

**Youth Perceptions of Change Agent Productions:  
Experiences and Outcomes**

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## **Introduction**

### **Change Agent Productions**

Change Agent Productions (CAP) is a social enterprise of the YMCA of Greater Long Beach Downtown Community Development. It began operations in October, 2007 with a grant from the ZeroDivide Foundation. When data were collected for this report in August 2009, CAP was operating with four Digital Media Artists and one Art Director who worked alongside 52 urban high school or college age youth who had graduated from the YMCA Youth Institute over the past two years. CAP was specifically designed to provide challenging career development opportunities for low-income, culturally-diverse high school and college-age youth. These youth are provided paid, freelancing opportunities to work on various assignments. Internship opportunities for the youth were designed to build on the job skills training they received while in the Youth Institute and to help them more fully develop their business, academic, technical, and social skills.

CAP contracts have usually come from community-based and non-profit organizations. It provides a wide-range of media services including video (documentaries, advertisements, public service announcements), graphics (corporate branding, brochures, professional reports, magazines), web (construction, layout, domain registration), audio-visual (on-site tech set-up and support, presentation equipment), and training (movie-making, graphic design, media lab consultation).

### **CAP Interns**

Graduates from the YMCA Youth Institute may apply for internships with CAP by filling out an application and survey, providing their grades and completing an interview. This process helps the youth to develop skills in obtaining a job. In the application, youth are asked to list their recent Youth Institute involvement, current extracurricular activities, number of hours per week they could work, the types of software and equipment they were most proficient with, and,

the technological skills they would like to further develop. In addition, they are asked about possible time obstacles, their potential career fields, and what they personally hoped to accomplish through internship participation. The purpose of this study was to examine their motivation, experiences, and the accomplishments that they thought they had made through their involvement with CAP.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

All eligible CAP interns (interns who had worked on at least one CAP job in the past year) were invited to participate in the focus groups. CAP staff helped the researchers by coordinating with the CAP interns to arrange for times when the focus groups were to meet. Out of the 52 eligible CAP interns, 23 ( 44%) participated in the study.

As shown in Table 1, slightly more than half (52%) of the participants were male. Their ages ranged from 15 to 18 years (Mean = 16.26, SD = 1.10). The majority (43.5%) were Latino followed by those who identified themselves as Asian-American/Pacific Islander (21.5%), African-American (17%), Mixed/Bi-Racial (13%), and European-American (4.5%).

Table 1  
Change Agent Productions Focus Group Sample Demographics  
N = 23

	Percent	Frequency
Gender		
Male	52%	12
Female	48%	11
Ethnicity		
Latino	43.5%	10
Asian-American/Pacific Islander	21.5%	5
Mixed/Bi-Racial	13%	3
African-American	17%	4
European-American	4.5%	1
Age		
15	30%	7
16	30%	7
17	22%	5
18	18%	4

### Materials and Procedure

Researchers from the California State University Long Beach, Department of Social Work designed the study and constructed the interview guide in consultation with CAP staff. An Associate Professor of Social Work from California State University, Long Beach conducted the focus groups. A total of four focus groups were conducted in August, 2009, at the YMCA Community Development Branch. The focus group sessions lasted between 2 and 2 ¼ hours. Between five to seven youth participated in each focus group.

Open-ended questions were used to solicit information from the youth and to ensure that the same issues were explored in all the focus groups. The interview guide included the following questions:

1. What made you interested in joining Change Agent Productions in the beginning?
2. Describe how Change Agent Productions has assisted you with your life.
3. What types of jobs did you work on for Change Agent Productions?
4. What did you do to get the job?
5. What technical skills did you develop?
6. What did you learn about working with others?
7. How has Change Agent Productions helped you to develop as a human being?
8. How might your experiences help you with your future goals?
9. What suggestions would you make to staff to make your experiences better?
10. What kind of careers do you hope to pursue in the future?
11. For those who have been with Change Agent Productions for more than a year, in the last year what changes have you seen in (a) yourselves, and (b) Change Agent Productions?

### **Analysis**

All the focus group sessions were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim. A focus group approach was adopted since it allowed for an in-depth scrutiny of the youths' experiences and views (Kitzinger, 1995; Morgan, 1998). This approach also allowed for the efficient yet exhaustive collection of data regarding the youths' experiences with CAP, their subjective perceptions of these experiences, and how their lives have been impacted by these experiences. This method also proved to be ideal as it provided a naturalistic context for data collection (Weinberger, et al., 1998).

The data collected were analyzed using a modified grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). As the themes emerged, the researcher repeatedly returned to the data to ensure that they adequately explained the wide diversity of experiences of all the youth. Data obtained from all four focus groups were analyzed and used for this report.

## **Findings**

The themes that were identified corresponded primarily to the questions that were asked during the focus groups. The identified themes related to the following:

- (1) Youth interest in CAP in the beginning,
- (2) Getting a job assignment,
- (3) Job types and technical skills acquired,
- (4) Work skills acquired,
- (5) Academic support and ambition,
- (6) Finding support and nurturance,
- (7) Changes during the past year, and
- (8) Suggestions from the youth.

### **Youth Interest in CAP at the Beginning**

All the youth who were interviewed expressed unanimously that their involvement with CAP has been immensely satisfying, beneficial, and enriching. Most reported that they had felt excited about joining CAP from the beginning. These youth said that they were drawn to CAP because it provided them with the opportunity to utilize their skills purposefully and productively in a field that they were interested in. The following are some of the comments that the youth made.

I love technology; it's just something fun. I think it's a tool for the future. They asked me if I wanted to do a job and I didn't refuse because film making is something I love to do.

It applies to my major. I was able to learn more skills and more about my future career. I not only learned the tools of the program, but also talked to people and companies about designing and advertising.

What made me interested was getting the opportunity to work with different people; expand my knowledge base, work for clients. It helped me develop my skills to full potential.

Several of the youth also mentioned that they were attracted to CAP at the beginning because they were interested in teaching others about the technology skills they had acquired.

Two of the youth indicated

The reason I joined CAP was so I could teach people what I learned; Photoshop, Illustrator, iMovie, how to use a camera.

I wanted to be able to share what I learned. I like teaching others.

In addition, all the youth said that, prior to becoming interns, their peers who were CAP interns talked to them about CAP and that this had inspired them to apply. They were excited to hear that CAP staff was very supportive of interns, the work environment was non-threatening, and that the interns enjoyed their work. The following are what some of the youth said.

I joined Change Agent because of the atmosphere. You hear them work but you also hear them laughing and having fun. How do they accomplish that? Maybe I should try.

People who had worked for CAP would tell me how fun it was; how while working they would be enjoying themselves. And, the money thing, that's just a bonus to everything.

CAP provided an environment that made me feel safe. It made me feel like I could accomplish something, and it helped me to really get to know others. I could learn about work and about life.

### **Getting a Job Assignment**

When asked what they did to get an internship assignment, most of the youth mentioned that they had to apply to be selected for their first assignment. Some youth added that they made sure that CAP staff knew about their capabilities. The following are what some of the youth said.

I actually applied like everybody else and they called me up for the job. From then on they knew that I had the skill set for that particular job. That's how I became involved.

They have a list outside in the hallway which describes what the available job is. You sign up for it and there is a possibility that they will choose you. That's how I got most of my assignments.

I just showcased my skills and I asked [staff] if they had any jobs for me. I approached them first and stepped back. When the opportunity came up and

the necessary skills I had were needed, they called me and asked me if I could help.

Some of the youth reported that CAP staff would sometimes approach them individually to recruit them for a project. This was possible since staff constantly interacted with the youth and had access to their application material. Staff was also acquainted with their skills, their availability, and interests.

When I was in middle school [a staff person] knew I was into arts so he asked me if I would like to work for CAP and have job training.

[Staff] knows I'm interested in learning so when it's a performance job, they ask me, "Oh, this would be good for you. You should come to it."

Most of the youth, however, mentioned that they were assigned jobs based on their abilities and the skills. The following are what some of the youth reported.

Getting a job is competitive because everybody wants to go on trips. So it depends on the technology that they want; they picked me based on it.

I'm a person who speaks his mind, so if it's a training that has to deal with talking to people, sometimes I get chosen.

They recognize that I have talent for animation and coding which not many of the other interns here have. It's one of the reasons why I get called on repeatedly to do projects.

The youth also pointed out that CAP staff tried to provide all the youth with at least some internship opportunities.

They get everybody. They don't stay with just the same people.

Sometimes they'll find a person that is quiet so they can teach her how to speak to an audience.

Sometimes they pick people who do not have those qualities. They want to give new people a chance.

In addition, all the youth reported that it was essential for them to obtain good grades at school to be hired for a job with CAP. This was a prerequisite especially since some projects required that the youth travel and sometimes for several days. One youth explained

During the school year a lot of the jobs involve being out of town and being out of school for a certain amount of time. If you want to go on a job they have to make sure that you are doing well in school and that you can afford missing those four, three, maybe two days, or maybe even just one day of school. Some people can't afford to do that because they are failing their grades and Change Agent doesn't want that.

## **Job Types and Technical Skills Acquired**

### **Job types.**

The majority of the CAP interns reported that they provided media services and worked on various aspects of movie production. Several youth claimed to be technology tutors. These interns taught other youth as well as personnel from other after-school programs about the computer programs and technology they knew. Others worked on photography and graphic design projects while others interned as writers or journalists. These youth produced brochures and magazines. Still others worked on web page construction and maintenance.

### ***Movie production.***

The youth who reported that they provided media services indicated that their assignments ranged from script writing to production, filming, editing and music editing. The following are descriptions of what some of these youth mentioned.

There are different jobs that I've done, but I've done mostly movie jobs because I feel that I am better at editing than anything else. So, mostly I stick to editing because that is where I feel most useful.

I helped do a documentary about the United States and what we as teens felt were not good in America. We did that when we went to Washington. We got a lot of stock footage.

They paid us to film their conference. I was one of those in charge of taking pictures of what was happening. I also helped film a speech made by one of the very important people at the conference. Some of us edited what we took and made it into a movie.

### ***After-school programs.***

The interns who reported that they were technology tutors worked on training projects. They taught the technology they had acquired from the Youth Institute and CAP and provided

consultations about the running of after-school programs. Their audiences were staff from other after-school programs, as well as youth from other programs. Their audiences would sometimes include interested parents, teachers, and school administrators. The following are quotes from some of the youth.

I actually worked for them teaching adults who are running after-school programs. I just help them out and teach them to use the digital camera and how to set up movie editing on the computer.

I taught kids and adults about certain skills, especially at the Charge Summit. That was a great experience.

The first time I went on a job with Change Agent I actually taught teenagers. It was easier because of the age group, but still you needed to know more and know what you were talking about.

The experiences of CAP interns and the tasks they perform are unique. The Youth Institute is equipped with cutting-edge media technology and hence the Youth Institute is a model after-school program. Consequently, many CAP interns had the opportunity to attend after-school conferences as part of their internship. Through workshop sessions and other presentations, they demonstrate their skills and describe their experiences. The following is what some of the youth reported.

They were asking us questions on how to get teenagers into the program. We told them that they needed supporting staff and a comfortable environment.

It's not only teaching people computer skills, it was also about talking to adults about how to keep running a youth center. How to get younger people involved in wanting to come back, and keeping them out of trouble and doing something productive.

All of the people at the workshop didn't know teenagers had the skills or were capable of doing the work we did. They wanted to start stuff similar to what we are doing. They were inspired.

### ***Web design, journalism and graphic art.***

Some youth reported that they helped design and maintain the web pages for CAP and other non-profit organizations. Periodically they would encode promotional videos and pictures

and put them on the Internet. According to the youth:

It's the Long Beach WRAP. We have been helping them with their website.

I've done web sites for the district. Recently we did a project for ZeroDivide that was a flipbook, and we've done animation for an annual report.

Several interns also reported that they were hired to write for magazines which were designed and produced by CAP. A major feature of these magazines was to focus on career development for youth who are in middle- and high-school.

[CAP] asked us to write an article about a job that interests us. It could be a story, a poem, or a graphic illustration explaining the job, and why we like it. It's a way to give teenagers information about that job and what they need to do to succeed. I've also done an article based on an interview of an artist [in the community].

Some of the youth worked on graphic art. The following are quotes from a youth describing how she helped with the layout and design of a magazine and another from a youth who was hired to design logos.

My job was to create layouts for each of the articles that the youth created. I had to come up with a concept for the magazine cover. This made me think more innovatively in terms of giving something that the client wants.

When I first started with CAP, there was this organization, a community involvement program that was starting. I did their logo, and I was able to produce several different logos for them.

### **Technical Skills Acquired**

Although all the youth were taught digital media and other technology prior to joining CAP, the youth reported that they continued to learn additional computer programs and other skills through their association with CAP. All of them, however, expressed that what they valued most about their internship experiences was the ability to utilize the skills they have acquired in real working situations. The following are what some of the youth mentioned.

With CAP you're using what you learned.

You learn little things along the way. You may have to cut a reel and you forget how to. You go ask somebody. In time, you learn different things by applying them.

When I showed the viewers how to angle a camera, how to shoot it, how to edit it, and to layer it, that actually helped me because I know I can do this in a real-life setting.

It has improved my skills. I actually improved on camera techniques and camera usage when I was teaching.

### **Technical resource to family, classmates, and teachers.**

Equipped with the technology they have acquired through their involvement with CAP and the Youth Institute, some of the youth also mentioned that they were able to utilize their skills to the benefit of their family members, classmates and teachers. They were able to teach and provide assistance by imparting their knowledge, especially related to computer programs, to these individuals who were not involved with CAP. The following are some of the youth's comments.

I have four siblings. I teach them how to use the computer so they can present their work and get good grades in school.

I would offer my teacher help in PhotoShop. I would tell her that I would offer my computer skills in exchange of getting extra credit or a higher grade.

When I present my class project, everyone else's presentation usually looks bad. But I don't hide my skills from people. I will teach them how to do it. We're not selfish about everything we learned. If anyone asks, I'll just tell them.

### **Additional Job Skills Acquired**

The youth also reported that they learned a lot about the world of work through their experiences with Change Agent Productions (CAP). In particular, the youth mentioned that they learned about the subtleties of interacting with clients, about working as a team to successfully complete assignments, and about taking on desirable work habits.

## **Interactions with clients.**

### *Public speaking.*

Most of the youth reported that they learned about and became comfortable with public-speaking through their internship experiences. These youth made presentations to groups of adults and youth on issues involving their experiences with CAP and the skills they had acquired. Over time these assignments helped them gain confidence and overcome their anxiety. The following are what some of the youth said.

I had to talk to a roomful of adults. I wasn't much of a person to talk. I was shy, so they taught me how to open up little by little.

I improved my public-speaking skills. I had to step out of my box, express my feelings. CAP really helped me to expand, especially in speaking.

Some of the youth also described how they had to overcome their shyness in order to conduct themselves professionally on a person to person basis. The following are what two of them mentioned.

When we meet these corporate-type people, we are able to talk and communicate with them. They commented that we were really respectful compared to other teenagers.

I was shy at the beginning. As they kept on talking to me, I began to talk more. Now I am the first one to go up to people and say, "Hi, I'm so and so, and what's your name?"

Using their ability to communicate in a professional manner, some of the youth reported that they were able to network with successful professionals in their field of interest at conferences and other work settings. The youths valued these experiences.

I think it bumps me up when I need to get a job. The benefits [of working for CAP] are getting to know people out there in your field in different states. Some of them have given me their business cards so I can call them if I'm looking for a job and even reference them in my resume.

### ***Working with adult clients.***

Most of the youth also reported their internship experiences helped them become comfortable interacting and communicating with adults. They claimed that they had learned to trust themselves even though they are still minors. According to some of the youth:

I remember I had to run a workshop. It was scary because I saw all these adults staring at me. I was scared. At the end, the older people were really surprised and said, "Wow, you have such good teenagers doing this." That's one of the jobs that I've done. I was really amazed and it gave me more confidence in myself.

I learned self-confidence from working for CAP because I have to be confident in my skills to be able to teach people twice my age. You need to trust yourself.

### ***Difficult clients.***

A few of the youth reported that they had encountered difficult clients and had to learn how to deal with these people. The following are opposite approaches which two of the youth claimed to have taken.

I've come across some annoying people while teaching. It's not so fun, but you have to deal with it. You have to talk with them, and hopefully they stop being annoying.

It taught me how to deal with some difficult people. At first I didn't know what to do. I learned to ignore these people, and do what I have to. If you give them attention, that is what they want.

### **Working with other interns.**

#### ***Communication.***

The youth also reported that working together with other interns could, at times, be extremely difficult. Each person had his or her ideas and they would come into conflict with one another. All of the youth indicated that coming together to work on a project as a team could be very complicated. This process could only proceed when there was open and good communication. They had to express their ideas to others and learn to listen in these work settings. The following are what some of the youth said.

To accomplish a task you always have to share your ideas, even if it seems like they will not work. I had to learn to open up to others and not be shy.

If you don't say something the job won't get done. You always have to do something about it.

Be open and express your ideas and feel comfortable. If you are criticized, know how to deal with criticism. You need constructive criticism.

***Developing patience.***

Many youth also mentioned that their work experiences taught them more about patience.

As mentioned, they reported that while working on projects disagreements and unexpected problems arose and hence their patience would be tested. The youth reported that they had to learn to deal with their frustrations, remain focused, and continue working together to complete their assignments. The following are some of their comments.

We do get on each other's nerves, but you just get over it. After all, we do have to help each other. We need each other.

You learn how to work with people even though they have flaws and selfish ways.

You might not get along with everyone, but you have to work on the same project. Just because I don't like you doesn't mean I don't want to work with you.

Working on an assignment, I would sometimes have a big crisis. I'd think "Ah, I can't take it anymore; what should I do?" Staff would say don't lash out, just stay calm, things like this always happen and they build your character. I learned how to deal with problems in the right way.

One youth had the foresight to realize that having to deal with others who disagreed with him would be reflective of what working life would sometimes be like when he became an adult.

It made me realize that I am going to have to deal with people that I don't like. CAP made me more mature, and made me realize that I am going to meet these kinds of people in the real world.

***Developing leadership skills.***

Many youth commented that their experiences working for CAP led them to develop leadership skills. These youth emphasized that they learned to listen more, and became more

skillful in assessing situations and coming up with creative solutions. They also learned to voice their opinions assertively. The following are comments that two of the youth made.

In a group, there is always that one person who is headstrong and people who don't say anything. At a certain point, you have to let go; while at other times you have to tell everybody to push harder. For people who are really quiet, you have to tell them to share their ideas.

Leadership skill is the ability to be in a group and guide the group; take account of the ideas of your group members and then work with all of them. A leader is not always bossing people around. She gets people together, uniting them, and having them work together.

One of the interns described her approach about handling disagreements.

When someone doesn't agree with you, you have to learn how to get through to them instead of being stubborn and wanting to shut that person out.

Another youth described how he would tactfully express himself.

You learn not to be so blunt. Instead of just saying someone's idea is stupid, you learn how to listen and how to take things into account. People could come up with ideas that are so off. I just listened to them and then said, "I like your idea and that would be great if we were doing another kind of project. Maybe if you tweak your idea just a little bit, it will be a perfect fit." You have to be patient.

### *Appreciating diversity.*

Reflecting the diversity of its geographical location, CAP draws interns who are ethnically and racially diverse. The youth reported that their experiences with CAP have made them realize that stereotyping based on gender or ethnicity, though widespread, are unfounded and unfortunate. Their involvement with CAP taught them to appreciate the diversity around them more. All of them insisted that there was no reason not to like or work with someone because of his or her race, ethnicity or gender. In fact, most of the youths mentioned that they would feel awkward if they associated with individuals belonging to a particular race or ethnic group only.

I learned to accept everyone. After going through the Youth Institute and being employed by CAP, I realized that no matter what color, what age, what height, what race, it doesn't really matter.

Working on CAP projects really helped me realize not to stereotype anyone based on race or sex. You need to accept them for who they are.

One intern talked about how he had been reaching out to others.

I am not afraid to go out of my boundaries and out of my box. Stop listening to everything the media says and stereotyping people. Meeting new people is an experience; you shouldn't want to hold yourself back.

### **Learning desirable work habits.**

#### ***Time management.***

Some of the youth mentioned that CAP helped them with time management. Some indicated that they were bad at meeting deadlines in the past and this caused difficulties for them at school and their grades had suffered. They claimed when they worked for CAP it was essential that they met the deadlines imposed on them. They have since continued to incorporate this discipline into other aspects of their lives. The following examples describe how the interns have become aware and consequently become more disciplined with regards to meeting deadlines.

I used to be a big procrastinator and when you are working with Change Agent you can't do that. They have deadlines; you have to make sure you keep them. So that helps me in school because I check myself.

Doing some of the work [for CAP] was very grueling, very long and tedious, but it taught me how to manage my time, as well as finishing everything that I am supposed to do. When I know I have deadlines, I know I'll meet those deadlines.

#### ***Trustworthiness.***

Several of the youth said that their experiences with CAP helped them learn that it was important to be dependable. They became aware and acquired this attribute because they depended on one another to complete their work assignments for CAP. Each intern's input was important. Someone who was slacking off or was absent from work without a reason would

cause delays in the completion of the project and cause difficulties to others. The following are comments from two youth.

You have to be trustworthy. They have to know that they can count on you.

Some of the work is difficult and requires a lot of effort. You have to be committed and dependable and not give up easily.

### ***Being organized.***

Some youth also indicated that they have become more organized. They now store their work material in a systematic way that would eventually enhance their ability to be efficient.

One youth described her experience.

I have become more organized. Instead of having my work everywhere, I now have it so that it is more professional.

Others outlined that they had become more systematic in the way they approach problems.

When you go on these trips, there are some problems on the way. You learn problem solving. You learn how to break things down, and try to find solutions to the problems, so it won't be so hectic.

## **Academic Support and Ambition**

### **Motivation and grades.**

Many of the youth indicated that the grades they received at school had improved because of their involvement with CAP. Some attributed this improvement to them becoming more conscientious about their school work and that they have developed more desirable work habits. Others claimed that using the computer and technical skills that they had acquired helped them to improve on their school assignments. The following are what some of the youth described to account for their improved grades.

There are a lot of people that just go to school and not get their things done. I believe that when you are with CAP that you get your work done and then there's fun. At school you can put that into action.

Well, sometimes in history [class] the teacher lets us make a movie [for our project]. I have actually used the technology and it has gotten me a good grade.

At school you are expected to do well, but there's really nobody there to motivate you. Some people can motivate themselves, but other people need a push, just to realize how much education is important. Here you get that treatment.

Some youth indicated that being able to go on out-of-town trips and not missing out on such opportunities have motivated them to be more diligent about school work. Hence, they received better grades.

I'm usually okay with a C. But there is a couple of the [CAP] staff who would check my grades and say, "How come you've got this C? If you don't get a B, you are not going to go [on a trip for CAP]." So it makes me want to go to class and do more work. I think that it is actually worth getting good grades [to go on a trip for CAP].

#### **Assistance with homework.**

All the youth indicated that staff were very interested in their performance at school and were willing to assist them whenever they were having difficulties with their school work. The following are examples of what some of the youth said about their interactions with staff.

I told [staff] I was struggling with math and he told me, "Just two options; get tutoring or bring the math book and your homework here so I can help you." I took the tutoring because it would be faster and it brought my grade up.

They would proof read all my papers and they were so much better. When you have problems with schoolwork, they will help you out. You can also use their cameras and laptops to help in your homework assignments.

They don't let you take any jobs unless you have the right grades. If you don't have good grades they still want you to come [to the CAP and Youth Institute site] but they want you to come to do your homework and focus on school first.

All the youth also claimed that CAP staff was willing to write letters of recommendation for them. Two youth, who were about to graduate from high school, mentioned that one of the staff persons helped them identify suitable colleges or community colleges. These youth added that the staff person also helped them find information about receiving financial aid.

### **Ambitions and future careers.**

All the youth had no doubts that their involvement with CAP helped them become more aware of their inclinations. For some, knowing themselves better allowed them to envision their future goals. These youth claimed that CAP has started them on the path toward fulfilling their dreams. One youth summed it up with this idea

They expose you to so many things here so you are not drawn to one area. Once you find that specific area that you like, they'll help push you in that direction.

In fact, several youth indicated that their involvement with CAP gave them the chance to explore, learn more about, and eventually identify careers they are interested in pursuing. The following are comments from some of these youth.

Directing is something that I didn't think about much, but working with Change Agent showed me that it was a passion of mine.

Well, my future goal is to become a graphic designer. I enjoy doing what I'm doing at Change Agent.

I want to be a photographer. One of the CAP staff is a photographer and he taught me. This is something I love doing.

They are pushing us further to explore opportunities within our field of interest.

A lot of us here have that passion and that drive to create. Change Agent has given us a hand and with that hand we're able to pick something that is a passion for us.

Some of the youth mentioned that they had no intention of pursuing careers directly related to the jobs they have done for CAP. Nonetheless they thought that their involvement with CAP was beneficial to their career goals. These youth reported

I do mainly web designs. I want to get into computer engineering. At least I get the experience of doing something related.

I'm really thinking about being a lawyer. I like arguing and I want to try to prove my point. CAP really helped me develop confidence and improve my public-speaking skills. I learned how to enunciate my words and not mumble and to prove my point in an orderly manner.

I want to become an architect. A lot of the things are now computer-based and knowing the technology will help me.

I want to become a physical therapist, and to do that you have to work with people. Communication is one of the most important things. Over here we learn about that a lot. I think this will help me in my future goals.

I'm going into nursing and I am good with writing. So they come to me for a lot of the writing projects. I've done an article about nursing for them. I had to look for information and found out things that I did not even know about. This helped me a lot.

Other youth, who were still exploring career options, also thought that their association with CAP was beneficial. They mentioned that CAP has helped them assess their skills and interests, and opened new horizons and possibilities to them.

They help me narrow down the type of jobs I want. With each job I get to see what I have to do and what skills I have to learn.

I was all over the place. They started narrowing it down to what would be beneficial to me and what would help me in the long run.

I think Change Agent has shown me that certain jobs aren't right for me so I can eliminate them.

Some of the older youth reported that they were thinking about attending college. These youth indicated that they had not thought about higher education prior to their involvement with CAP. They claimed that the change resulted because of the mentorship and prompts they received from CAP staff. One youth described it in the following way:

[Staff] is really helpful in trying to find out if we are interested about college. From time to time, he'll stop by and ask what I want to do. Then I share with him my ideas. I think I might go to college and do just that.

Another youth who was planning to attend college the following year thought that his involvement with CAP had been crucial to him being awarded the college scholarship he received.

If it wasn't for the work that I produced here professionally, I don't think I would be able to get the scholarship. Also, getting help and advice from [CAP staff] helped me get the scholarship.

## **Finding Support and Nurturance**

### **Environment.**

All the youth were extremely keen about the supportive and nurturing environment that Change Agent Productions (CAP) provided them. They thought that CAP and the Youth Institute engendered a happy and joyful atmosphere where they could be themselves. The following are some of the quotes from the youth.

In school we are more competitive, more adversarial, whereas here, we are more mellow and relaxed, and we can work with each other more easily.

CAP builds you without breaking you, which is rare. Outside, it's either my way or no way, but here you can believe in them. If they can, they will help you out.

This is a good work environment because they treat everyone equally. We don't go stabbing each other's backs, taking other people's jobs.

All the youth also reported that CAP and the Youth Institute provided them a safe zone; a home away from home and a place where they could come to socialize.

Everyone here is like my family. I trust them and I can talk to them about my problems, and I can cry on their shoulder.

Here you can be who you want to be without being judged or anything like that. That's really cool.

It's not like at school where you have your cliques. Here we get rid of all that stuff. Everybody knows everybody and we at least have a conversation. We're really close here.

### **Friends.**

As expected, all the youth were enthusiastic about the friendships they have established while working for CAP. They indicated that CAP helped them establish meaningful and trusting friendships. These youth reported that while working together on projects, they have gotten to know more about one another. One youth stated that "When we work together, we talk and find out what we have in common, so you make better friends." The following are what some of the youth mentioned about the friendships they have established.

I've gotten so many friends that I trust and have confidence in.

It's a good thing that I have this place. I have these friends that I can talk to just in case I need a little help, a little counseling, anything really.

The friends I've made, I use them as pillars to hold me up when I need that support. You have all these friends and they're going to be there for you.

### **CAP staff.**

All the youth also reported that they were very pleased with CAP staff. A number of the youth said that CAP staff understood them well. The youth always felt supported by CAP staff.

The following are what some of the youth said.

Being around the staff here helped me build character. It is kind of like having a big brother.

Well, I would say I developed self-esteem. They always talk good to you. If you are failing a class, they get on you about that. They tell you, "Come on, you can do it." They never put you down; they always try to bring you back up.

I learned to have more trust in myself ... I remembered when I was working on the magazine, I was saying "Man, I can't do it," and then [the staff person] told me, "Yes, you can. Just do your best. You are creative."

The following is a description by a youth about the assistance he received from CAP staff when he was in despair.

I haven't had my mom since I was about five. There was a day when I came in and just didn't want to do anything. I was pretty depressed, and all of [the staff] took me away from everyone else and sat me down and allowed me to explain everything. They told me that it was not my fault that my mom is in prison, that it's not me that caused anything. They really helped me to accept this part of my life.

Another youth explained that he was grateful to CAP staff for helping him change.

I had serious behavior issues. Before I came here, I was a juvenile delinquent. I got in fights, I took stuff personally, and I ignored what people said. The staff here talked to me and they helped me out emotionally. They told me stuff that made me feel good about myself. So, I calmed down. My anger isn't as intense as it used to be. I owe it to CAP for changing me.

### **Impact on family dynamics.**

The youth reported that their involvement with CAP has also influenced the way they interact with family members. Several of the youth indicated that in the past when they did not know how to deal with their stresses they would lash out at their family members, particularly their parents. These youth commented that because of their association with CAP they have better self-esteem and are more mature and less egocentric now. Thanks to CAP, they are more patient and better able to deal with their stresses. CAP has been a positive influence in their family lives.

Sometimes my mom and I bump heads but, as I learned life skills here, like patience, it has helped me develop that bond and trust that my mom and I had.

My mom and I sometimes get into an argument. But I just start to talk nicely to her and with a calm voice. If it's my fault, I will admit it.

I learned how to shepherd my siblings. I'm more mature now. I help my mom out. I used to have an attitude, be sarcastic. Now I try to refrain from it. I do chores without having to be told.

### **Receiving a stipend.**

Interns also receive a stipend for each job they perform. The youth found this to be an added benefit. This enhanced their self esteem. Some of the youth also reported that they used their stipend constructively.

I needed to pay for registration and a deposit for housing [for college]. I was able to have that money saved up through working for CAP.

You get a stipend, you get paid for that, and that could help in your household.

### **Changes During the Past Year**

#### **In the youth.**

Most of the youth who were involved with CAP for more than a year thought that they continued to develop positively and mature during the past year. They mentioned that they were more independent and had developed self-esteem. The following are what two of the youth said.

I don't think my style has changed that much, just the way I think has changed.

I can be assertive without being aggressive. I do that with the new class. I ask them to clean-up and they oblige. I also say thank you and I don't make them do all the work. I help them out. So, I can balance myself out now. I'm more comfortable with myself and more confident.

These youth also mentioned that their friendships with other interns had strengthened during the past year. Some indicated that during their first year with CAP they were acquainted with one another, and that it was in the second year that their friendships strengthened and they became close to other CAP youth.

Our friendship and bond, I would say are stronger. They're sturdier because we know more about each other. And we know our weaknesses and our strengths. We know when to go to them if we need help or when to be near them when they need help.

All the youth also acknowledged that their job skills had also improved during the past year. According to two of the youth

My filming skills got better. They helped me with that.

I feel that my artistic side shows up more now, my appreciation for music and film. All I can really say is, yeah, I've changed, hopefully for the better.

### **Within CAP.**

All the youth reported that during the past year they thought that there were more CAP jobs and internship positions available. Two of the youth pointed out

There are more projects. I think [CAP] has grown to be more known. They have more clients. Their previous clients want them back and sometimes they refer them to other people.

They are asking a lot more kids to do work. There are more jobs, which is surprising with the economy.

The youth also reported that CAP introduced new computer software technology to them.

According to one youth:

There's a lot more technology than we had last year. We actually got a new program "after effects the visual" and then we learned a lot more about special effects.

In addition, the youth mentioned that CAP had developed a new musical project that involves having a band.

### **Suggestions from the Youth**

All of the youth were extremely pleased with their involvement and experiences with CAP. Most indicated that they enjoyed everything about CAP and had no complaints. One youth succinctly summed up this sentiment.

I don't think they should change anything. The staff have their own personalities, which brings a lot to the table. They have their own abilities in technology. It is a well put-together program.

A few of the youth, however, commented that they would like to learn more computer programs. The following are what two youth mentioned.

I think it would be better if they introduced us to more programs like "InDesign." Maybe they can teach us other programs we don't know.

Staff could give tutorials because they know a lot [of other programs] but are too busy to teach them to each individual youth.

One youth made a suggestion about how to better prepare to embark on work projects.

Right before a job, probably a week in advance, [staff could] teach what they know to help some of the other kids know their niche.

Some of the youth thought the facility that housed CAP and the Youth Institute was cramped. They indicated that a bigger space would be ideal to house the growing number of youths. A few also commented that they would like to have more work opportunities because they enjoyed working for CAP very much.

### **Conclusions**

In 2007, the YMCA Youth Institute received funding from the California Community Technology Foundation to establish Change Agent Productions (CAP), a social enterprise designed to provide paid internships to youth to work on projects such as digital movie making, graphic design, web design, conference AV support, technology set-up and consultation.

Contracts that CAP receives are derived primarily from school districts and non-profit organizations. This social enterprise consists of four digital artists and one art director. They work alongside 52 urban youth, many coming from traditionally underrepresented populations with the intent of teaching corporate skills to the youth.

This report is based on data collected at the end of CAP's second year of operation in August, 2009. The themes identified from the analysis of the data overwhelmingly suggest that the CAP interns found their involvement and experiences with CAP satisfying, beneficial and enriching. In fact, CAP has not only become an essential part of their lives but is an important highlight. CAP has enriched the lives of these youth by providing an outlet for them to explore their potential, discover their interests, learn new skills and technology, and engage in productive work as part of the labor force.

Consequently, the youth have learned many subtleties about employment in real work environments such as filling out job applications and promoting themselves in this endeavor. In conjunction with their internships, the youth learned about public speaking. They also learned to be confident and how to conduct and present themselves professionally, and how to deal with difficult clients. While working with other interns, the youth developed leadership skills. They also learned about patience and the value of open and good communication. The youth also became aware and developed desirable work habits such as time management and responsibility.

In addition, CAP helped the youth uncover their inclinations and enhanced the potential career interests of those who were able to identify their future career paths. Consequently, CAP was able to evoke the sense of excitement within these youth with regards to their future and potential career interest. As a consequence, CAP also helped motivate the youth to excel in their school performance. For some youth, their involvement with CAP has been instrumental in helping them aspire to attain higher education and in particular a college degree.

CAP has been instrumental in providing support for the youth and in creating a congenial environment whereby the youth could establish for themselves a nourishing social support system of peers and also CAP staff. Consequently, these supports have significantly impacted their family and personal lives.

In brief, all the youth expressed unanimous enthusiasm about their involvement with CAP and hoped that opportunities to work for CAP would continue in the future. The youth found that their involvement with CAP was enriching in multiple ways; personally, socially, and professionally. This research finds overwhelming evidence to support the notion that CAP has met all its goals and objectives. In the words of one youth who summarized her experiences with CAP:

People at [CAP] are open-minded so you're freer to do things without being in someone's way. They teach you work ethics, they teach skills. You become a better worker and a better person.

### **Lessons Learned and Recommendation for Social Enterprises**

As evidenced in this report, CAP has met its objective of providing challenging career development opportunities to the youth involved. CAP helped these youth to not only develop technical and business skills, but also assisted with their academic performance, and their social and personal lives. The lessons learned from CAP during its two years of operation may not be pertinent in every aspect to all social enterprise models but several key areas are worth noting.

First, CAP's affiliation with the ongoing after school program, the YMCA Youth Institute, has proven beneficial. CAP's interns are graduates from the Youth Institute. When they come to CAP they already have some of the technical proficiency they need. In addition, the CAP interns have already established some form of working relationship with other interns as well as with staff. These factors provide a significant benefit in terms of recruitment and retention and helps youth when they are working as a team. In effect, the Youth Institute provides a pool of interested youth and prepares the youth to meet the requirements of CAP.

Thus, it may be useful to embed social enterprises designed to serve teens in already existing programs

Second, CAP interns are employed in jobs that require a certain level of technical expertise. The youth are keen and excited about the technology that they have learned. The assignments the interns work on and the final product bear a level of sophistication. Being proficient in the technology used, puts these youth ahead of other youth regarding career-enhancing skills and likely helps attract them to this social enterprise. This suggests that social enterprises that provide youth with higher-level, relevant career skills may be more successful in attracting and retaining youth.

Third, CAP internship opportunities are competitive. The youth are required to apply for internship positions by filling out an application, providing their grades, and completing an interview. In the process, the youth provide information regarding the skills and equipment they are most proficient with. They also provide information about what they hope to accomplish through their internship. Consequently, this process helps the youth develop skills in obtaining a job as well as the skills necessary to retain one. It will be important for social enterprises targeting youth, particularly given the current economic climate, to help interns develop skills in all areas of employment, from beginning to end. Providing support, both motivational and concrete, for youth's academic achievement and school performance is also a critical component for youth-oriented social enterprises.

Fourth, an important theme that emerged from this study was the youth's request for ongoing training and skills development. This corresponds to the youth's original interest in CAP, in that they not only wanted to use the technology they had acquired previously but wanted to develop their skills to their full potential. Thus, CAP and other social enterprise endeavors may want to include ongoing skill development workshops. In addition, it may prove useful as

well as provide “prep” time prior to sending the interns on a job to help them be clear about their job responsibilities and expectations and provide them with an opportunity to practice.

Finally, this study also revealed that the youth were particularly pleased with the supportive environment that CAP and the Youth Institute had established. In this atmosphere, the youth were able to find support from one another and from staff and could be themselves. Their personal lives and academic performance were enhanced. It enabled them to be creative, to be free to discover their talents and inclinations, and set the stage for them to learn new skills and to work. This finding underscores the importance of embedding social enterprises within a comprehensive youth development framework. Dealing with humans, especially with youth as vulnerable as these are, it would be impossible to separate the two issues.

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