself, and setting and working toward achieving personal and academic goals.	Relationship Skills: The ability to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships with diverse individuals and groups. This includes communicating clearly, listening actively, cooperating, resisting inappropriate social pressure, negotiating conflict constructively, and seeking and offering help when needed.	Social Awareness: The ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others from diverse backgrounds and cultures, to understand social and ethical norms for behavior, and to recognize family, school, and community resources and supports.	Responsible Decision Making: The ability to make constructive and respectful choices about personal behavior and social interactions based on consideration of ethical standards, safety concerns, social norms, the realistic evaluation of consequences of various actions, and the well-being of self and others.
Emotion Management: Abilities to be aware of and constructively handle both positive and challenging emotions.						
Teamwork: Abilities to collaborate and coordinate action with others.	▲ ●	▲				
Empathy: Relating to others with acceptance, understanding and sensitivity to their diverse perspectives and experiences	●		▲			
	●			▲		
Responsibility: Dispositions and abilities to reliably meet commitments and fulfill obligations of challenging roles.	●		▲			▲ ●
	▲	▲ ●	▲ ●			●
Initiative: Capacities to take action, sustain motivation, and persevere through challenge towards an identified goal.	▲		▲		●	▲
Problem Solving: Abilities to plan, strategize, and implement complex tasks.						
		Social Skills: Socially acceptable learned behaviors that enable a person to interact effectively with others and to avoid socially unacceptable responses (e.g., cooperation, assertion, responsibility, empathy, and self-control).	Academic Perseverance: Stay focused on a goal despite obstacles (grit or persistence) and forego distractions or temptations to prioritize higher pursuits over lower pleasures (delayed gratification, self-discipline, self-control).	Academic Mindsets: Psycho-social attitudes or beliefs one has about oneself in relation to academic work that motivate students to persist at schoolwork (e.g., sense of belonging, incremental ability beliefs, efficacy beliefs, values academics).	Learning Strategies: Processes and tactics one employs to aid in the cognitive work of thinking, remembering, or learning (e.g., metacognition, self-regulated learning, time management, and goal setting).	Academic Behaviors: Behaviors commonly associated with being a "good student"...include regularly attending class, arriving ready to work (with necessary supplies and materials), paying attention, participating in instructional activities and class discussions, and devoting out-of-school time to studying and completing homework.
	●	Farrington et al. (2012) Teaching Adolescents to Become Learners: The Role of Noncognitive Factors in Shaping School Performance. https://ccsr.uchicago.edu/publications/teaching-adolescents-become-learners-role-noncognitive-factors-shaping-school .				

Appendix C: Larson et al., Evidence Base

See <http://hdfs.illinois.edu/directory/larsonr> for full and up to date list of publications.

ROLE OF PROGRAM STAFF

Griffith, A. N., & Larson, R. W. (in press). Why trust matters: How confidence in leaders transforms what adolescents gain from youth programs. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*.

Larson, R. W., Walker, K. C., Rusk, N. & Diaz, L. B. (2015). Understanding youth development from the practitioner's point of view: A call for research on effective practice. *Applied Developmental Science*, 19 (2), 74-86.

Larson, R. & Angus, R. (2011). Pursuing paradox: The role of adults in creating empowering settings for youth. Prepared for M. Aber, K. Maton, & E. Seidman (Eds.). *Empowerment settings and voices for social change* (pp. 65-93). New York: Oxford.

Advisors of youth programs navigate the paradox of trying to provide direction while allowing youth to make decisions and learn from their actions. This article examines what differentiates advisors who are effective in facilitating youth's development of empowerment skills (specifically strategic thinking). We found these advisors exercised an art of "leading from behind" in which they provided judicious support- when and if needed – in ways that maintained youth's experience of agency and facilitated their cycles of learning.

Walker, K. (2010). The multiple roles that youth development program leaders adopt with youth. *Youth & society*, 20(10), 1-21.

Larson, R. & Walker, K. (2010). Dilemmas of practice: Challenges to program quality encountered by youth program leaders. *American Journal of Community Psychology*. 45, 338-349.

To create and sustain high quality youth development programs, it is important to understand the challenging situations and dilemmas that emerge in program leaders' daily work with youth.

Larson, R.W., Rickman, A.N., Gibbons, C.M., & Walker, K.C. (2009). Practitioner expertise: Creating quality within the daily tumble of events in youth settings. In N.Yohalem, R. Granger, & K. Pittman (Eds.). *New Directions for Youth Development*, No 121, 71-88. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Walker, K. & Larson, R. (Winter 2006). The dilemmas of youth work: Balancing the professional with the personal. *New Directions for Youth Development*, No 112, 109-118.

Youth workers encounter numerous dilemmas in their daily practice, including situations that create tension between relating to youth in a professional versus a personal way.

Walker, K. & Larson, R. (February 2006). Adult-driven youth programs: An oxymoron?. *The Prevention Researcher*, 13 (1), 17-20.

Larson, R., Walker, K., & Pearce, N. (2005). A comparison of youth-driven and adult-driven youth programs: Balancing inputs from youth and adults. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 33, 57-74.

Contrasts the unfolding of events and experiences in two youth-led and two adult-led programs: What types of environments do they provide for youth development? What developmental processes does each facilitate? What are the vulnerabilities of each and what strategies do adult leaders do to make each successful?

Larson, R., & Walker, K. (2005). Processes of positive development: Classic theories. In P. Witt & L. Caldwell (Eds.). *Recreation and youth development* (pp.131-148). State College, PA: Venture Publishing.

Uses examples from research to demonstrate how five classic theories of developmental science (e.g., Learning theory, Piaget, Attachment theories) provide concepts of positive development that can be applied in youth development programs.

Walker, K. & Larson, R. (Spring, 2004). Life on the ground: Balancing youth ownership with adult input. *Evaluation Exchange*, 10 (1), p. 8.

A short essay discussing the daily dilemmas faced by adult leaders of youth programs.

DEVELOPMENTAL PROCESSES, GENERAL

Larson, R. W. (2011). Positive development in a disorderly world: SRA Presidential Address. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 21, 317-334.

Larson, R. (2000). Toward a psychology of positive youth development. *American Psychologist*, Vol. 55, No.1, 170-183.

Larson, R. W, Perry, S. C., Kang, H., & Walker, K. C. (2011). Understanding the Development in Youth Development Programs: Looking To the Future. *Journal of Youth Development*, 6 (3), 155-167.

Larson, R. W. (2011). Adolescents' conscious processes of developing regulation: Learning to appraise challenges. In R. M. Lerner, J. V. Lerner, E. P. Bowers, S. Lewin-Bizan, S. Gestsdottir, & J. B. Urban (Eds.). *Thriving in childhood and adolescence: The role of self regulation processes: New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development*. No. 134. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Larson, R. (2006). Positive youth development, willful adolescents, and mentoring. *Journal of community psychology*, 34, 677-689.

Larson, R., & Walker, K. (2006). Learning about the "real world" in an urban arts program. *Journal of Adolescent Research* 21, 244-268.

To make the transition into adulthood youth must learn to function in the complex and unpredictable "real worlds" of adult life. This intensive case study of an urban arts program identifies the types of experiences and leader support that facilitate developmental processes.

Larson, R., & Wood, D. (2006). Positive development. In L.R. Sherrod (Ed.). *Youth activism: An international encyclopedia*, Vol. 2 (pp. 479-485). Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing.

Uses the example of one youth activism program to demonstrate how such programs can be rich contexts for young people to engage in different forms of self-development.

Larson, R., Jarrett, R., Hansen, D., Pearce, N., Sullivan, P., Walker, K., Watkins, N., & Wood, D., (2004). Organized youth activities as contexts for positive development (pp. 540-560). In Linley, A. & Joseph, S. (Eds.), *Positive Psychology in Practice: From Research to Application*. New York: Wiley.

Preliminary findings of the research show how youth programs promote development in five domains of growth and how adult leaders helped provide conditions for youth to engage in these processes of growth.

DEVELOPMENT OF INITIATIVE, STRATEGIC THINKING, AND RESPONSIBILITY

Salusky, I., Larson, R.W., Griffith, A., Wu, J., Raffaelli, M., Sugimura, N., Guzman, M. (in press). How adolescents develop responsibility: What can be learned from youth programs. *Journal of Adolescent Research*.

Larson, R. & Angus, R. (2011). Pursuing paradox: The role of adults in creating empowering settings for youth. Prepared for M. Aber, K. Maton, & E. Seidman (Eds.). *Empowerment settings and voices for social change* (pp. 65-93). New York: Oxford.

Advisors of youth programs navigate the paradox of trying to provide direction while allowing youth to make decisions and learn from their actions. This article examines what differentiates advisors who are effective in facilitating youth's development of empowerment skills (specifically strategic thinking). We found these advisors exercised an art of "leading from behind" in which they provided judicious support—when and if needed—in ways that maintained youth's experience of agency and facilitated their cycles of learning.

Larson, R.W. & Angus, R.M. (2011). Adolescents' development of skills for agency in youth programs: Learning to think strategically. *Child Development*, 82, 277-294.

Wood, D., Larson, R.W., & Brown, J. (2009). How adolescents come to see themselves as more responsible through participation in youth programs. *Child Development*, 80, 295-309.

Larson, R., Hansen, D., & Walker, K. (2005). Everybody's gotta give: Adolescents' development of initiative and teamwork within a youth program. In Mahoney, J., Larson, R., & Eccles, J. (Eds.). *Organized activities as contexts of development: Extracurricular activities, after-school and community programs* (pp. 159-184). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Research on an FFA program reveals a process of developmental change through which youth gained abilities to plan and organize work toward long-term goals. The study also shows the techniques used by the adult advisors to keep youth engaged in this process.

Larson, R. & Hansen, D. (2005). The development of strategic thinking: Learning to impact humans systems in a youth activism program. *Human Development*, 48, 327-349.

Elucidates the development of advanced skills in strategic thought and action within a youth activism program in which young people worked for social change.

EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Rusk, N., Larson, R. W., Raffaelli, M., Walker, K., Washington, L., Gutierrez, V., Kang, H., Tran, S., & Perry, S.C. (2013). Positive youth development in organized youth programs: How teens learn to manage emotions. In Proctor, C., & Linley, P. A. (Ed.), *Research, applications, and interventions for children and adolescents*. (pp. 247-261). New York: Springer Dordrecht Heidelberg.

Full article (PDF): <http://youthdev.illinois.edu/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Rusk-Et-Al-2013-How-Teens-Learn-to-Manage-Emotions.pdf>

Larson, R. W. & Brown, J. R. (2007). Emotional development in adolescence: What can be learned from a high school theater program. *Child Development*, 78(4), 1083-1099.

Progress in understanding adolescent emotional development requires close examination of emotional experience in context, and to do this the authors drew on qualitative data collected over the course of a high school theater production. Participants' accounts of experiences in this setting demonstrated their capacity to actively extract emotional knowledge and develop strategies for managing emotions. These accounts suggested that youth's repeated 'hot' experience of unfolding emotional episodes in the setting provided material for this active process of learning. Youth also learned by drawing on and internalizing the 'emotion culture' of the setting which provided concepts, strategies, and "tools" for managing emotional episodes.

TEAMWORK DEVELOPMENT

Larson, R. W., Jensen, L., Kang, H., Griffith, A. & Rompala, V. (in press). Peer Groups as a Crucible of Positive Value Development in a Global World. In G. Trommsdorff & X. Chen (Eds.) *Values, Religion, and Culture in Adolescent Development*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Larson, R. (2007). From "I" to "We": Development of the capacity for teamwork in youth programs. In R. Lerner & R. Silbereisen (Eds.). *Approaches to positive youth development*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

This article examines how youth overcome egocentric barriers and develop skills for working collaboratively with peers.

SOCIAL CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT

Sullivan, P.J. & Larson, R.W. (2010). Connecting youth to high resource adults: Lessons from effective youth programs. *Journal of Adolescent Research*. 25 (1), 99-123.

Jarrett, R.L., Sullivan, P.J., & Watkins, N.D. (2005). Developing social capital through participation in organized youth programs: Qualitative insights from three programs. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 33, 41-55.
How three youth programs overcame the generational divide and facilitated youth's formation of connections with resource-rich community adults. Findings show the processes whereby youth gained social capital, the types of social capital they gained, and the role of the programs in facilitating this process.

BRIDGING DIFFERENCE

Watkins, N. D., Larson, R., & Sullivan, P. J. (2007). Bridging intergroup difference in a community youth program. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 51, 380-402.

This paper presents a theoretical explanation for how a youth activism program promotes the bridging of differences among racial groups and people of different sexual orientations.

MOTIVATION

Larson, R. W., & Dawes, N. P., (in press). How to cultivate adolescents' motivation: Effective strategies employed by the professional staff of American youth programs. In S. Joseph (Ed.), *Positive psychology in practice*. New York: Wiley.

Larson, R. W. & Dawes, N. P. (in press). Cultivating intrinsic motivation in American youth programs: The expertise of youth practitioners. In M. Csikszentmihalyi (Ed.) *Education and Youth Development in Cross-Cultural Perspective: Contributions from Positive Psychology*. New York: Springer.

Dawes, N. P., & Larson, R. W. (2011). How youth get engaged: Grounded-theory research on motivational development in organized youth programs. *Developmental Psychology*, 47(1), 259-269.

Larson, R. W. & Rusk, N. (2011). Intrinsic Motivation and Positive Development. In R. M. Lerner, J. V. Lerner, & J. B. Benson (Eds). *Advances in Child Development and Behavior: Positive Youth Development* (pp. 89-130). Oxford, UK: Elsevier.

Pearce, N. & Larson, R. (2006). The process of motivational change in a civic activism organization. *Applied Developmental Science*, 10, 121-131.

Describes stages of change whereby unmotivated youth become engaged in the activities of a youth activism program, including the role of peers and the adult leader in facilitating this motivational change.

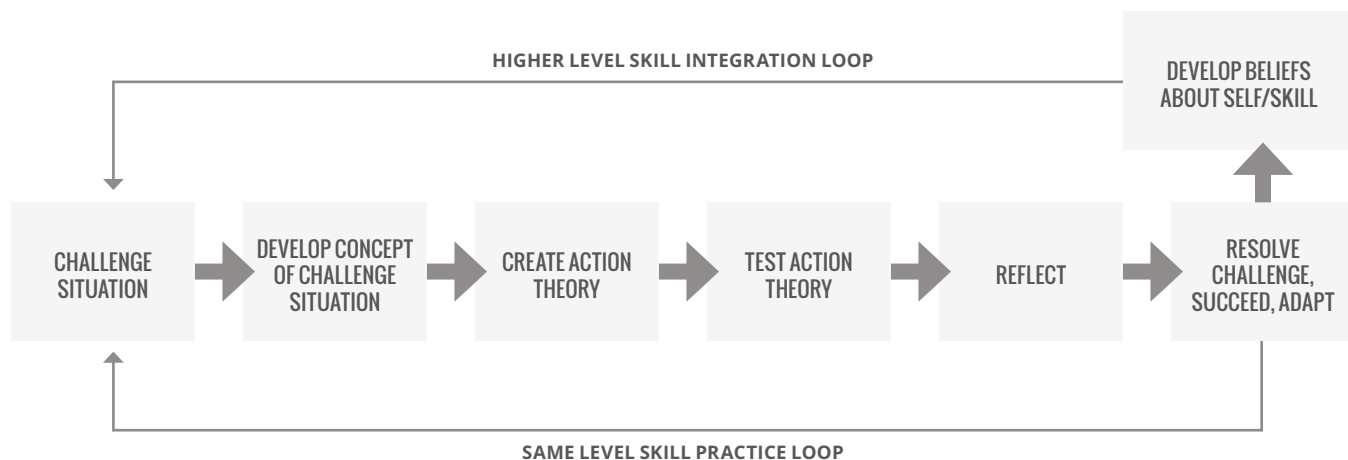
Appendix D: Learning Theory for Social and Emotional Skills and Identification of SEL Practices

Our goal in the SEL Challenge was to describe the curriculum and instructional methods of expert practitioners. To make this information useful, we needed to describe these elements at a level of concreteness that names individual behavior and objective conditions in the offering that can be recognized and acted upon by OST staff. We needed to ask questions of the SEL experts that produced answers about practice at a relatively low level of abstraction and complexity. We developed an SEL theory to help us develop the right kinds of questions. Two important concepts were learning cycles and responsive practices.

LEARNING CYCLES

We started with the assumption that social and emotional skills can be learned much like other skills—represented by the learning cycle in Figure D-1. As youth encounter challenges embedded in the offering curriculum, they go through a cycle of identification, planning, action, and evaluation that results in resolution, adaptation, or redirection⁹⁹ in relation to the original challenge. As the approach to a novel challenge becomes routine through repetitive practice, mastery occurs and the skill becomes integrated as one part of a response to new, more complex challenges. This meant that we wanted to ask staff about visible moments in the learning cycle: Where and how do challenges occur and get thought through? Where and how are plans made, tested, and reflected upon? How do you know when youth have learned or mastered a skill? What do social and emotional skills look like when youth are demonstrating them?

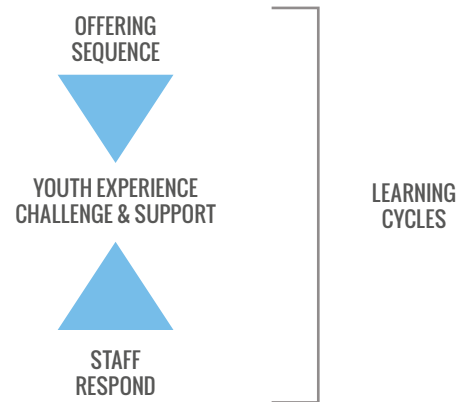
Figure D-1. Learning Cycle



RESPONSIVE PRACTICE

It was also important to know how youth challenges were created by the offering curriculum and how staff responded when challenges, planned or unplanned, did in fact occur. Figure D-2 portrays how we thought about the process as youth worked through curriculum where they experienced challenges and received staff supports in real time. Critically, different youth respond to any context in different ways. For example, a particularly difficult writing task will affect strong writers differently than weak ones at different moments, and present staff with different individual youth behaviors in response. Staff in the SEL program must respond to these differences appropriately so as to keep youth engaged. We asked staff the following questions: Which kinds of *responsive practices* do you use in the moment when challenges emerge? How do you get to know the youth? Can you anticipate responses to challenges that may occur at different moments in the curriculum? What are structures for check-ins that helped staff know when youth are experiencing challenges?

Figure D-2. Learning Cycles as Product of Planned Offering Sequence, Youth Intermittent Experience of Supported Challenge, and Staff Responsive Practices



TIMEFRAMES

Finally, we understood that learning cycles vary in length for different SEL domains. For example, in the emotion management domain, learning cycles might occur very rapidly (e.g., secondary appraisal of emotion may occur in seconds) while learning responsibility might occur over the entire nine month arc of an offering. Our theory suggests that learning cycles for social and emotional skills occur on time scales relevant to the offering curriculum and staff practices. That is we are concerned with *moments* wherein a staff might provide a real-time response to youth behavior; or *sessions* or *sequences of sessions* during which, for example, specific parts of the curriculum are implemented and specific youth experiences delivered (e.g., completed the trust building part of the curriculum). Extending further, the overall offering sequence may be the descriptive period over which skills grow (e.g., 9 months)—and this was the frame for most of the key youth experiences in the standards. Finally, in some cases staff discussed youth skill development over multiple years (e.g., adolescence) in the case of returning students who in some programs took on staff roles in subsequent years.

Appendix E: Crosswalk of Youth Program Quality Assessment with SEL domains

SEL DOMAIN	YOUTH PQA ITEM
Emotional Management	(ES.1) Positive emotional climate (SB.5) Support for struggling youth (Ec.1) Staff uses non-evaluative language (AP.1) Staff share control with youth (AP.2) Staff provide an explanation
Empathy	(ES.2) Lack of bias (WW.1) Staff greet youth (WW.2) Staff warm and respectful (WW.3) Positive staff body language (Be.1) Get to know each other (Be.2) Inclusive relationships
Responsibility	(SF.4) Staff explain activities clearly (Co.2) Interdependent roles (AP.1) Staff share control with youth
Teamwork	(Co.1) Opportunities to work collaboratively (Co.2) Interdependent roles (Co.3) Shared goals (Ld.1) Practice group process skills (AP.1) Staff share control with youth (Be.3) Youth identify with program offering
Initiative	(Ch.1) Content alternatives (Ch.2) Process alternatives (AE.3) Balance concrete and abstract (Pn.1) Opportunities to make plans (SB.5) Support for struggling youth (Be.4) Publically acknowledge achievements
Problem Solving	(SB.2) Staff encourages youth to try new skills (SB.5) Support for struggling youth (AE.1) Youth engage with materials or ideas. (SF.5) Appropriate time for activities (Be.4) Publically acknowledge achievements (AP.1) Staff share control with youth (Pn.1) Opportunities to make plans (Pn.2) Multiple planning strategies used (Ch.1) Content alternatives (Ch.2) Process alternatives (Rf.1) Intentional reflection

Appendix F: Domain Aliases

Emotion Management – Abilities to be aware of and constructively handle both positive and challenging emotions.

emotional intelligence – a component or precursor of Social Awareness and Collaboration and includes the perseverance in the face of difficulty, a personal mindset¹⁰⁰

impulse control – remaining in control of one’s behavior when experiencing negative emotions¹⁰¹

self-control – the ability to avoid impulsive behavior and fulfill short-term obligations¹⁰²

self-discipline – the ability to suppress prepotent responses in the service of a higher goal; such a choice is not automatic but rather requires conscious effort¹⁰

self-regulation – a person’s ability to generate socially approved behavior in the absence of external monitors¹⁰⁴

Empathy – Relating to others with acceptance, understanding, and sensitivity to their diverse perspectives and experiences.

culture – can identify and understand patterns of behaviors and social relationships reflecting the assumptions, values, norms, and artifacts shared by members of the organization¹⁰⁵

empathy – (a) an *emotional simulation* process that mirrors the emotional elements of the other’s bodily experience¹⁰⁶; (b) a conceptual, *perspective-taking* process¹⁰⁷; (c) an *emotion-regulation* process used to soothe personal distress at the other’s pain or discomfort, making it possible to mobilize compassion and helping behavior for the other¹⁰⁸

global awareness – learning from and working collaboratively with individuals representing diverse cultures, religions and lifestyles in a spirit of mutual respect and open dialogue in personal, work and community contexts¹⁰⁹

morality – moral systems are interlocking sets of values, practices, institutions, and evolved psychological mechanisms that work together to suppress or regulate selfishness and make social life possible¹¹⁰

Teamwork – Abilities to collaborate and coordinate action with others.

communications – the ability to exchange information and ideas with others through writing, speaking, reading or listening¹¹¹

cooperative learning – the instructional use of small groups so that students work together to maximize their own and each others’ learning¹¹²; student interaction over subject matter as an integral part of the learning process¹¹³

listen actively – attend to oral information; clarify purpose for listening and use listening strategies appropriate to that purpose; monitor comprehension, adjusting listening strategies to overcome barriers to comprehension; integrate information from listening with prior knowledge to address listening purpose¹¹⁴

negotiation – assessing the potential outcomes of the process and aiming to obtain the best value for self or organization¹¹⁵

oral expression; oral comprehension – the ability to communicate information and ideas in speaking so others will understand; the ability to listen to and understand information and ideas presented through spoken words and sentences¹¹⁶

pro-social behavior – voluntary behavior intended to benefit another¹¹⁷

resolve conflict and negotiate – acknowledge that there is a conflict; identify areas of agreement and disagreement; generate options for resolving conflict that have a “win/win” potential; engage parties in trying to reach agreement on a course of action that can satisfy the needs and interests of all; evaluate results of efforts and revise approach as necessary¹¹⁸

social competence – the ability to effectively make and maintain positive social outcomes and peer relationships by organizing one’s own personal and environmental resources¹¹⁹

social problem solving – the ability to handle situations in such a way that youth can get along with others and be more effective in interactions with them¹²⁰

social skills – socially acceptable learned behaviors that enable a person to interact effectively with others and to avoid socially unacceptable responses¹²¹

Initiative – Capacities to take action, sustain motivation, and persevere through challenge toward an identified goal.

academic tenacity – mindsets and skills that allow students to look beyond short-term concerns to longer-term or higher-order goals, and to withstand challenges and setbacks to persevere toward those goals¹²²

delayed gratification – the ability to resist the temptation for an immediate reward and wait for a later reward¹²³

goal-setting – is the process of establishing clear and usable targets, or objectives, for learning¹²⁴

grit – the degree to which students stay focused on a long-term goal despite obstacles¹²⁵

mastery-focused goals – a task-focused orientation towards goals with an intrinsic focus on learning and improving¹²⁶

motivation – intrinsic motivation refers to performing an activity for itself to experience pleasure and satisfaction inherent in the activity; Extrinsic motivation involves engaging in an activity for external reasons such as receiving rewards or avoiding punishments¹²⁷

perseverance – an individual's ability to remain focused on a task that may be boring or difficult¹²⁸

persistence – to hold firmly or steadfastly to some purpose or task¹²⁹; a personality trait meaning perseverance in spite of fatigue or frustration¹³⁰

resiliency – the process of coping with adversity, change or opportunity in a manner that results in the identification, fortification and enrichment of resilient qualities or protective factors¹³¹

work ethic – the beliefs, values, and principles that guide the way individuals interpret and act upon their rights and responsibilities within the work context at any given time¹³²

Responsibility – Dispositions and abilities to reliably meet commitments and fulfill obligations of challenging roles.

conscientiousness – personality trait manifested in characteristic behaviors such as being efficient, organized, neat, and systematic¹³³

self-reliance – the degree to which the child displays autonomy, responsibility, and personal initiative in the classroom. Self-reliance is not synonymous with independence or dependence, but is characterized by the following markers; (a) personal initiative, (b) self-regulation, and (c) persistence and engagement, and (d) autonomy¹³⁴

Problem Solving – Abilities to plan, strategize, and implement complex tasks.

cognitive process – 'cold' cognition refers to thinking processes under conditions of low emotion and/or arousal whereas 'hot' cognition refers to thinking under conditions of strong feelings or high arousal and which therefore may be much more important to understanding risky choices in real-life situations¹³⁵

cognitive strategies – behaviors employed to achieve goals¹³⁶

competent decision making – the process of weighing and considering all of the options, risks, benefits, and other key components involved in the decision-making process¹³⁷

critical thinking – the use of a core set of cognitive skills – analysis, interpretation, inference, explanation, evaluation and self-regulation¹³⁸

metacognitive strategies – planning how to approach a given learning task and evaluating and monitoring progress¹³⁹

plan – set and prioritize goals; develop an organized approach of activities and objectives; actively carry out the plan; monitor the plan's progress while considering any need to adjust the plan; evaluate its effectiveness in achieving the goal¹⁴⁰

problem solving – define a problem, generate alternatives, make decisions and plan, identify a realistic first step, evaluate how effective an implemented plan is and make necessary changes¹⁴¹

problem solving – the process of discovering the sequence of alternatives leading to a good or ideal solution for a situation that evokes anxiety and distress¹⁴²

solve problems and make decisions – anticipate or identify problems; use information from diverse sources to arrive at a clearer understanding of the problem and its root causes; generate alternative solutions; evaluate strengths and weaknesses of alternatives, including potential risks and benefits and short- and long-term consequences; select alternative that is most appropriate to goal, context, and available resources; establish criteria for evaluating effectiveness of solution or decision¹⁴³

PART FIVE.

GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS





Agency – The concept of agency also refers to the experience of control in their own lives that youth experience when they are trusted to make decisions about things that affect them.

Curriculum – Description of (1) a sequence of content and planned experiences fit to the developmental and learning needs of the learner and (2) the supports necessary for the instructional staff to plan and implement that sequence. Curriculum features highlighted in the guide include content sequence, offering session structure, responsive practices, and staff supports.

Offering – An offering is characterized by the same group of youth and adults meeting over multiple sessions for a planned learning purpose. The target offerings in the SEL Challenge are those exemplary offerings using SEL practices and curriculum to grow youth social and emotional skills.

Out-of-school time (OST) – The term out-of-school time is used to refer to settings variously labeled afterschool, expanded learning, extracurricular clubs, summer camps, and sports; many mentoring, tutoring, apprenticeship, and workforce development programs; programs for disconnected and homeless youth; and some alternative schools.

Performance study – Use of selected performance measures at an individual OST site to describe the quality of management and instructional practices as well as change in youth skills to produce a performance report used during a continuous improvement cycle. The performance report includes comparisons to normative performance benchmarks.

Practice indicator – The lowest level descriptor for an SEL standard in this guide. Practice indicators describe specific youth experiences, staff behaviors, or other objective conditions that occur during out-of-school time offerings.

Quality improvement system (QIS) – In the OST field, a QIS typically consists of four elements: Standards for good performance, performance measures and reports, an annual continuous improvement cycle, supports and incentives necessary to implement the prior elements.

SEL practice – Our definition of staff practices includes both staff behaviors (e.g., modeling appropriate use of emotion) and program structures that the staff put into place (e.g., recruitment policy). Key youth experiences (e.g., taking on roles and obligations) point to staff practices and program structures necessary to produce those youth experiences. In this sense, the staff practices and key youth experiences are both included as standards for SEL practices.

Social and emotional learning (SEL) – Defined in the following way by the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL): the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions.

Standard – We use the phrase “standards for SEL practice” and the term “standards” to describe practices that (1) appear across the Challenge offerings, (2) were described as important by the expert practitioners, and (3) were supported in the evidence base. In this guide, each standard consists of a sentence describing the practice and multiple practice indicators describing different facets of the standard.

End Notes

- ¹ The point is that contexts associated with poverty, traumatic experience, and chronic stress can cause dysregulation of emotion, motivation, attention, and behavior, and ultimately limit developmental potential. As adolescents accumulate experience with successful self-regulation, their identity comes to include increasing confidence that with effort they can engage positive contexts and overcome challenging ones. Furthermore, experiences of successful self-regulation and resultant SEL skill, likely moderates the effects of early negative experience on outcomes in early adulthood. The recovery and healthy development from adolescent's suffering the effects of prior negative experience is likely to be fostered through exposure to contexts like the exemplary SEL offerings identified in the Challenge. These ideas are discussed in several disciplinary languages, for example: Murray et al., 2015; Cote, 2012; Evans & Fuller-Rowell, 2013; Blair and Raver, 2012; Bryck and Fischer, 2012; Curtis and Cicetti, 2007.
- ² Durlak, J. A., Weissberg, R. P., Dymnicki, A. B., Taylor, R. D., & Schellinger, K. B. (2011). The impact of enhancing students' social and emotional learning: A meta-analysis of school-based universal interventions. *Child Development*, 82(1), 405-432, Durlak, J., & Weissberg, R. (2010). A Meta-Analysis of After-School Programs That Seek to Promote Personal and Social Skills in Children and Adolescents. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 45(3-4), 294-309.
- ³ The programs recruited into the SEL Challenge were eligible because they served "vulnerable" youth. Applicants interpreted vulnerability to mean several things: Youth were selected because they presented with low social and emotional skills during recruitment (e.g., introversion or few friends); Youth lived in difficult homes or neighborhoods where exposure to violence and toxic levels of stress were almost assured; Youth were referred by a social service agency due to a history (e.g., foster care, juvenile offense) that was likely to include traumatic experience; Youth were exposed to systematic racism and exclusion.
- ⁴ An offering is defined as having the same staff and youth meeting over multiple sessions for a specific learning purpose. One exemplary SEL offering was targeted at each of the eight organizations. Each targeted SEL offering had a different curriculum which was focused on building youth skills in at least one SEL domain.
- ⁵ Selected applicants were able to clearly describe: A mature and/or innovative offering that was focused on at least one SEL domain, occurred on a regular basis over several months, and served vulnerable youth; an offering curriculum sequence and how students learn in relation to the curriculum; the types of work that youth did during the offering; how offerings were structured to be youth centered and adult-led; how offerings had been evaluated over multiple cycles.
- ⁶ Performance measures for quality of management practices and quality of instructional practices are described in Smith, C., Akiva, T., Sugar, S., Lo, Y. J., Frank, K. A., Peck, S. C., & Cortina, K. S. (2012). *Continuous quality improvement in afterschool settings: Impact findings from the Youth Program Quality Intervention study*. Ypsilanti, MI: Forum for Youth Investment; and in Smith, C., Akiva, T., Sugar, S. A., & Hallman, S. (2012). *Leading indicators measurement system: Analysis of Oklahoma data - Technical appendix to the Oklahoma 21st Century Community Learning Centers statewide evaluation*. Ypsilanti, MI: David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality. Survey measures of youth beliefs aligned with the SEL domains were largely drawn from Child Trends work described in Lippman, L. H., Moore, K. A., Guzman, L., Ryberg, R., McIntosh, H., Ramos, M. F., . . . Kuhfeld, M. (2014). *Flourishing children: Defining and testing indicators of positive development*. New York, NY: Springer. Staff ratings of youth behavior aligned with the six domains were developed by the SEL Challenge partners. All measures and findings are described in greater detail in the Technical Report for the SEL Challenge (forthcoming).
- ⁷ Smith, C., Akiva, T., Sugar, S., Lo, Y. J., Frank, K. A., Peck, S. C., & Cortina, K. S. (2012). *Continuous quality improvement in afterschool settings: Impact findings from the Youth Program Quality Intervention study*. Ypsilanti, MI: Forum for Youth Investment; Smith, C. (2013). *Moving the Needle on "Moving the Needle": Next Stage Technical Guidance for Performance Based Accountability Systems in the Expanded Learning Field with a Focus on Performance Levels for the Quality of Instructional Services*. Ypsilanti, MI: David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality, a division of the Forum for Youth Investment.

- ⁸ This dual language of practice is used in both the Larson et al evidence base for adolescents as well as in many other descriptions of curriculum and educational practice (e.g., High/Scope).
- ⁹ We were struck by how much this list looks like the features of positive youth development settings described in the National Research Council's earlier work on community based settings for youth. See Eccles, J., & Gootman, J. (Eds.). (2002). *Community programs to promote youth development*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.
- ¹⁰ Zone of Proximal development. See Vygotsky, L. S. (1962). *Thought and language*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press..
- ¹¹ Fischer, K. W., & Bidell, T. R. (2006). Dynamic development of action and thought. In W. Damon & R. M. Lerner (Eds.), *Theoretical models of human development. Handbook of child psychology* (6 ed., Vol. 1, pp. 313-399). New York: Wiley.; Baker, E. A. (2014). Learning and assessment: Twenty-first century skills and cognitive assessment In H. F. O'Neil, R. S. Perez, & E. A. Baker (Eds.), *Teaching and measuring cognitive readiness: Springer*.
- ¹² Côté, J. E. (2000). *Arrested adulthood: The changing nature of maturity and identity*: NYU Press.
- ¹³ 13 Eccles, J., & Gootman, J. (Eds.). (2002). *Community programs to promote youth development*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.
- ¹⁴ Ibid.
- ¹⁵ The staff practices outlined in this guide are very similar to those suggested by the Northeast Foundation and Responsive Classroom (see <https://www.responsiveclassroom.org/>) and numerous other sources.
- ¹⁶ Gross, J. J., & Thompson, R. A. (2007). Emotion Regulation: Conceptual Foundations. In J. J. Gross (Ed.), *Handbook of emotion regulation*. (Vol. xvii, pp. 3-24). New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- ¹⁷ Bates, J. E., Lewis, M., & Haviland-Jones, J. M. (2000). Temperament as an emotion construct: Theoretical and practical issues. In M. Lewis & J. M. Haviland-Jones (Eds.), *Handbook of emotions* (Vol. 2, pp. 382-396). New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- ¹⁸ Reyna, V. F., & Farley, F. (2006). Risk and rationality in adolescent decision making implications for theory, practice, and public policy. *Psychological science in the public interest*, 7(1), 1-44, Schwarz, N., & Clore, G. L. (1983). Mood, misattribution, and judgments of well-being: informative and directive functions of affective states. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 45(3), 513.
- ¹⁹ Brenhouse, H. C., & Andersen, S. L. (2011). Developmental trajectories during adolescence in males and females: A cross-species understanding of underlying brain changes. *Neuroscience & Biobehavioral Reviews*, 35(8), 1687-1703, Steinberg, L. (2007). Risk Taking in Adolescence: New Perspectives from Brain and Behavioral Science. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 16(2), 55-59.
- ²⁰ Larson, R. W. (2011). Positive Development in a Disorderly World. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 21(2), 317-334, Rusk, N., Larson, R. W., Raffaelli, M., Walker, K., Washington, L., Gutierrez, V., . . . Cole Perry, S. (2013). Positive Youth Development in Organized Programs: How Teens Learn to Manage Emotions. In C. Proctor & P. A. Linley (Eds.), *Research, Applications, and Interventions for Children and Adolescents: A Positive Psychology Perspective* (pp. 247-261): Springer.
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programs, personal experience or the experiences of other participants demonstrate effects of “isms.” This can facilitate moving a discussion from societal issues to thinking about personal experiences and personal ramifications of societal injustice.

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The Social and Emotional Learning Challenge was designed to identify promising practices for building skills in six areas: emotion management, empathy, teamwork, initiative, responsibility, and problem solving. The Challenge was a partnership between expert practitioners delivering exemplary programs in eight unique communities, a team of researchers, and a national foundation. This field guide, a product of the SEL Challenge, shares best practices and collective expertise for equipping the rising generation with the social and emotional skills they need to thrive.

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