

Youth Perceptions of a Technology-Focused Social Enterprise

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Abstract A qualitative approach was used to explore youth's perceptions of their experiences with Change Agent Productions (CAP); a social enterprise designed to provide challenging, positive youth, and career development opportunities for low-income, culturally-diverse high school and college-age youth. Four focus groups were held with youth who had worked at least one job for CAP at the end of the second year of the program. Open-ended questions were used to explore youth job experiences as well as the impact these experiences had on different areas of their lives. Besides helping youth to learn about potential career paths and the subtleties of employment in the real world, outcome themes included improved academic success and higher educational aspirations, more self-confidence, professionalism, leadership skills, better work habits, and improved communication and relationships with both peers and family. Implications for social enterprises focused on youth are discussed.

Keywords Social enterprise · Technology · Low-income youth · Workforce preparation · Program evaluation

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Introduction

Social enterprise is not an exact or well-defined concept in the United States (Young 2001) and definitions of social enterprises vary greatly depending on whom is asked (Dees 2001). Broadly defined, social enterprises are social mission-driven organizations which apply market-based strategies to achieve a social purpose (Hawn et al. 2010). More specifically, Ho and Chan (2010) suggested that the term social enterprise refers to organizations that manage their business with the dual aims of social improvement and economic gain. Social enterprises act as change agents for society. They identify missed opportunities, create new approaches, and find solutions that make a positive impact on vulnerable members of society, while striving to make a profit (Ashoka 2011; Thompson and Doherty 2006).

According to Young (2001), there are at least three distinct types of social enterprises in the United States. These include corporate philanthropies, for-profit businesses that use a portion of their resources for social causes or to promote public good; social-purpose organizations, private organizations devoted to achieving social good; and hybrids which purport to achieve both of these goals, in that, they make a profit and contribute to the greater social good. Regardless of the type of business a social enterprise pursues, the main intent is to further social and environmental goals in a financially sustainable way. In its purest form, social enterprises are non-profits that reinvest the money they make to achieve a social objective (Wharton 2010). The increasing interest in social enterprises can be attributed to several interrelated trends including a growing emphasis in the United States on promoting social goals and social responsibility of both individuals and businesses (Dees 2001). In addition, the economic downturn has forced nonprofit organizations to reduce their dependence on grants and charitable donations while increasing their reliance on revenue earned through their own means (Dees 2001).

Many social enterprises are designed to empower and build the vocational, interpersonal, and business skills of vulnerable populations that have traditionally lacked access to specialized work training or been excluded from the labor market (Mancino and Thomas 2005; Ndemo 2006; Ferguson 2007). Along with job skill development, most social enterprises also recognize the need to provide personal-development supports to those who train and work in their programs (Cooney and Williams-Shanks 2010; Ferguson 2007; Boyle 2010). Ultimately, social enterprises should provide vulnerable populations a gateway into the workforce by providing needed support along with training in vocational/business skills. Social enterprise interventions may be a particularly good fit for youth because participants gain not only job and business skills, but also receive adult mentorship which can help them develop personally and provide opportunities that might not otherwise be unavailable to them (Ferguson 2007).

Benefits of Social Enterprise for Vulnerable Populations

Through social enterprises, many disenfranchised groups, such as low-income, at-risk youth, disabled individuals, older persons, and ex-offenders, can learn new job skills and enhance their employability (Ho and Chan 2010). Ho and Chan (2010)

indicated that a variety of job skills are taught through social enterprises such as retail and wholesale services, domestic care services, catering services, maintenance and repair services, travel and entertainment services, and production services. Homeboy Industries in Los Angeles provides ex-gang members with a supportive environment in which to learn tangible job skills and gain work experience in food service, maintenance, merchandising, press and public relations and silk-screening and embroidery (Boyle 2010). Another social enterprise in Los Angeles provides job training and supportive interventions to youth who are homeless. Participants are taught vocational skills (Photoshop, graphic design) and small business skills (marketing, budgeting, accounting). At the same time, they are provided with adult mentorship, and linkages to medical and mental health services (Ferguson 2007).

Enhancing the skills and marketability of disenfranchised populations has been deemed a critical component of social enterprises, however, there have been relatively few studies that actually document the impact of such programs on the participants (Ferguson and Xie 2007; Ferguson and Islam 2008). An ethnographic study by Ndemo (2006) on faith-based social enterprises in Kenya, revealed that, when first recruited, participants were shy and lacked self-confidence, but, after starting to work, they seemed happier and filled with confidence. Their external demeanor, hairstyles and way of dressing greatly improved, indicating that they had money beyond that needed for their basic expenses. Heeks and Arun (2010) examined the impact of outsourcing IT services to women's social enterprises in India. The study found that the women not only gained new skills, income and physical assets, but also a sense of psychosocial empowerment such as new attitudes, confidence, status, roles and identity.

Ferguson and Islam (2008) examined the impact of a social enterprise with youth who were homeless in Los Angeles using a sample of five. They identified many positive mental health, employment, social and behavioral outcomes among participants. They also found positive societal outcomes since youth suggested their experience with the program was helping to change society's perceptions of youth who are homeless (Ferguson and Islam 2008).

Technology and Vulnerable Youth

Since technology impacts every facet of life and enormous opportunities exist for young adults who possess the skills and knowledge of this "twenty-first century literacy" (Wilhelm et al. 2002), it seems reasonable that a technology-oriented social enterprise would greatly benefit low-income, urban youth. This is particularly true given the large gap that still exists between the haves and the have-nots regarding access and knowledge about technology (Davis et al. 2007; National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) 2010). While computer interconnectivity has become extremely important to economic and business success, many individuals in central urban areas are not acquiring this technological gain as rapidly as their more affluent counterparts (NTIA 2000), resulting in a digital divide (Coe-Regan and O'Donnell 2006; Keegan-Eamon 2004). This situation leaves segments of the population completely disenfranchised from opportunities to improve their lives through the use of technology (Norris and

Conceicao 2004). Although recent increases in computer access at public schools has somewhat narrowed the technology gap among youth from varying socioeconomic statuses and ethnicities, there still exists substantial inequalities in Internet access and use at home (NTIA 2008).

According to the NTIA (2008), 61 % of youth in low-income families (less than \$15,000 annually) do not have Internet access at home, compared to only 5 % of youth in higher income families (\$75,000 or more). In California specifically, 64 % of households earning less than \$15,000 annually do not own a computer and 73 % do not have Internet access, compared to only 34 and 40 %, respectively, of all California households (The Children's Partnership 2008). Also, 67 % of European-American youth access and use the Internet at home, compared to only 43 % of Latino and 45 % of African-American youth (NTIA 2008).

Youth who have access to different technologies (e.g., computers, Internet) can gain educational advantages and employment opportunities, however, it is apparent that low-income and youth of color are at risk for not realizing these benefits (Keegan-Eamon 2004; Norris and Conceicao 2004). As a result, more community-based programs are attempting to bridge this gap and improve opportunities for low-income, culturally diverse youth to learn different technologies (Harvard Family Research Project 2004). The YMCA Youth Institute (YI) and Change Agent Productions (CAP) are two such programs. This purpose of this study was to explore the effects of internship participation with CAP, a social enterprise focused on improving the technology and workforce skills among low-income, culturally-diverse, urban teens and young adults, at the end of its second year of operation.

YMCA Youth Institute and Change Agent Productions

The YMCA of Greater Long Beach Youth Institute (YI) is a year-round program that uses technology as an integral mechanism for promoting youth development and enhancing the academic success and career readiness of low-income, culturally-diverse high school students (O'Donnell and Coe-Regan 2006). The neighborhoods in which the vast majority of YI youth live are densely populated, ethnically diverse, and have the highest poverty rates in the city. New cohorts enter each summer with an intensive 8 week program. At the end of the summer, they become "YI Alumni," who can then voluntarily participate in a wide range of year-round programs throughout their high school and college years. The program uses youth development principles and project-based learning to promote leadership skills and cultural tolerance. They teach youth technology skills in the areas of web design, digital storytelling/movie-making, animation, digital graphics, and presentation and office software. The program focuses on enhancing academic interest and achievement, and provides service learning opportunities. Year-round involvement opportunities include digital art lab access, homework assistance, academic and personal advising, community service, equipment use, field trips, and social work services (Coe-Regan and O'Donnell 2006).

Change Agent Productions (CAP) is a social enterprise of the YMCA of Greater Long Beach Community Development Branch. CAP was specifically designed to

provide challenging, positive youth, and career development opportunities for low-income, culturally-diverse high school and college-age youth. CAP internship opportunities for youth build on the technology training they received while in the YI, and help them more fully develop their technical, business, academic and social skills. CAP is staffed with professional digital media artists who work alongside urban youth to develop and complete professional media projects. Both the YI and CAP utilize a positive youth development framework for working with youth and young adults. This framework suggests programs must provide safety, supportive relationships, meaningful youth involvement, skill-building, and community involvement to effectively move youth toward positive long-term outcomes (Community Network for Youth Development 2001). Positive youth development strategies are incorporated into all aspects of the program since participation in positive youth development programs have been shown to enhance academic and social skills success (Hall et al. 2003) while reducing involvement in adolescent problem behaviors (Roffman et al. 2001; Meltzer et al. 2006; Catalano et al. 2004).

CAP primarily provides media services to community-based organizations and non-profits. Media services include 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). Whenever feasible, CAP employs youth interns to work on their projects.

YI alumni apply for internships with CAP by completing an application and survey, and undergoing an interview. This process helps them to develop skills in obtaining jobs. CAP applicants must also submit their current grades during the application process. Interns are selected for projects based on their skill sets, availability, interests, and acceptable grades. While there is no minimum grade requirement for CAP participation, youth will not be considered for jobs if they are doing poorly in school (not completing assignments and homework), have too many absences or any failing grades on their report card. Approximately 85 % of all CAP applicants receive an internship.

Interns work on a variety of jobs including graphic design (brochures, magazines), web design and maintenance, photography, making videos and movies, writing and journalism, providing audiovisual services to conferences and events, and providing technology consultation and trainings. While most (65 %) of jobs were in California, primarily Southern California, about 20 % were out-of-state jobs. Interns were supervised and mentored by CAP's professional staff including an Art Director and three digital media artists. In addition, depending on the project, interns worked under the supervision of YI or other YMCA staff as well.

The purpose of the current study was to explore the effects of CAP participation on the interns themselves at the end of the second year of the program. The study examined the effects of CAP program participation by gathering feedback from the interns.

Methods

Data Collection

After IRB approval from California State University, Long Beach, four focus groups were held at the end of the second year of the program, with 23 (44 %) of the 52 CAP interns who had completed at least one CAP job. CAP staff explained the purpose of the research and distributed informed consent forms to interns. If the interns were under 18 years of age, consent forms were also signed by their parents. The focus groups were conducted by an Associate Professor of Social Work from California State University, Long Beach. Each focus group met for about 2 hours to answer a series of open-ended questions. The sessions were conducted in English and were audio-taped and transcribed verbatim.

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 by CAP staff. CAP staff collected informed consent letters and arranged convenient times for the focus groups to be held. Out of the 52 eligible CAP interns, 23 (44 %) participated in the study. Interns ranged from 15 to 18 years old, with the majority being between the ages of 15 and 16 (60 %). Fifty-two percent of participants were male. Forty-four percent of participants were Latino, 22 % were Asian American/Pacific Islander, 17 % were African American, 13 % were Mixed Ethnicities, and 4 % were Caucasian. Interns worked between one and nine jobs with an average of 3 jobs per intern. Pseudonyms were used in this article to protect youth confidentiality.

Interview Guide

The focus groups used a series of open-ended questions to explore reasons why participants chose to work for CAP, their job experiences, and the impact of program participation on their technology and media skills, job and interpersonal skills, and future goals and plans. The interview guide is in "[Appendix](#)". Focus group questions were created by the researchers to reflect the goals of CAP. The questions were then reviewed by CAP staff for additions and approval.

Analysis

Since the literature on the effects of social enterprises is somewhat limited, a focus group approach was adopted since it is exploratory in nature and allows for an in-depth scrutiny of the youth's experiences and views (Kitzinger 1995; Morgan 1998). This approach also allowed for the efficient yet exhaustive collection of data regarding the participants' experiences with CAP, their subjective perceptions of these experiences, and how their lives have been impacted by these experiences. The data collected were analyzed using a modified grounded theory approach (Strauss and Corbin 1998). As the themes emerged, the researchers repeatedly

returned to the data to ensure that they adequately explained the wide diversity of experiences of all the youth.

Results

Most youth reported that they had been excited about joining CAP. They were drawn to CAP because it provided them with the opportunity to utilize their skills purposefully and productively in a field they were interested in. All the youth said that, prior to becoming interns, they were inspired to apply because of conversations they had had with already-employed CAP interns. Active interns reported that the work environment was non-threatening and that CAP staff were very supportive.

Juan: 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

Rosa: People who had worked for CAP would tell me how fun it was and that they enjoyed themselves while working. The money thing is just a bonus to everything

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.

Kris: They have a list outside in the hallway that 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

Maria: 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.

Jose: 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

Tanya: [Staff] knows I'm interested in learning so when it's a performance job, they tell 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 skills. The following are what some of the youth reported.

Ana: 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

Tran: 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.

Danny: 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

Tiana: 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

Types of Jobs

The majority of the CAP interns reported that they provided media services and worked on various aspects of movie production. Several youth were technology trainers. These interns taught other youth as well as staff from 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; some producing brochures and magazines. Still others worked on web page construction and maintenance.

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

Tran: I've done websites for the district. Recently we did a project for foundation that was a flipbook, and we've done animation for an annual report

Lara: 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

These opportunities helped these youth to gain job skills in multiple technology areas.

Effects of CAP Participation

The youth unanimously expressed that their involvement with CAP had been immensely satisfying, beneficial, and enriching. Major effects were noted in the areas of technical skills, job skills, academic performance and personal growth.

Technical Skills Acquired

Although all the youth had been taught digital media and other technology skills in the YI, they reported they had learned additional computer programs and different technology 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 had acquired in real work situations.

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

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

Some youth further honed the technology skills they were learning with CAP, particularly computer skills, by teaching them to others such as family members, classmates and teachers. Comments indicated that CAP was benefitting others indirectly with the internship program.

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

Danny: I would offer my teacher help in Photoshop. I told her that I would offer my computer skills in exchange for getting extra credit or a higher grade

Additional Job Skills Acquired

The youth also reported that they had learned a great deal about the world of work through their experiences with CAP. Frequently mentioned workforce skills included public speaking, communication skills, patience and collaboration skills, diversity appreciation, dependability, time management, and organization skills.

Public Speaking Most of the youth reported that they learned about and became adept at public-speaking through their internship experiences as they made presentations to groups. These assignments helped them gain confidence and overcome their anxiety to work with adults.

Ana: 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

Lili: I had to run a workshop. I was scared because I saw all these adults staring at me. At the end, the older people were really surprised and said, "Wow, you

have such good teenagers doing this.” I was amazed. It gave me more confidence in myself

With their ability to communicate in a professional manner, some youth really valued that they had been able to network with professionals in their field of interest at conferences and in other work settings.

Darnell: It bumps me up when I need to get a job. The benefits are getting to know people 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 reference them in my resume

Communicating with Others Most of the youth also reported their internship experiences helped them become comfortable interacting and communicating with adults.

Luis: I was shy at the beginning. As they helped 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?”

A few of the youth reported that they had encountered difficult clients and had to develop skills to work effectively with people, even when they were challenging.

Maria: 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

The youth also reported that working with other interns could, at times, be extremely difficult since each person had his or her ideas which might be in conflict with the preferences of others. Thus, the job process could only proceed when there was open and good communication. When working with others, they needed to develop skills that allowed them to listen patiently and effectively, express their ideas to others, and be open to dealing with constructive criticism.

Patience The work experiences taught interns that, when disagreements or unexpected problems arose, patience was needed. They indicated they had to learn to deal with their frustrations, remain focused, and continue working together to complete their assignments.

Tiana: 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

Ana: 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

Leadership Skills Many youth noted their experiences with CAP had led them to develop leadership skills. These youth emphasized that they learned to work in a group, and became more skillful in assessing situations and coming up with creative solutions in partnership with others. They also learned to voice their opinions assertively, but compromise when necessary.

Lara:

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

Malika: 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

Appreciating Diversity Reflecting the diversity of its geographical location, CAP drew interns who were ethnically-diverse. The youth reported that their experiences had made them realize that stereotyping based on gender or ethnicity, though widespread, was 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 youth mentioned that they would feel awkward if they only associated with individuals belonging to a particular race or ethnic group.

Leslie: 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

Time Management Some youth indicated that they had difficulty meeting deadlines in the past and this had caused problems for them at school and their grades had suffered. When they worked for CAP, it was essential that they met the deadlines. Thus, CAP helped them with time management and some had begun to incorporate this skill into other aspects of their lives.

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

Kim: Doing some of the work 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

Dependability Several of the youth said that their experiences with CAP taught them it was important to be dependable. They became aware and acquired this attribute because they depended on one another to complete their work assignments. Someone who was slacking off or was absent from work without a reason caused project delays and difficulties for others.

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

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

Organization Some youth also indicated that they had become more organized and systematic in the way they stored their materials which enhanced their ability to be efficient. Others indicated that they had become more systematic in the way they approached problems.

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

Mia: When you go on these trips, there are usually some problems. 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

In addition to technology and workforce skills, many youth attributed positive changes in academics, family dynamics and future plans to the CAP internship experience.

Academic Performance and Educational Aspirations Many youth indicated that the grades they received at school had improved because of their involvement with CAP. Some attributed this to them becoming more conscientious about their school work while others said they had developed more desirable work habits. Others claimed that their acquired technical skills had helped them to improve their school assignments.

Ralph: 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

Kris: 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 they were motivated to do better at school so they could work on out-of-town trips that might make them miss school. Hence, they worked hard to improve their grades so they could work more CAP jobs. All of the youth also indicated that staff was very interested in their performance at school and willing to assist them whenever they had difficulties with their school work.

Rosa: I'm usually okay with a C. But there is a couple of 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. It is actually worth getting good grades [to go on a trip for CAP]

Ralph: I told [staff] I was struggling with math and he told me, "Just two options; get some 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

Tran: 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 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. Some of the older youth reported that they were thinking about attending college and that staff had helped some to identify suitable universities or community colleges and to find financial aid information. These youth indicated that they had not thought about higher education prior to their involvement with CAP. They claimed that the change resulted due to the mentorship and prompts they received from CAP staff. One 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.

Kim: [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

Juan: 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

Personal Changes

Friends All the youth were enthusiastic about the meaningful and trusting friendships they had established while working for CAP. Youth reported that, while working together on projects, they had 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."

Mia: 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

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

Family Dynamics The youth reported that their involvement with CAP has also influenced the way they interacted with family members. Several indicated that, in the past, when they did not know how to deal with their stress, they would lash out at their family members, particularly their parents. These youth commented that, because of their association with CAP, they had better self-esteem and had become more mature and less egocentric. Thanks to CAP, they had also become more patient and better able to deal with their stresses. All of these things contributed to improved family dynamics.

Jose: 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

Tanya: 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

The Future All the youth had no doubt that their involvement with CAP helped them become more aware of their future inclinations. For some, knowing themselves better, allowed them to envision their future goals. These youth claimed that CAP had started them on the path toward fulfilling their dreams. Several youth indicated that CAP had given them the chance to explore, learn more about, and eventually identify careers they were interested in pursuing.

Jamal: 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

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

Luis: A lot of us here have that passion and that drive to create. CAP 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 had done for CAP. Nonetheless, they thought that their involvement with CAP was beneficial to their career goals.

Rosa: 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

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

Chhean: 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

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

Kris: 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

Alex: CAP has shown me that certain jobs aren't right for me so I can eliminate them

CAP Environment and Staff

It was clear throughout many of the responses that interns were appreciative of the environment that surrounded their work at CAP. All the youth were extremely keen

about the supportive and nurturing environment that CAP provided them. They thought that CAP engendered a supportive atmosphere where they could learn, make mistakes, and be themselves.

Alex: 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

Danny: 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

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

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

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

Malika: 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

Interns also found the small stipend they received to work on each project an added benefit. Being paid enhanced their self esteem and some reported they used their stipend constructively.

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

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

All the youth felt understood and supported by staff. Comments indicated that staff did not just focus solely on job-related issues, instead they provided support in multiple areas.

Jamal: 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."

Malika: 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. They told me that it was not my fault that my mom is in prison. They really helped me to accept that part of my life

Jose: 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 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

All the youth expressed 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.

Alex: 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

Discussion

The evidence provided by the youth through the focus groups indicates that this social enterprise program was efficacious in bringing about positive changes for the youth within their work environment and beyond. The themes explicated in the results section overwhelmingly suggest that the CAP interns found their involvement beneficial in multiple areas. They reported learning technology skills, job skills, interpersonal skills, and leadership skills. It also positively impacted their family relationships, academic careers and future plans. Other studies have also documented that the benefits of social enterprise participation extend beyond specific job skills, into the family and community (Heeks and Arun 2010; Ferguson and Islam 2008; Ndemo 2006). Although the monetary benefits of involvement were sometimes noted, they were not perceived to be as important as other gains.

Similar to other studies (Heeks and Arun 2010; Ferguson and Islam 2008; Ndemo 2006), these youth learned many subtleties about employment and applying technology and job skills in real work environments. They gained experience in completing job applications and promoting themselves. In their internships, the youth learned about public speaking. They also learned to be more confident, 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 communication and diversity. The youth also became aware and developed desirable work habits such as time management and responsibility. All of these skills should prove beneficial as they enter the job market, and suggests that social enterprises can promote work place skills. While prior social enterprise studies rarely allude to gains in non-technical job skills, this study provides clear evidence that youth can develop skills and work habits that should prove beneficial to them regardless of the career they choose.

In addition, CAP helped the youth uncover their future inclinations and enhanced the potential career interests of those who were able to identify their future career paths. As a consequence, youth were motivated to excel in their school performance, and, for some, involvement was instrumental in helping them aspire to attain higher education and a college degree. Participants were also able to network with others who work in their fields of interest, and to identify what jobs were best suited for them. Similar findings regarding networking and future planning have been documented in the social enterprise literature (Heeks and Arun 2010; Ferguson and Islam 2008). It was also interesting to note that, even when these youth did not plan on continuing in a field related to technology, they still

identified valuable job skills and ways in which the technology skills they had learned could be applied in other arenas.

CAP provided an outlet for youth to explore their potential, discover their interests, learn new skills, engage in productive work, and establish positive relationships with adults while providing support and creating a congenial environment in which to learn and be mentored. In particular, youth noted the support and help they received from CAP staff as key to their desire to be involved and their continued participation. This suggests, as noted in the literature (Cooney and Williams-Shanks 2010; Ferguson 2007; Boyle 2010), that the provision of additional supports are likely to be critical to ensure the work and life success of the vulnerable populations targeted by social enterprises. Establishing positive adult relationships should also be emphasized when designing social enterprises for youth since the adult staff clearly played an important role in mentoring and supporting the participating youth.

Recommendations for Social Enterprise Programs

The lessons learned from CAP during its' first 2 years of operation are preliminary and may not be generalizable to all social enterprise models, but several key areas are worth noting. CAP interns were already involved in a YMCA program, so, when they came to CAP, they had already established some form of working relationship with other interns and staff. These factors likely contributed to participant recruitment and retention, and these relationships helped youth when they were working as a team. In effect, the Youth Institute provided a pool of interested youth and prepared them to meet the requirements of CAP. Thus, it may be useful to embed social enterprises designed to serve teens in already existing programs (O'Toole et al. 2010) to increase participation.

Second, CAP interns were employed in jobs that required a certain level of technical expertise and were attractive to youth. The job assignments that were undertaken and the final products the youth produced bore a level of sophistication. Being proficient in state-of-the art technology was seen as putting these youth ahead of others in terms of academic and career-enhancing skills. Thus, the type of social enterprise and the potential to provide viable career skills will likely be important to consider when developing social enterprises to benefit youth. Social enterprises that provide youth with higher-level, relevant career skills may be more successful in attracting and retaining youth. Ferguson and Islam (2008) found that increasing participants' technology knowledge and skills allowed them to compete in the formal job market, to do freelance jobs, and introduced them to a formal job network; indicating the relevancy of the skills gained.

Third, CAP internship opportunities are competitive. Youth are required to apply for internship positions by filling out an application and completing an interview. They are competitively selected and paid a stipend for specific projects. Processes like these should help social enterprise populations 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, is also likely to be a critical component for youth-oriented social enterprises since high school graduation and possibly higher education will improve their long-term outcomes.

Finally, this study also revealed that the youth were particularly enthusiastic with the supportive environment that CAP had established. In this atmosphere, the youth were able to find support from one another and from staff. Others investigating social enterprise programs have found improved social relationships with both staff and other participants (Ferguson and Islam 2008) and noted the importance of the atmosphere in attracting and retaining participants (Boyle 2010; Ferguson 2007). Staff support was identified by youth as critical to not only the development of job skills, but also to improving their lives at school and home. This finding underscores the importance of embedding social enterprises that target youth within a comprehensive youth development framework and the provision of supportive interventions. It also suggests that social enterprises must hire staff that are skilled in both the technical aspects of the work and in the challenges of their specific population if they are to be successful in meeting their social objectives. Employing skilled staff will also make it more likely that the diverse needs of youth will be met and that the benefits of their participation will extend beyond the job skills required for the specific product produced.

Limitations and Future Research

Although the results of this study strongly suggest that social enterprise participation may directly benefit participants in multiple ways, the findings should be viewed as preliminary, and with some caution due to some limitations. First, the sample size limits the ability to generalize the findings. Also, only about half of those who had worked at CAP were available to participate in the focus groups and they may not be representative of others who participated in the internship experience. Another possible limitation is the fact that all CAP interns were first involved in the High School Youth Institute program; although all of the focus group questions were specifically related to CAP, youth may have shared benefits gained from the larger program. Social desirability may have also influenced the responses as participants may, knowing the purpose of the evaluation, have said things they thought were expected of them (Patton 2002). At present, the literature on the impact of social enterprises on participants is limited to a few, very small qualitative studies, so an understanding of the potential impact of this type of intervention will require additional research. As these efforts move forward, it will be important to examine impact with larger samples and with stronger quantitative research designs to fully determine their effects.

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Appendix

Interview Guide for Change Agent Youth

1. What made you interested in joining Change Agent Productions?
2. Describe how Change Agent Production 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?

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