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5-2023

Project Emerald : Youth and their ability to shine

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2/13/23

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Abstract

A lack of leadership opportunities available to at-risk youth has caused an increased
likelihood of struggles in school, higher rates of juvenile delinquency & a lack of job readiness
skills. Growing Greatness is a non-profit organization located in Watsonville, California that
teaches leadership and health advocacy workshops for youth who attend local middle schools
and high schools. The purpose of this project was to implement a new online confidence building
workshop. One of the activities was titled, "Group Agreements" and it shed light on a way to
build on confidence, by creating a safe space that can provide a break from things such as
judgment & unsolicited opinions. The results were measured by a pre-survey & a post-survey.
The post-survey indicated a huge difference in the answers received after the workshop was
completed, with all three participants confirming an increase within their individual personal
strengths & overall confidence.

Keywords : Leadership, Youth, Confidence, Self-esteem, Development

Report Content

I. Agency and communities served

The agency I am currently interning at is Growing Greatness. The mission of this agency is to
develop skills and provide ways for community members & youth to engage in and lead
community change, revitalization, social justice, experiential educational experiences, and policy
making processes. The community served is Watsonville and they have a population of 52,067
residents, 7,417 of them being youth which is the main population served. The services that
Growing Greatness provides are on site workshops that teach youth skills as well as capacity

building in order to facilitate community change. Additionally, Growing Greatness supports other non profit organizations like Community Bike Collective and Bike Santa Cruz County who educate the public in regards to cyclist and pedestrian safety and they occasionally provide the public with free helmets as well as reflectors.

II. Problem Model

Contributing Factors	Problem	Consequences
The youth voice is not valued within society	A lack of leadership opportunities for youth	Youth aren't receiving the sufficient job readiness skills to enter the workforce
Low Confidence for the youth		Lack of success in school (Low graduation rates)
Lack of funding and programming		Higher Juvenile Crime rates

A. Identify a social problem

The social problem that will be addressed is the lack of leadership opportunities available to the youth. Youth leadership is of extreme importance because it supports youth within developing the ability to analyze their own weaknesses, but most importantly strengths. Additionally, youth leadership aids youth in setting personal and professional goals, as well as having the self esteem, motivation, confidence and abilities to see them through.

The lack of leadership opportunities for youth in many communities has come with numerous detrimental effects such as youth not receiving the sufficient job readiness skills to enter the workforce, which has led to high youth unemployment. Additionally, the lack of leadership opportunities has caused a downward spiral within the success of many young students, causing a decline in graduation rates and an incline in juvenile delinquency; since, they are investing their time on felonious activities instead of on school subjects.

B. Identify contributing factors

The youth voice is not valued

In our current day, the youth represent a significant proportion of the population within our communities, yet they are oftentime left out of leadership discussions at the community level. This may be due to the fact that youth are not given the same opportunities as someone older because they are seen as inferior and their input is rarely considered or taken seriously. One article mentions "It is essential for adults and community leaders to recognize that giving young people the opportunity to express themselves, and further, respecting their thoughts and ideas, is valuable for individual and social youth development. Youth should be involved in the decisions and discussions that will shape their future" (Higgs, 2021).

Additionally, the youth are the greatest engines of change within our communities and allowing them to be part of decision making processes will only help them flourish. This will also create a positive impact in society since allowing youth in the decision and planning process will help create more responsive and successful services that are specifically designed for youth, by the youth. Furthermore, it will require community leaders to think critically in regards to what needs to be implemented or changed in order to provide the best support to the youth. One article mentions "Giving young people a voice in school or a program empowers them and makes them

feel like they belong, they are valued, and their contributions matter. These competency feelings also help youth fully engage and develop team-building and leadership skills" (Perry, 2017). It is evident that making a change within valuing the youth voice will only drive positive change within society and help create a huge support system where the younger generations feel valued and appreciated.

Lack of funding and programming

A lack of funding and programming is a barrier that has plagued many communities for some time, especially low income ones. This issue has caused a lack of opportunity for millions of young adults in the way that programs and agencies that provide support are lacking stable and reliable financial streams to support them and keep them up and running. The lack of funding creates a huge barrier since oftentimes parents cannot afford to pay for leadership program services, and their children are left without any of these support systems. One article mentions "Even with the billions of dollars infused into afterschool programming, the demand far outweighs the supply, advocates say. And the kids and families who suffer the most, as a result, are those from lower-income homes" (Rinker, 2021). The lack of funding in many communities is extremely concerning since many programs create a safe space for youth where they can develop their emotional and leadership skills, without this everyone is placed in a dire situation.

Additionally, leadership programs help youth stay away from delinquent activities in the time they have free after school. They are supported by caring mentors and adults but without the funds, programs serving disadvantaged youth will continue to diminish. One database article mentions "More than half of programs (57 percent) report that their budget is inadequate to meet community needs, an increase of nearly 10 points since 2009" (Afterschool Alliance, 2012). This

has not only caused a negative effect on afterschool programs but also within communities causing them to struggle with high unemployment rates. It is evident there is a high demand for funding in order to meet community needs and without this funding, there is a cut back on field trips, staff positions and hours, as well as a cut back on leadership workshops that are offered.

Low confidence for youth

Self confidence is an attitude that reflects a belief in your own skills and abilities, it also signifies that you trust and accept your strengths and weaknesses but all in all, still have a positive view of yourself. It is evident that self confidence plays a critical role within one's life, and among children and adolescents, it is a central concept related to academic achievement, social functioning, and psychopathology. Studies indicated that "children with low self-esteem were less successful at schools, less accepted by their peers, and were linked with childhood psychopathology, including anxiety, depression, and eating disorders. Self-esteem is a primary force that prevents maladaptive adolescent behavior like drug abuse and engagement in damaging peer relationships" (Wong, Lau, Lee, 2012). Low confidence may cause youth to feel nervous and anxious in regards to accepting roles within leadership opportunities which in the end turn out to be detrimental.

It is of great importance to recognize that without confidence there is no leadership, and this is true because what you don't have within yourself you cannot offer to others. That is why it is essential to build on youth's confidence in order to bring out their strengths. Furthermore, self confidence has the power to set the stage for one's entire life. One study mentions "According to a questionnaire given to 90,000 students in grades 7-12, self-esteem helps teens deal with emotional stress. In addition, having good self-esteem correlates with success later in life, mainly because good grades and confidence can allow a teen to start out with scholarships and other

opportunities (Merced Union High School District. (n.d.). 2023) All in all, it is clear that youth having high confidence is directly correlated to their success in life, which is why it is essential to provide the necessary support systems to build on it.

C. Identify consequences

Lack Of Success In School

A lack of leadership opportunities for the youth can lead to many negative outcomes such as a lack of success in school which contributes to low graduation rates. Many students, oftentimes from low-income communities, fail to make the connection between school and success in life which causes a lack of interest and motivation within their studies and this leads them on a never-ending road where they struggle with no direction or motivation towards wanting to succeed. Additionally, if they come from families where parents have a low educational attainment they are less likely to receive the support they need in order to pursue a higher education or skill sets in order to climb up the workforce ladder. That is where leadership programs come into play, and without their direction or mentorship, many youth will continue to stay oppressed within their lack of success in school and life.

Higher Juvenile Crime Rates

Another consequence of a lack of leadership opportunities for the youth is higher juvenile crime rates. This is due to the fact that the youth is not provided with the opportunities to develop positive behaviors or skill sets. This lack of opportunity has been directly linked to high daytime burglary rates and vandalism which puts the youth at high risk of becoming delinquent and ending up within the prison system. A recent study found that "27 percent of eighth graders spent 2 or more hours alone after school and that low-income youth were more likely than others

to be home alone for 3 or more hours. It is not surprising, therefore, that most violent crimes committed by juveniles take place at the close of the school day, when fewer opportunities for constructive activities are available"(**Office of Justice Programs, 2022).** Leadership opportunities are the foundation of efforts that can prevent violence and youth crime, which is why it is crucial to implement them within our communities so they can nurture the youth and strengthen their skill sets.

Lack Of Job Readiness Skills

Lastly, another consequence of a lack of leadership opportunities is a lack of job readiness skills which largely contributes to the rates of youth unemployment rising. This is a clear consequence of nonprofit organizations' inability to give support to youth due to local government budget shortfalls, declining foundation funds, and a dip in individual charitable giving. Non-profit organizations are largely responsible for helping youth acquire job readiness skill sets that will eventually aid them in acquiring a job. One article mentions that "young people across the world aren't able to identify or acquire the skills needed for today's job market, contributing to a global skills gap and exacerbating youth unemployment"(UNICEF, 2021). All in all, it is evident that there is a disconnect between youth and education and leadership systems.

III. Project description and justification

A. **Provide a Working Title: <u>Project Emerald: Youth and their ability to shine</u>**

B. **Project Description**:

For the capstone project two interns are going to collaborate to implement a new online workshop focused on confidence building and public speaking. I will be focusing on the confidence building portion of the program and will be responsible for introducing and

explaining preparation/organization, confident body language, positive mental imagery, pausing and managing nerves.

C. Project Justification

The primary goal of this project is to help the youth build on their confidence and public speaking skills so that they can in that way develop the ability to recognize the strengths within themselves. By implementing this project, the agency expects to accomplish positive life skills for the youth that will continue to benefit them as they carry into adulthood.

The issue that will be addressed is a lack of leadership opportunities for the youth and one contributing factor that is being addressed would be the low confidence issue that many youth experience. The project will address this by building on the youth's self esteem through confidence building tactics and they will be able to expand their built confidence on exercises involving public speaking to gain a further understanding of their strengths and confidence. Additionally, it has been found that "leadership experience increased students' willingness to "lead by example" and contribute first; second-ranked candidates were approximately 50% more likely to contribute first when assigned to leadership positions" (Anderson, Lu, 2017)

The proposed project meets best practice standards because instead of an in person workshop it is online. We got the idea to design it online after what occurred with COVID-19 and the stay at home orders. Additionally, we agreed that an online workshop would be of best convenience since the youth would be able to access and complete the exercises at any given time of the day.

The benefits that will result from this project are many, the skill development that we will be implementing has the potential to prepare youth to facilitate meetings, make effective

presentations, start conversations and work in a team setting where they are confident enough to give their input without fear.

Project Implementation Plan

There will be a workshop that will consist of two sessions in total with an expected twelve participants who are middle school aged boys and girls from Ceiba Middle School. The participants will meet in order to discuss the topics of confidence building and public speaking skills. I will mainly focus on carrying out the confidence building portion of the workshop while Jonathan Portillo the other intern will carry out the public speaking skills portion of the workshop. Additionally, we will administer a pre-survey and post-survey in order to confirm whether participants experienced an increased level of confidence after the workshop. The goal of this project is to increase the youth's confidence which will help build on strong public speaking skills in order to create a positive environment where they may feel inclined enough to advocate for themselves as well as for programs such as Growing Greatness that help create workshops like these which aid in creating a net of support, helping youth build on important skill sets that will greatly impact their future such as when they are applying for jobs.

Expected Outcomes & Assessment Plan

There are an expected 12 participants. We expect 50% of the participants to have an increased knowledge of confidence building and public speaking skills.

In regards to the assessment plan for the project we expect the attendance records to be good, given the fact that it will only consist of two sessions so having someone be absent will not be likely. The post-surveys will help greatly in addressing whether this workshop was successful within confidence building and increased knowledge in public speaking skills.

Implementation process

Within the implementation process the project was scheduled as an in person workshop with the assistance of the executive director on March 9th, 2022 at the organization's physical site located in Watsonville Ca. When the participants first arrived we had them write down their names on a sign in sheet. After this, we handed out three surveys with a total of five questions that would be answered prior to the workshop, so that we could in that way pinpoint any improvements in confidence after the online workshop was completed.

The confidence workshop itself was created using Growing Greatness's "Do Kit" curriculum workbook and the workshop consisted of two activities. The first one was a "group agreements" video activity and it expanded on the idea of building confidence by creating a safe space that in turn can provide a break from judgment, unsolicited opinions, and having to explain yourself. We can create a safe space by creating group agreements that everyone is committed to and accountable for. Rules are different from agreements because agreements are shared and rules are given.

The second video activity titled "What can we count on you for?" and it expanded on the idea that we all have different strengths and we bring those strengths to our spaces, these strengths can be shared intentionally and will build confidence. Within this activity each participant shared one strength that would be brought to the group which helps create a sense of accountability and responsibility for ourselves, our group, and our work.

Results

Results were gathered from the pre-survey which was completed before the video workshop was presented as well from the post-survey which was completed once the workshop had concluded. The pre-survey was completed by three middle school participants and it had a

total of 5 questions. Question 1.) I am comfortable speaking to an audience. 2.) I know how to craft a speech. 3.) I see myself as a changemaker or leader. 4.) How has this workshop helped you to better inspire others to take action? 5.) What did you learn from this workshop?. The first three questions were answered using a linear scale of 1-10. We had expected 12 participants from Ceiba middle school but in the end, only had three attendees due to the youth being involved in other activities that were out of our control.

Results from the pre-survey indicated that the three participants were lacking confidence in regards to their individual personal strengths. In the end, the post-survey results turned out to be extremely successful and we measured this by comparing the pre workshop survey answers and the post survey workshop answers. There was a huge difference in the answers received after the workshop was completed, with all three of the participants confirming an increase within their individual personal strengths and overall confidence.

One recommendation would be to research and find more skill sets that can be potentially built on. This has the potential to create a vast amount of workshops that the youth can easily access and complete online. All in all, helping the youth build on their already existing strengths that will be utilized even as they carry into adulthood.

Pre-survey participant responses
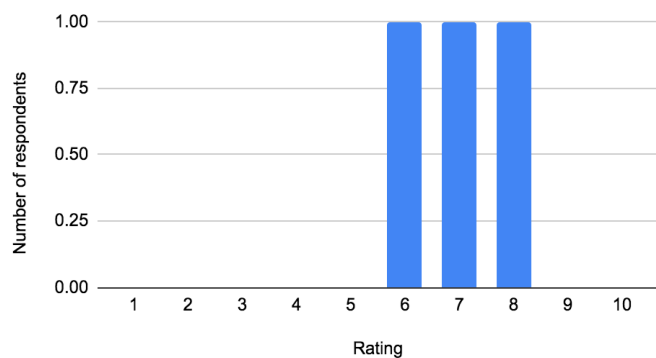
Post-survey participant responses
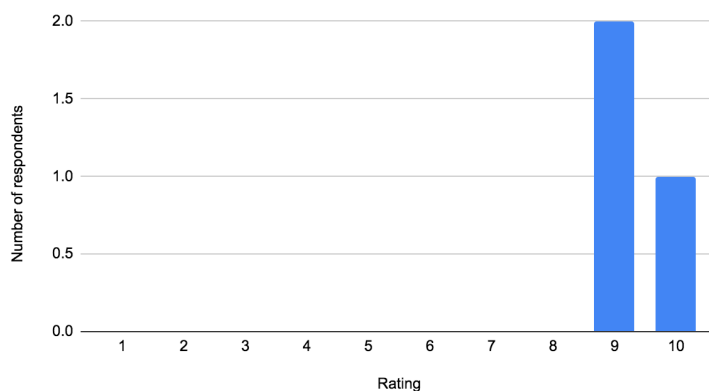
Conclusions and Recommendations

The research reflects a high demand for more public speaking and confidence building skill workshops for the youth in Watsonville, Ca. An online workshop would greatly benefit students since a large majority of them do not have dependable transportation, many of them with parents who are at work and cannot afford to leave. This online workshop would allow students to access and complete the material at their own pace and at their own time as long as they are connected to wifi, in order to access the portal.

My recommendations for the agency based on my findings is to build on more online workshops with different topics or objectives since there is a great possibility for expansion within this area that could greatly benefit the youth. One thing that could be done differently in order to improve the project would be an investment in more video technology in order to improve the quality and sound of the videos.

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Appendix A

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, envelope	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
Review post participant surveys in order to reflect on knowledge and skills gained.	After the workshops	Intern	I feel better about myself: A. Strongly agree B. Agree C. Neutral D. Disagree E. Strongly Disagree	Feedback from participants that will be used to assess workshop effectiveness
Conduct Research to learn best practices of advocacy programs for youth residents.	January 31, 2023	Mentor Intern	The leaders will be informed with past, current, and future policies	Research will educate the leaders about implemented programs and policies accessible to residents
Attend city events in order to connect with other local organizations	April 15, 2023	Intern Mentor Local organizations	Workshop pre and post surveys Transportation Registration Forms	Collect data from other organizations working towards the same social issue & compare analysis