

Community Health Program Planning 2011: Field Action Report

Program Evaluation of the Summer Youth Employment & Learning Program (SYELP) at the Community Renewal Team (CRT)

Evaluation conducted by Yale School of Public Health Student Team:

Britton Gibson, Blanca Paccha, Nicholas DeVito, Stephanie Platis, Whitney Hubbard (TA) & Krista Heybruck-Santiago (Preceptor)

The Problem

Urban youth face a variety of obstacles during adolescence that can result in higher rates of negative behaviors and attitudes. Beyond the elevated levels of violence and crime, the youth often inherit the burden of poverty and unemployment.

- **In Connecticut, 1 in 10 children under the age of 18 lives in poverty, most of which live in urban areas**
- **In Hartford, 45% of children live below the poverty line.**

Hartford youth face the similar risks of youth in poverty—substance abuse, violence, and unhealthy sexual behaviors.

The traumatic experiences that accompany a life exposed to chronic poverty and violence can have profound effects on the transition of an adolescent into adulthood. Many are subject to an inferior education, inadequate health services, lack of job opportunities, and poor community support.

In order to combat these negative outcomes, CRT has implemented a variety of programs that provide at-risk youth with the support necessary to avoid detrimental behaviors and maximize the realization of their own potential.

The Summer Youth Employment & Learning Program (SYELP)

The Community Renewal Team (CRT) is an anti-poverty, non-profit organization based in Hartford. For over 10 years they have run a Summer Youth Employment & Learning Program (SYELP).

Through this program CRT provides Hartford youth with the opportunity to gain work experience over the summer, while also being educated on the necessary skills to improve professionalism and employability.

The aim of SYELP is to provide youth with:

- **Meaningful work experiences**
- **Professional, communication and inter-personal skills building**
- **A source of income**
- **An opportunity for youth to realize their own potential in the workplace**

The Project

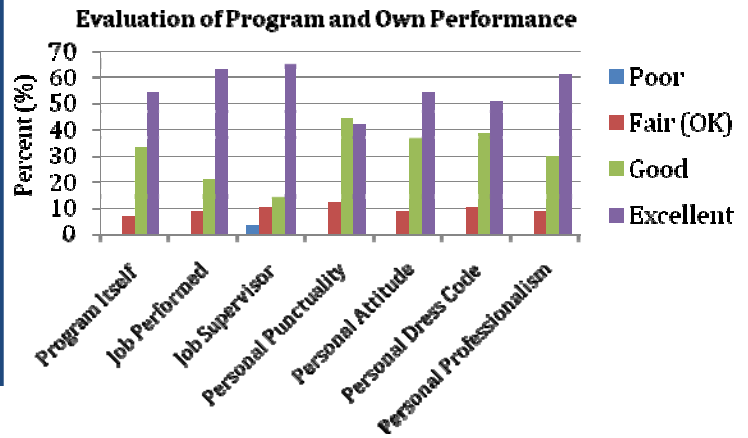
While CRT has been running this program for several years, it has recently made some structural modifications in order to improve the impact of the program. Thus, to determine the current impact of the program, to identify best practices and to suggest improvements, we conducted an evaluation of SYELP.

Through student survey data collected by CRT and interviews that we conducted with supervisors, we gauged the strengths and weaknesses of the program in order to provide insight on the impact of the program and where improvements can be made to most effectively benefit the youth.

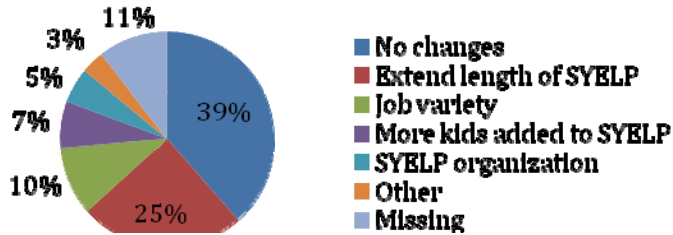
CRT conducted student surveys at the end of the program to gauge student response to the program. We were able to interview youth supervisors of the SYELP to gain insight into their experience with the program and opinion on the program overall. The data collected from the student surveys and supervisor interviews were analyzed and we were able to evaluate the program and offer recommendations.

Student Data

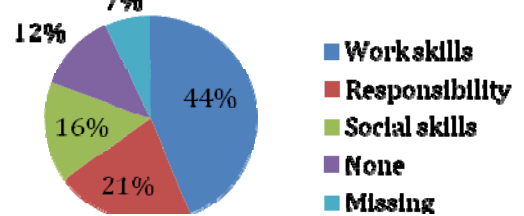
The majority of students responded with either “good” or “excellent” when asked about the program, their job, their supervisor and their own personal performance, including punctuality, attitude, dress, and professionalism. The majority of the students also responded that the program met their expectations and that they had a clear understanding of the expectations of them. All said they would participate again and would recommend the program to a friend.



Changes to SYELP



New Skills Learned



Supervisor Data

Four common themes emerged from supervisor interviews. These themes and some of the main findings are summarized below.

Behavior

- Supervisors were generally satisfied with their experiences in SYELP and felt working with the youth was a positive experience.
- There were some concerns surrounding professionalism, attitude and motivation of the students, but these were not major detractors from the program.
- *“...they wanted to come back and they were just so excited to be here and they enjoyed the experience so much and it was really great to see them so excited about our field.”*

Communication

- Some supervisors discussed some difficulties within the hierarchy of communication between supervisors, case managers and student employees.
- Expressed a desire for more formalized methods and channels of communication.
- — *“...some sort of questionnaire or feedback from the youth... And maybe they can do the same thing about the supervisors. Maybe there is something that they want to know that we are not providing, you know just to have an opportunity to say, well you know, are you enjoying yourself, are you getting what you wanted, what you envisioned?”*

Roles and Responsibilities

- Supervisors felt they were able to act as mentors while maintaining a professional environment.
- These professional relationships were important to the supervisors and they would like to expand on them further.
- — *“I think you have to kind of get involved in mentoring....what I used to do is allow them to come in, sit down and talk, and let them loosen up a little, laugh a little bit, because they are not taking it as if we would as adults...if you don't help them realize that the importance of work the importance of professionalism and how you should carry yourself when you get into employment and all of this, they don't get it.”*

Goals and Achievements

- Supervisors generally felt that the students were able to meet the personal goals they had for their professional development.
- Creating a dialogue to discuss these goals with the students would be a valuable experience.
- — *“I feel like they did learn something here that they could carry with them. I basically tried to get them to learn to come to work on time, dress, keep themselves presentable at all times for whatever position they were put in.”*

Recommendations

By examining both the student and supervisor data, we were able to come up with a number of areas for potential improvement or alteration of the program.

- The newly implemented interview component, where supervisors were able to interview students before placement, was well received by students and supervisors. Making this a more comprehensive component of the program would ensure appropriate summer placements.
- Improve communication between youth, program managers and supervisors by formalizing standard practices and procedures throughout the program.
- There was considerable interest by both supervisors and students to extend the length of the program to give more opportunity for professional and development.
- Create opportunities, such as an SYELP Alumni Program, for supervisors and students to remain in contact after the program has ended.
- The SYELP is based very strongly on relationships between organizations. Having a discussion on the execution and logistics of the program, while at the same time reexamining the roles and responsibilities of each organization may be beneficial.

References

- Zimmerman et al & Berman, et. al 1996 * Can't find full references in citations
- Voices for Children: <http://www.ctkidslink.org/publications/well10augtowndata.pdf>, <http://www.ctkidslink.org/publications/well09largecitydata.pdf>
- Commission on Children "Child Poverty in Connecticut: January 2009" State of Connecticut General Assembly, January 15, 2009,
- Lawrence, J., Bennett, N., Conley, D., and Li, J. "The effects of poverty on child health and development" Annu. Rev. Public Health. 1997. 18: 463-83
- Brindis CD, Driscoll AK, Biggs MA, Valderrama LT. 2002."Fact Sheet on Latino Youth: Income & Poverty." University of California, San Francisco, CA.
- Greene, M. "Chronic Exposure to Violence and Poverty: Interventions That Work for Youth" Crime and Delinquency, 1993 39:106