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Project Emerald: Youth and Their Ability To Shine

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Collaborative Health & Human Services

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Abstract

This Capstone project was implemented at Growing Greatness located in Watsonville, CA to address the lack of access to leadership programs for the underserved youth in Watsonville with purpose of empowering them to become effective communicators and advocate for them to inspire change through an in-person workshop about speaking to inspire them for action by and speaking with passion, empathy and purpose. The project was implemented using a focus group based approach that involved participants and youth leaders. The evaluation of the project revealed that it met most of the expected outcomes, and that the participants reported significant improvements in their ability to express their ideas and advocate for their communities.

However, some challenges were identified, such as the need for resources and follow-up support to sustain the impact of the workshop. To address these challenges, the project recommends that the agency should establish more partnerships with local schools and youth organizations.

Keywords: leadership, communication, underserved youth, participatory approach, workshop.

Agency & Communities Served

Growing Greatness's (GG) vision statement is as follows: "A thriving world of people and communities living from equity and justice", and their mission statement is " Growing Greatness stands for equity and justice and is manifesting the Greatness that exists within each of us and our communities" (Growing Greatness, 2022). GG's goal is to generate durable leadership and civic engagement through developing pilot advocacy programs for youth of Watsonville. The current Watsonville population is 52,067, which is 84.3% predominantly Hispanic (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). Within this population, 13% live in poverty. In addition to this, 36% of Watsonville residents 25 years and over are not high school graduates and only 11% of residents 25 years or more have a Bachelor's degree or higher. GG has a great activity where they take the

youth on bike rides through Watsonville and neighboring communities to show them the importance of being a part of their community. Expanding on their activities would benefit the organization and the youth to learn about the different roles that can be applied in any activity. It would be beneficial to the youth and to the organization itself. The concept of GG was created in 2016 Kimberly Lacrosse and was inspired to advocate for community change within the community she grew up in. Underserved and economically disadvantaged youth in Watsonville lack access to leadership and advocacy programs. A way to serve the people in this community is by making Leadership Workshops accessible to students in the Watsonville community to safely experience and participate in youth focused workshops.

Problem Model

Contributing Factors	Problem	Consequences
1. Lack of parental involvement	Lack of access to leadership programs for the underserved youth in Watsonville	Greater risk for poverty
2. Inequality within different socioeconomic areas create different opportunities		Increased gang activity
3. Lack of funding for leadership programs		Large Latinx community of underserved youth at risk of social disenfranchisement

Problem Statement

Underserved youth in Watsonville lack access to leadership programs. Only 20% of youth leadership programs in the US specifically target low-income or underrepresented youth (Aspen Institute, 2019). Some of these youth come from families that lack the knowledge needed to obtain information about the programs that are currently available and some lack access to the minimal resources that are out there. Without programs catered to the youth and their interests, kids would not be able to be as engaged in school and their communities (Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth, 2008). Youth who feel involved and are given the opportunity to participate have better outcomes enhance the standard of living and help develop and strengthen communities (“Effectiveness of Positive Youth Development Programs | Youth.gov,” n.d.). Addressing the lack of access to leadership programs for underserved youth requires a collaborative effort from various stakeholders, including organizations, communities, and governments. By working together, we can help ensure that all youth have access to the resources and opportunities they need to become effective leaders.

Contributing Factors

Lack of Parental Involvement

Parents' participation in programs is an important part of the development of children because information about student's progress in school or program is talked about, and teachers as well as practitioners can advise the parents during this time on improvements that can be made. However, there are work demands, and “in order to visit with teachers or attend school events during school hours, wages had to be forgone by at least one parent” (Zarate, 2007, p.10). In order to be economically stable, some Latinx parents are required to work two jobs, which prevents them from attending parent conferences or other school based activities (Elizabeth Wildsmith et al., 2020). Some jobs may have little or no flexibility, and frequently requesting

time-off is hard for Latinx parents because there is a fear of losing employment. The parents are not purposely refusing to attend school-based activities or after school youth programs, rather the balance of work, daycare, and other duties, can create a challenge to attend and be more involved (The National Research Center on Hispanic Children & Families, 2018). These leadership and advocacy programs help understand the importance of academic involvement. The ability to help students in their academics could be hard to achieve if the parents' education level is low, because they are not able to transfer sufficient knowledge. The low education Latinx parents obtain is affecting the ability to effectively advocate for their children's academic success. "Students with parents with low educational attainment and lower expectations for their children's education have lower graduation rates." (Mena, 2017) That is where these after school programs can play an important role in the students academic success.

Inequality creating different opportunities

When kids are from lower income areas, they only have access to go to schools that have less funding (Mathewson, 2022). Because these kids only have access to these schools they also only have access to the minimal amount of programs that these schools may provide. Youth from lower socioeconomic backgrounds may have difficulty joining programs as they do not have the money that some programs may require or the programs are put on by schools that they do not attend. The youth in these areas are already at a disadvantage because there is nothing they can do at the time about the poverty that they live in. This can be discouraging for the kids because they have nowhere to go and do not have the ability to learn the same skills as their more privileged counterparts ("Disparities and Resiliency in Adolescent Health," n.d.).

Lack of funding for programs

High quality communities are provided with greater resources, and the problem is that low-income communities are receiving the least of the resources (Leonard et al., 2016). To further reflect on Leonard et al. (2016) article, low-income schools are not able to provide valuable education, which forbids improvement for the student's learning. After school educational programs would be an ideal resource to construct, especially in poor urban neighborhoods. Latinx are living in environments with no valuable resources that are needed in order to expand their level of education. And by funding schools, tutoring, and other homework assistance programs can provide help in completing, and understanding homework. This is a great concern because leadership and advocacy workshops help youth stay active in their schools and communities. The problem is that organizations like Growing Greatness have demonstrated a positive and measurable impact on those being served, but still struggle with receiving funding. Nonprofit funding is notoriously difficult to come by. The state and federal governments both have financial assistance programs to assist non-profit organizations.

Consequences

The prevalence of the issue has shown that the lack of leadership programs for youth creates a lack of engagement in school and other activities which can result in arising problems of living in poverty, gang activity, incarceration, and social disenfranchisement (Bridgeland, M. J., Dilulio, J.J., & Morison, B. K., 2006, p. 1). Youth who become disengaged are more likely to drop out of school putting them at a greater risk for living in poverty. On average, "high school dropouts earn \$9,200 less per year than high school graduates, and about one million less over a lifetime than college graduates" (Bridgeland, M. J., 2006, p. 2). According to the statement, the low earnings for high school dropouts could affect their ability to support themselves overtime.

The amount being earned is a dramatic difference, in which dropouts need to take into consideration because of future consequences

When youth are disengaged from school and their community they often turn to people who they feel will listen to them which is what appeals to youth getting involved in gang activity (Tonks & Stephenson, 2018). Youth feel like they have a voice within these gangs and are heard by the people around them, leading them into this kind of lifestyle. With increased involvement in gangs, they also have increased chances of becoming incarcerated which creates a cycle that is hard to break. When the underserved youth are given the opportunity to have their voices heard, whether in school or in a program, it creates a positive outlet for them to be a part of their community and to be seen (Lamplugh, 2021). Education, job training, and other resources can help individuals avoid joining gangs or leave them behind, and community engagement can help build trust and support for these efforts (“Changing Course: Preventing Gang Membership,” n.d.).

Underserved youth in Watsonville are at risk of social disenfranchisement. Disenfranchised communities are groups of people who are marginalized and excluded from full participation in society (“Definition of Disenfranchised,” n.d.) Examples of disenfranchised communities include people living in poverty, racial and ethnic minorities, LGBTQ+ individuals, people with disabilities, and immigrants. These groups often face barriers to full participation in society, including limited access to education and job opportunities, inadequate healthcare, and discrimination in the legal system (Homan & Brown, 2022). Addressing the issues faced by disenfranchised communities requires a concerted effort from government, civil society, and individuals (OECD, 2018). It involves tackling the root causes of marginalization, such as economic inequality and discrimination, and creating policies and programs that promote

inclusivity and equal access to resources and opportunities. Additionally, it requires active listening and amplification of the voices of those who are disenfranchised, and recognizing the value of diverse perspectives and experiences. The youth of Watsonville falls under this category because some of them come from living in poverty and are minorities themselves.

Capstone Project Description and Justification

Project Emerald: Youth and Their Ability To Shine

This passion project is to create a new program activity that allows students and participants to engage with building their confidence, public speaking and how to be better leaders in their community, but through their already existing passions. The activity in mind is a workshop about thinking about what you care about, what you stand for, the lives you want to change when you are writing and speaking. The goal of this activity would be to help them develop and improve on their ability to communicate to us and their classmates, Speaking to inspire them for action. Giving the youth the exposure to talk about what they are currently interested in a setting that does not feel intimidating or other external pressures is important to this activity. Access to leadership and advocacy workshops that help youth stay active in their schools and communities is a problem particularly for young adults. Organizations such as Cream of the Crop Leaders (CCL) have conducted studies that highlight the necessity of programs that revolve around confidence building and public speaking. A study done by North Carolina State University showed improved academic performance, courage to voice opinions and influence others for good, and empowerment to overcome fear of public speaking (McCollum, 2021). Unfortunately, it is estimated that 24.6 million children in the United States are unable to attend an after-school program, a drastic increase since 2004 at about 60% (After

School Alliance, 2021). In fact, 75% of American adults fear public speaking, which ranks ahead of fear of death, spiders and heights (Fischlschweiger, 2018).

The intern's role in this project is to be the youth leader and facilitator in this workshop. Growing Greatness's (GG) goal is to generate durable leadership and advocacy through developing an after school workshop for the youth and families of Watsonville and counties nearby. This workshop will help implement leadership skills for future leaders to engage effectively in the public and personal relationships to provide materials and provide activities that engage with the participants of the community with their needs.

Expected Outcomes & Assessment Plan

The expected outcomes are all participants will fill out surveys that show the increased sense of self confidence developed during the program. GG will develop at least four new leaders on the leadership team who have participated in two workshops and have taken leadership roles in our communities. At least 75% of the 12 youth participants in Watsonville will attend workshop sessions to obtain confidence building and public speaking skills about advocacy. Four new participants to Growing Greatness will be recruited through community events held and collaborate with current programs.

An assessment survey will be conducted to determine the usefulness of the workshop while taking the workshop in person or online. This survey will measure each participant's experience with attending a workshop in-person when the workshop is part of the regular curriculum. It will also assess the participants' follow up with participants after the workshop to assess the long-term impact of the workshop on their confidence building and public speaking skills. This was done through surveys and one-on-one interviews, and helped Growing Greatness to assess the sustainability and effectiveness of the workshop in the long-term.

Implementation Process

The Project Implementation Plan for this workshop included a workshop about Speaking to Inspire for Action. To ensure its success, the workshop was about speaking to inspire them for action by speaking with passion, empathy and purpose. Intern developed and produced a video using Growing Greatness's "Do Kit" curriculum workbook. It also provided materials and activities that engage with the participants of the community to help with their needs. This also gave the youth an outlet to figure out what they are truly passionate about and new skills they can implement throughout their adult lives. The method we used to make this workshop effective was by making it a focus group based activity where at the end of the session we debriefed to see what the participants could share and reflect on. First, the intern identified the topic and objectives of the workshop, as well as the target audience. The intern also assisted in research and logistics. Next, the team reached out to partners and stakeholders to invite them to participate and contribute to the workshop. The partners included subject matter and facilitators. Growing Greatness (GG) worked closely with them to ensure that the workshop content was relevant, informative, and engaging.

The participants were then invited to register for the workshop. The team developed a registration process and handled all the logistics related to participant communication, and registration. The team also developed an evaluation process to measure the effectiveness of the workshop. During the workshop, the intern led the session, and provided support for logistics and participant needs. The intern was responsible for documenting the workshop and producing a report from the data collected from the pre-post survey.

After the workshop, the team analyzed the evaluation results and used them to make improvements for future workshops. Overall, the implementation process for this workshop was

a collaborative effort that involved participants. The team worked closely together to ensure that the workshop was successful and achieved its objectives.

Project Results

The actual outcome of the workshop did not meet the expected outcome. The expected outcome was that at least 75% of the 12 youth participants in Watsonville would attend workshop sessions to obtain confidence building and public speaking skills. However, during the session the intern hosted, only four participants were present. Although the project did not have the participants we intended, the four participants enjoyed the workshop and provided feedback on how they felt.

While this is a significant difference from the expected outcome, it's important to consider the factors that may have contributed to this outcome. For example, it's possible that the workshop was not promoted effectively to the target audience, or that the timing of the workshop was not convenient for the participants. Additionally, there may have been lingering effects from the weather conditions that Watsonville suffered during the heavy storm and flooding they encountered. Originally we had a workshop scheduled for earlier March that had to be canceled due to weather.

To fully assess the impact of the workshop, it's important to collect feedback from the participants who did attend. The intern implemented a pre-post survey question for the participants. By collecting this feedback, Growing Greatness can gain a better understanding of the impact of the workshop and make improvements for future sessions.

Figure 1: When respondents were asked they felt comfortable speaking to an audience, 75% rated it six or higher on a scale 1-10.

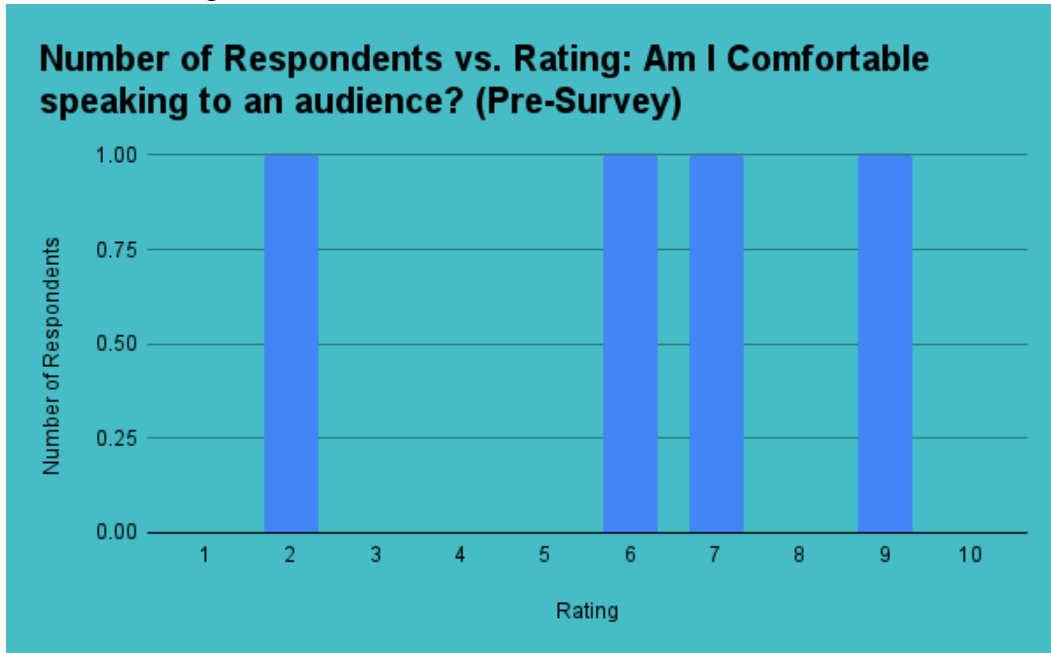


Figure 2: Respondents were asked again how they felt about speaking to an audience, all participants rated it six or higher on a scale 1-10.

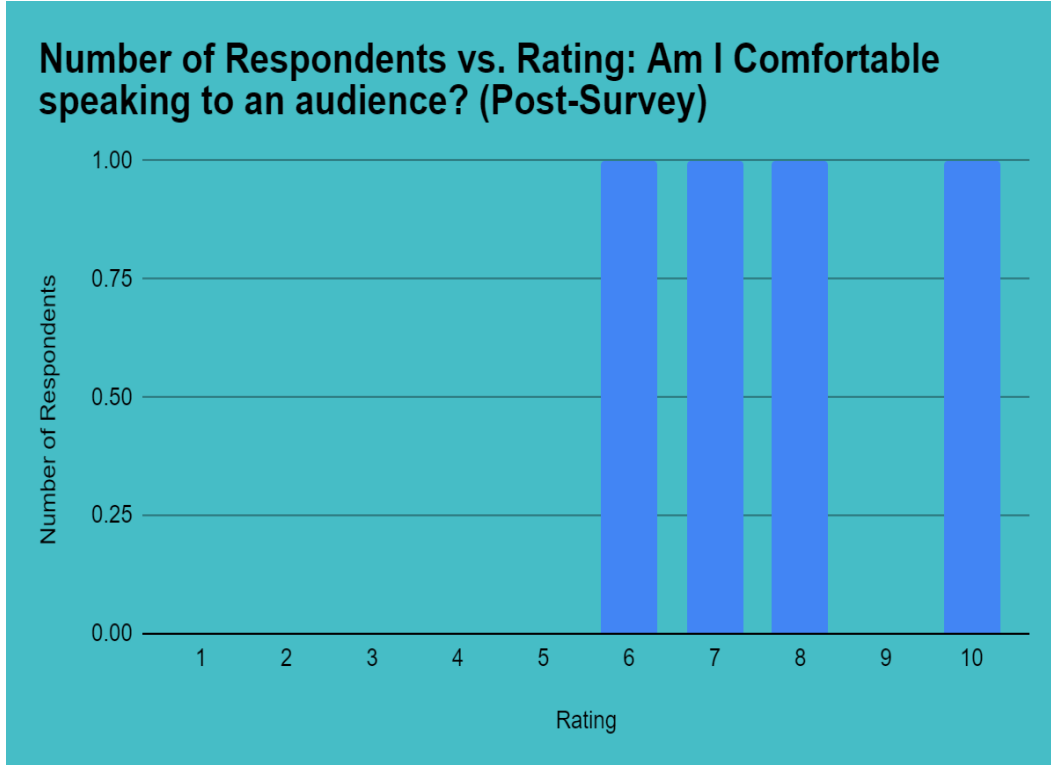


Figure 3: When respondents were asked if they saw themselves as a change maker or leader, 50% rated it five or lower on a scale 1-10.



Figure 3: Respondents revisited the question, 25% rated it six and the other 75% rated themselves an eight from a scale 1-10.

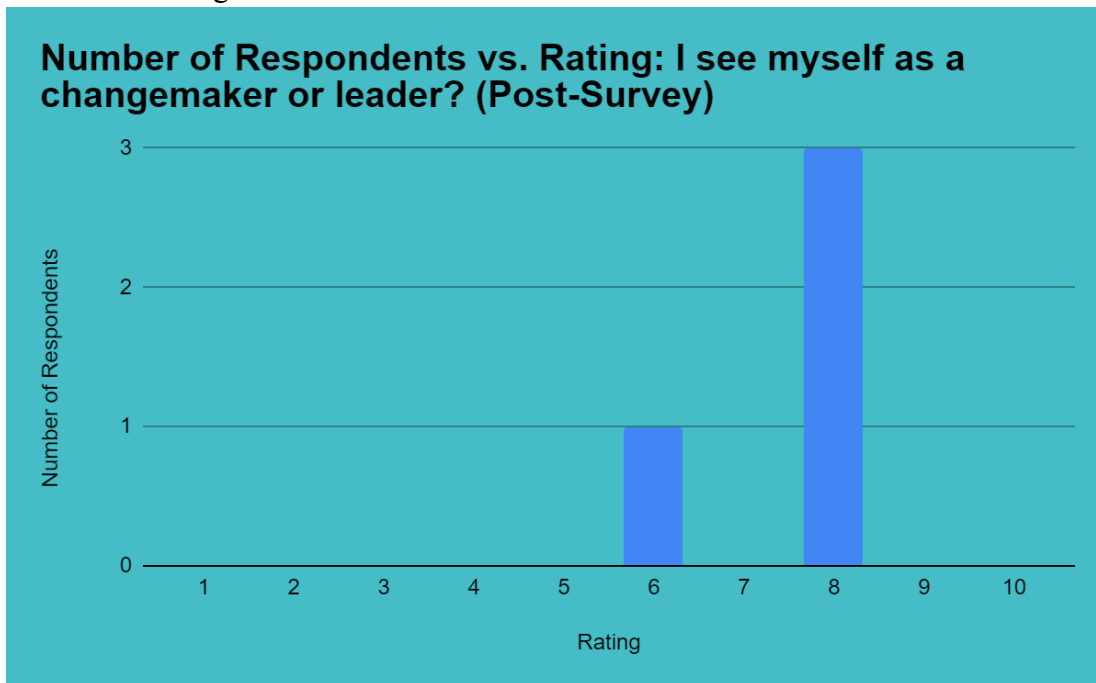


Figure 4: Respondents were asked if they found the workshop helpful, all four participants said “yes.”



Conclusion & Recommendations

The research and implementation of this capstone project has shown the benefits of these types of workshops. The focus group approach has proven to be effective in engaging young people and providing them with the tools and space they need to communicate effectively and advocate for change. Overall, the project has been successful in achieving its intended outcomes. Participants were able to feel stronger about their abilities. There are still some challenges that need to be addressed to ensure the sustainability of the implementation of the workshop. To address these challenges, I recommend establishing more partnerships with local and youth organizations to increase access to leadership programs to the underserved youth in Watsonville and to provide follow-up support for the youth after this workshop to ensure they continue to develop and improve their skills. By implementing these recommendations, the agency can ensure that the impact of the workshop continues to be felt in the community and that the

underserved youth in Watsonville access to leadership programs become effective communicators and advocates for their communities.

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Appendix A

Scope of Work

Task	Timeline	Parties Involved	Materials/ Services Needed	Completed Product
Schedule youth workshops at organization's physical site	March 9, 2023 & March 16, 2023	Participants, mentor, intern	Communication to school Via email, availability from all parties	Confirmed date & time for workshop with the youth
Quantitative: Prepare sign in sheet for attending participants	Scheduled workshops: March 9, 2023 & March 16, 2023	Intern	Post workshop surveys, pens, envelop	Clipboard with sign in sheet are given to participants and completed surveys are collected
Collect and report the results of the success of the program at staff meetings.	End of March: after workshops have been conducted	Intern & Mentor	Pre and post participant surveys	Surveys will be created on Google forms and printed
Write google survey questions	March 10, 2023	Intern	Print out of questions & a computer on site if participants prefer digital access of questions	Measurable results for our analysis
Review post participant surveys in order to reflect how participants feel.	After the workshops	Intern	Am I comfortable speaking to an audience? 1-10	Feedback from participants that will be used to assess workshop effectiveness
Conduct Research to learn best	January 31, 2023	Mentor Intern	The leaders will be informed with past,	Research will educate the leaders about

practices of advocacy programs for youth residents.			current, and future policies	implemented programs and policies accessible to residents
Write script for video	March 10, 2023	Intern Mentor Local organizations	Tripod Video editing software Camera	Video to use at the workshop
Weekly meetings with mentor	Every Wednesday	Mentor	Google meets, facetime, text, Phone calls	Clear understanding of what is needed