

**FOCUS GROUP REPORT OF THE
LONG BEACH
YMCA STEPHENS YOUTH INSTITUTE
2005 ALUMNI**

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Introduction

Program Description

The YMCA of Greater Long Beach Stephens Youth Institute (SYI) is a program designed to use technology as an integral mechanism for promoting positive youth development and enhancing the academic success and career readiness of low-income, culturally-diverse middle school students. There are three main components to the SYI program; the summer program, the in-school program and the after-school program. Classes enter each summer with an intensive five-week program. The summer program starts off with a one-week wilderness retreat where students participate in many team-building and diversity training activities designed to build trust with one another and the SYI staff. The remaining four weeks are spent on project-based learning activities such as developing individual websites, oral storytelling presentations, writing and editing projects, and making movies. Upon graduation from the summer program, participants become SYI Alumni who are then able to voluntarily participate in the in-school and out-of-school technology programs offered by the YMCA. The after-school program consists mainly of academic support and skill building for the students and service learning opportunities in which the middle school youth tutor younger children in different technology skills. The instructors of the in-school class also collaborate with actual Stephens' teachers in the core content areas to design student learning projects. Students have produced a variety of movies with topics ranging from history, to anti-drug public service announcements, to teen suicide and child abuse, to a welcome video for the school.

Overview

This report presents a compilation of participants' perspectives describing their experience in the Long Beach YMCA Stephens Youth Institute program. The 16 SYI alumni were divided into two focus groups that each met one time for two hours over a two-day period

in August, 2006. The focus groups met with a trained facilitator to generate qualitative data on the significant components of the program. Each participant's verbal responses to predetermined questions about their experiences were audio-recorded. Their representative responses serve as the source of this report; and are structured according to the order in which the questions were asked.

Sample

The participants were 16 alumni of the 2005 Stephens Youth Institute Program, which represented 52% of the original 31 program participants. The sample ranged in age from 13 (56%) to 14 (44%) years old and there were an even number of males and females. Latinos (69%) were the largest ethnic group, followed by Filipino/Pacific Islanders (19%), African-Americans (6%) and Mixed/Bi-racial (6%). Almost two-thirds (62.5%) of the sample were 7th graders when they began the SYI program. In comparison to the entire 2005 SYI youth members (N = 26), focus group attendees were more likely to be younger (63%) and less likely to be African-American (25%).

Learning About and Choosing the YMCA Stephens Youth Institute

All (100%) of the students responded to this question. There were several common factors on how the members learned about the program and what led to their joining. How they learned about the program included through friends, teachers, school and family members. The reasons they gave for wanting to join the program included; interest in technology and learning new things, fun activities/trips, the stipend money, movie-making, something to do over the summer, meeting new people and thought it would be a good experience. The three most appealing factors to the youth were learning new things/technology, having fun activities to do over the summer, and receiving the stipend money.

I was called to the auditorium for a meeting and they told us about the program. They had chosen a couple of people that had asked for a computer class for the upcoming year.

The important thing that I thought about this program was the fact that I got to learn something new since I didn't have computer technology as an elective. Plus I thought it would be a good experience.

When I heard about the money I thought about being in it, and the fact that I was going to meet new people.

When they first talked about it, I was interested in the trips, like in the wilderness retreat for the first week.

I heard it over the school intercom and they said we would have a lot of fun activities and learn more about computers. And I said, cool that is something for me to do over the summer.

I heard about it from a friend. She told me that we were going to get paid for it. So then I thought, wow, we're going to learn, and we get paid for it.

I heard about it because of my sister; she was signing up for it. She told me to sign up, and she told me about the program and about the technology so I signed up.

I heard about it from one of my teachers, because she knew that I would like new challenges and to do new things. So she inspired me to join the program.

Friends, school announcements, teachers, family members, and a school meeting were the mediums for learning about the program. A few youth, at least originally, came because of the stipend; however, most noted that the money became less important as they became immersed in the program. A number of youth also joined because of their interest in technology or specific programs. It is also interesting to note that a few came because they had “nothing to do,” or were going to have a “boring summer.” All of this seems to suggest that it is a good idea to advertise the whole SYI program since different program aspects are attractive to different participants. Although the school itself seems to be a good recruiter for new SYI candidates, the use of multiple venues of advertising (friends, etc) should help attract a larger population.

Program Activities

Seven (44%) students responded to this question. Most of the respondents participated in all the SYI programs including the summer program, the in-school class and the after-school program. The classes/activities they mentioned that had taught them the most included the in-school video production class and the after-school digital media class.

After the summer ended, my school also had a digital media after-school class by the YMCA, so I was part of that, and we got more into filmmaking and Photoshop and making stories and learning how to do other things. We learned how to do school work. Also, throughout the year, the YMCA held programs and activities like Haunted House and the YMCA picnic. I think the after-school program taught me the most.

After the summer, they put me in a video production class during school and then I went to the after-school program. Technology was all around me throughout the whole year and I did learn a lot. I learned the most in the video production class.

I participated in a video production class and in an after-school digital media class. They both taught me a lot.

I was in the in-school class and the after-school. After-school, we would go do community service; we would go to other schools and teach kids how to use the laptop. I would say that the in-school class taught me the most.

From the comments above, it appears that respondents learned a lot, both during the in-school and the after-school programs. It seems that the in-school class taught these youth the most about video production, whereas the after-school class taught them both technology skills and the importance of giving back to the community through community service and teaching other children. That these youth were exposed to technology in multiple ways, and that they still reported learning a great deal from the in-school program, suggests that the in-school class is effective. This may, then, reinforce the benefits of partnerships between community organizations and schools in the development and implementation of technology classes in schools.

Knowledge and Skills Gained and Shared

Nine (56%) participants responded to this question. Most everyone commented about learning computer skills (N = 8) and leadership skills (N = 7). Some linked learning technological skills, such as using QuickTime and PowerPoint, to improving their grades in school (N = 4). Others mentioned that the program helped improve their social and teamwork skills and helped them learn to get along better with other cultures. Some described being able to help teach other youth with different technology programs and to be able to go above and beyond what teachers expected in school due to their new skills and abilities that allowed them to do their projects on the computer.

When we went back to school, after the SYI summer program, I used QuickTime and PowerPoint a lot for my projects in school, which improved my grades a lot, because I went beyond what other people did. The teachers were very proud.

I started hanging around with diverse races, and it shocked me. I noticed that I didn't change my friends; I just added more of them, so that was good. The other thing is all the knowledge we learned about computers. We would be able to use the same computers that we learned on. We would be able to use them for our different classes because all the teachers had the same computers, and I would be doing tricks on the keyboard, and people would be like where did you learn that? And I was like, "well, I was in the summer SYI program so I learned a lot there," and they wanted to be part of it.

What stuck out were the leadership and computer skills because those two things put together can teach other kids. You can teach them to become leaders and be able to use computers, because in the business world, you need that.

I learned more about leadership, and I use it at school now. Being in the program, around all these people that you don't know, it's better to step up and be a leader and it rubs off on other people.

I learned teamwork and leadership skills, it taught us a lot of things so that I can help other kids and to know that you can't do everything by yourself; you have to have friends to help you.

These findings, regarding the technology and leadership skill gains, is encouraging since they indicate that these youth were able to use their new skills outside of the SYI program, particularly to improve their school performance. Further, the fact that these youth made new

cross-cultural friends is very positive, especially given the past ethnic tensions within this community.

Previous Computer Access and Use

Twelve (75%) participants responded to this question. Most participants said that they did have some access to computers before entering the SYI Program either at home, school, or with friends, but that they did not use computers as frequently as they do now. Two participants stated that they had very limited access before they joined the SYI program. Before the program, most participants used computers to play games, use the Internet or to sometimes do school projects using word-processing programs, while after the program they did much more.

Before the program, I did have access to a computer but I only used it for Myspace, because there was nothing else to do. But after the program, I do so much more. I use PowerPoint and Photoshop and now I teach others.

I had very limited computer access before the program. If I wanted to use a computer at school, I would have to wait in line at the library. The computer lab wouldn't be open either. At home, my sister would be on the computer doing her projects, so I just had to use books and stuff from the library. Since I have been in the SYI Program, they gave me the ability to check out laptops. That helped me out a lot because it gave me access to PowerPoint and Photoshop and Word.

Before the SYI, I didn't know anything about computers at all. All I would do is type. I didn't even use the Internet because I wasn't really interested in computers at all. But after the SYI, it changed everything.

I really hated computers. I didn't know how to work them, so I didn't really want to use them. Before, I only used computers for typing, but now that I know how to work with other software, I can do much more. I am not very good at Photoshop, but I still work with it because I like it. I also like editing movies and working with other software. That is pretty cool.

I had computer access, but all I did was play video games and use the Internet. But now with the help of the YMCA, I use it for projects and to do photos in Photoshop. When other kids are coming in with poster boards I am coming in with PowerPoint presentations.

I didn't have access to any computers, so it was hard for me to do projects and type essays. There were times where I would have to go to places to type up my essays and all that, but sometimes they would not be open, so I would not be able use the computer. This would make it hard for me to complete a project.

While most of the respondents had some sort of computer access before joining the SYI, many indicated that they now had expanded access to computers, especially since they could check-out laptops and other types of equipment from the program. It appears that the depth and scope of the youth's computer knowledge has increased greatly after participation in the SYI program.

Development and Sharing of Technology Skills

Thirteen (81%) participants answered this question. All of the respondents mentioned specific technology skills they had learned from the SYI Program. The most common computer skills mentioned were PowerPoint, Photoshop, i-Movie, Final Cut, Microsoft Word and how to do Internet research. Many of the respondents stated that they were now using PowerPoint to do presentations in their classes, which greatly impressed their teachers. Some students even said that their teachers would ask for their help now, either for themselves or for other students. Students also stated that they have been able to help some of their peers and family members with their new technology skills.

I was taught PowerPoint when I came into the Youth Institute. I didn't know what it was or what it was used for before that. Once I learned it, I used it in school for a couple of projects and the teachers were really impressed that I knew how to work with it.

I didn't really know anything except Microsoft Word, but now since I have been in the program I have learned more about PowerPoint, Final Cut and Photoshop. I always have my computer out for a project. Now I will be using PowerPoint while everybody else is writing things down on a piece of paper. I always go further than what the teacher asks us to do. Also, whenever a teacher or anybody else needs help, they come to me because they know I have been in the program, and they know I can help them out with what they need.

I learned a lot. I learned i-Movie, Word, Photoshop and a lot of other software. I got to share a movie with other people and the teacher asked me for advice which was kind of weird because teachers are supposed to know stuff. Yeah, so the teacher asked me for help, and I taught her a couple of things because she had to teach her class something. That felt good because I helped teach a class. That was pretty cool.

I also helped a teacher edit a film that had to be shown to the whole school. It was pretty cool because he didn't know how to edit the film, so I put in the pictures and did the transitions on that, so it was pretty cool.

I learned a lot about all the programs. I liked all of them, but the one I liked the most was GarageBand because I have always been into music. Now I can make my own music, and with GarageBand I can mess with music and beats and things, so that is nice.

I learned about a lot more programs than what I originally knew, like I-movie, and GarageBand. But the one I fell in love with was i-Movie and maybe Final Cut. I teach kids too, some in middle school and some in elementary school, and I teach my brother.

Many of the respondents mentioned how “cool” it was to be able to help both children and adults (i.e., parents, teachers) with their newly acquired computer knowledge and skills. It seems that these youth did not just learn, but actually now use multiple types of computer software. The fact that these youth are also sharing their knowledge with peers and family members suggests the impact of the program may be beyond those experienced by the participants themselves. In addition, SYI participation may help teachers see students in a more positive light as they begin to do better in school, and even help teachers to further develop their own technology skills.

Current and Future Outcomes of the SYI Program

Eleven (69%) participants answered this question. The youth presented a variety of ways that the knowledge and skills learned in the program helps them now, and will help them in the future. The SYI program seemed to have improved their overall sense of self-confidence and taught them (a) how to get along with different groups of people, (b) to express their opinions, (c) teamwork and (d) what to do and not to do in a job interview setting. The most commonly stated aspect of the program that they thought would help them now and in the future was the technology and computer skills that they had learned. They suggested these skills are helping them to get better grades now, and would give them an advantage in getting a job later in life.

This program really helps us with our schoolwork, and it really improves our grades. It's an advantage for us if we really know computer skills for future jobs. It's an advantage for companies to hire you.

I want to be a teacher someday. I want to use the programs that I have learned and hopefully I will learn more and be more advanced than the other teachers. I want to possibly teach my students more specifics and get them to learn more and teach them better than other teachers would. They might learn how, and be more interested in it and do it on their own and have a career doing movies and then say thanks to me.

I learned how to fill out a job application and do a résumé. That's probably going to help me a lot because I will know what to write beforehand. That will definitely help me a lot in the future

I know that it is hard to get a job when you are young, but if you are really good with computer skills, it should be easier. You can get a good job. I am really happy because I am pretty good at computers now, thanks to this program. And, if my future goes as I plan, I want to be an actress. I have learned a lot here, like behind the camera stuff and what I have to do. I have experienced a couple of things here that relate to that, so now I know for sure that's what I want to do. This program has helped me a lot.

I think it is really going to help me in the future, because technology and computers is a big thing all over the world. So I'm guessing that computers are going to be a big thing for all businesses that you are in.

The focus of the groups' discussions went beyond technology; participants also placed significant emphasis on personal skills and growth, expressing their opinions/speaking out, getting along with different groups of people, and teamwork, which they believed would help them in their future.

They taught me how to work with different types of people and not just who I am comfortable with, because it is not like that in the real world. It's going to be different, and it's going to be working with different people who you might not always like, but you will have to work with them.

I learned a lot in this program, when it comes to working in groups. When I'm older at a job or in a meeting, I will know how to act and what to say, because here in the program I have learned how to work well with others and to just listen to what they have to say. I can use this for college and the future. I will be one step higher than all the other people who have not learned this stuff.

I think it is really going to help me because in the SYI they teach you how to make deadlines and if you are in an industry where you have to make deadlines,

you know how to get it done. I think that teamwork is really good too, because you might be at a job and you might have to work as a team, and you have to pull together and finish what you have to finish.

In the SYI, they teach you how to speak. I never used to talk, but since I have been in this program, they have encouraged me and have told me how important it is to speak your mind. So now when I am in class, I will just speak my mind, when they ask rather than calling on me. And it will help me in the future because my boss might need my opinion and then I will have to tell him.

The SYI program appears to have made a difference in these youth's lives. The new knowledge and skills, both in technology and in social skills, seems to have led to greater motivation to get good grades and to get along with others, which, in turn, has led to a more optimistic attitude toward their futures. How to get along with different types of people, how to work as a team, how to listen, how to make deadlines and how to speak up and give their own opinions are all skills that should help these youth with their futures.

Program Effects on Changes in Self and Relationships with Others

Fourteen (88%) participants answered this question. The youth described changes within themselves as significant outcomes of the program. Their responses were thoughtful and straightforward. They were extraordinarily self-reflective and revealing. They connected the changes within themselves to how involvement in the program helped them to improve themselves and their relationships with friends and family.

I have learned a lot about myself and a lot about others by being in this program. I know more about the people here in this program than the people in my classrooms at school, and I have learned so many skills that help me out in life. I have learned to be more patient with others and patient with myself because I had no patience at all. But now I am getting there and it is growing. I have learned to work well with others and to cooperate, even though I might be frustrated at times. I learned to keep my cool, to step up more, and to be a leader.

Before I entered this program, I didn't have many people talk to. I didn't know anybody in here, and now that I joined this program I got to make a lot of friends. And I have a computer at my house, but my parents don't know how to do anything with it, so they always turn to me for help. I feel good when they call me for help.

I have gotten more responsible. When people ask me to do stuff, I don't play around, I do it. I actually take things seriously. My grades have improved a lot too.

Before I was in this program, I was weak from the inside. Now that I am in the program, I feel very strong and confident in everything that I do.

I don't do well with talking in public. I'd shake and fidget. I told one of the staff that I just couldn't do it. He promised me that by the end of the program, this was going to change, and I was going to be able to do public speaking. After I noticed all these problems about my public speaking, they made me do one because they wanted me to get used to it, and I improved a lot. People were telling me that I got better. I think I did improve on my public speaking because of the program.

Several youth commented that they had changed from being a negative person to a more positive person, and that people in their lives were noticing this change. They also learned to look more openly at people who may be different from themselves.

I have compared myself from before the program to after the program. I have noticed that before the program, I was a very negative person, and I have changed myself a lot. My mom has also noticed and she told me that I am another person now and that I have a positive attitude most of the time, which makes me really happy hearing that from my mom. I have learned a lot about myself.

I used to be a pretty negative person. I didn't really talk to people that I wasn't comfortable with. But when I joined the SYI, I began to be more outgoing with people, and I would actually try to talk to different types of people because their culture was different. It is cool to get to know where they come from, and what they do because of who they are. I really enjoyed the summer program because it really changed the way I think about being different. Different doesn't mean you are weird, but it is something that you should be. It makes you true to yourself and true to others.

They also commented on how there was a network of trust among all of the people involved with the SYI program.

Before the program, I was not the type of person that would read or plan or work in a group, but with the SYI I got used to it. It got me out of my comfort zone, meeting and working with new people. Teamwork is good. Also, I don't really trust people that I have barely met, but in this program you have this circle of trust between everyone, and you don't have to be insecure about your problems or personal stuff. You can talk to anybody here.

Some of the commonly shared themes in this area were that they were learning to feel and be more positive, had become stronger and less shy, had become less judgmental, and were feeling more confident about themselves.

Changes in School Performance, Attitude, Involvement and Future Plans

Ten (63%) participants answered this question. The respondents had many positive things to say about how the SYI program had affected their school performance. Many of the respondents stated that since being in the SYI program, their grades in school had improved, that they were more involved in after-school activities such as sports or yearbook committee, and that they were more confident and outspoken in their classes. They also stated that the SYI program had helped them to clarify what they want to do with their futures, such as going on to college or what type of career choice to make.

I have been raising my grades. I use to slack off when I was in science and math. It has really helped me when I started learning about computers. English was also affected by this program. I started being more outspoken in my classes when I had to do projects and when I had to go in front of the class and speak to people. It has also affected my thoughts about the future. I want to be a film major, when I grow up. I like working with cameras and technology, and I really like editing movies.

At school I care more about my grades than I used to, and I feel I have to get good grades to have a good future.

I have always wanted to go college, but now it's like a big issue for me. I really want to go and I want to work hard. I will do all I have to do to make it there.

I have been in more activities. I am in sports, like track, basketball, soccer and flag football. I am in a lot of after-school activities and I do the morning message thing too. I have just become more confident with myself to where I am not afraid to do anything.

During my seventh and eighth grade year, I was on the yearbook committee at my school. When my teacher found out that I was in this program, she actually gave me more responsibility for the yearbook. I designed a cover page, and one of the sections, so it kind of gave me an advantage. The yearbook did turn out better this year. For the future, I plan to be in the medical field, but if that takes time, I want computer technology to be my back-up, kind of like a side job while I study for my medical career.

Many of the youth reported that their school habits and their grades had improved due to being a part of the SYI program. They seemed more involved with school activities and more confident in themselves. All of this suggests that SYI participation can positively impact school behavior and performance.

Program Effects on Relationships with School Personnel

Eleven (69%) participants responded to this question. Some students stated that their relationships with their teachers had gotten better, that their teachers took them more seriously, and that they found it easier to talk to their teachers since attending the SYI program.

I actually got to know a couple of teachers more. I really didn't talk to one of my teachers, and now he will ask me to help him out in the computer class.

I got closer to my teachers, and to people involved in the yearbook committee.

Now that I have been in the program, my teachers take me more seriously. I used to be one of those slackers, but still got good grades. I was always loud and crazy in classes. Basically, I was a class clown. But, now they take me more seriously and know that I am able to do stuff like be in the program, that I am up for it and am not going to be a lazy person.

I am able to talk to teachers more. I can just go up to them and ask for assignments that I need, if I was absent. Or, if I could do extra stuff so I could get a better grade in the class. It is just easier to talk to teachers now.

Other respondents compared the SYI staff to their teachers (63%), stating that they liked the SYI staff better than their teachers because they treated them as adults or like family, and that the SYI staff really cared for them and would help them.

I think the SYI staff is better than the teachers because they treat you more like family. They treat you nice, not like teachers. Some teachers just come for the money, but the staff comes because they care for you.

The staff is better than the teachers because they treat you like adults. They won't treat you like little kids. Some of the teachers think that once you have done something bad, that's what you're going to be like for the rest of the year. They think that's all you are. But the SYI staff, they will treat you like adults, because they know you can change, because kids can change.

The SYI staff is way better than the teachers. You can go to them and talk to them about any problem, whether it is at home or school, and they will do anything to help you. They treat you more like adults, they don't hide anything from you, they tell you straight up, if you're slipping in your grades and things like that. They really do care about you.

The SYI staff are better than the teachers, because the teachers don't really connect with you. The SYI staff bond with you and care for you. If they see you are going the wrong way, they point you to the right way. And they will tell you politely that they don't like to see you going bad, and they try to help you.

While the youth did describe better relationships with their teachers, mainly due to changes in themselves, the majority of students said that their relationships with the SYI staff were more fulfilling than those with their teachers. It is possible that the positive youth development strategies used by the SYI staff are critical to the bonding that occurred between SYI staff and youth. Given the collaborative relationship between the school and the YMCA, it might be possible to share positive youth development strategies with school staff, in the hopes of developing more positive relationships between youth and school staff.

Changes in Understanding Other Cultures

Eight (50%) participants responded to this question. Many youth expressed that the SYI program made them more accepting and more open to people from other cultures. Some even stated that they had learned more about their own culture.

The SYI is a really diverse group, and everybody does different things. With the friends I have made here, it is really cool to see how they celebrate different things and eat different kinds of foods.

I have learned more about different cultures, but I have also learned more about my own too. I am Black, Filipino and White and I really didn't know anything. Since finding all of these other people that are my races, I have learned more about myself and my culture. I have also learned of things they do that I probably would not agree with, like what they worship, but it is really kind of interesting once you get to know it.

Before the program, I would just hang around with people from my own race. I felt like that was how it was for everybody. But once I started hanging out with

new people from different races, I noticed that things were different. People raise their children with different beliefs.

Last year, at the potluck, I tasted sushi, and I had never tasted it before. It just gives you more experiences. You learn more about each other's cultures. At school, I used to hang out with one group, but now I hang out with many groups.

In school, it is not that diverse because you hang out in your own group, but in the SYI, there are all kinds of kids, and you can't stay in just one of groups. You start making friends with everybody start, learning about diversity. It also helped because at school I only kicked it with one race, but now, after I have made all these friends in the SYI, even at school I am hanging out with everybody; all the races.

It seems that being in the SYI program has opened new possibilities for these youth in terms of ethnic diversity. They were able to meet others from different ethnic backgrounds/cultures, and they were able to see that while there are many sets of beliefs in the world, they could still interact with others even though they may not always agree with their beliefs. Given that these youth are maintaining multi-ethnic friendships on the school campus, this may also help encourage multi-ethnic friendships among youth not involved in the program.

Relationships with Staff; Mentoring and Bonding Opportunities

Thirteen (81%) participants responded to this question. All comments regarding the SYI staff were very positive. Most commented that they could talk to the staff about anything, that they felt a very close bond with the staff, that the staff really cared about them and would help them in any way they could. They believed that the SYI staff treated them like adults, and would point them in the right direction if they saw that they were headed down a wrong path.

The staff is like part of your family, they are like your aunts or your uncles, or brother. You can have a conversation with them without trying to hide anything. You can tell them anything; it's a comfort zone, since you may not have anybody to talk to at home. Your parents might be working too much or you may not have the courage to talk to your parents. So, here you can talk to them and have fun with them. At the same time, it is serious when it is about work. So, you get to bond, and it is more comfortable than in school, because you don't have to be scared you will be called a teacher's pet.

I have learned to bond with the staff more than anybody in my family. Some people always say, "oh they are the staff, they don't know what we are going through, they don't understand what we are talking about," but I say that they were once kids too and they have probably been through this more than once and know more than us. So, we hear what they have to say, and we can communicate and connect with them too because they were once kids. And they still have a little kid in them.

The staff here, you can really talk to them about anything. You can really trust them because they will hear what you have to say, and will actually listen to you and want to talk to you. They might even just want to talk to you so they can have somebody to talk to. You have somebody here that you can talk to, not just somebody your age. But someone that is older than you, somebody that has gone through more than you.

The staff, they really earned our trust, because they talk to us in a way that we can trust them. And we just talk to them as family.

They treat you more like adults. You can talk to them. They are more real with you. They tell you everything up front. If your grades are slipping, they try to help you in anyway that they can.

Some of the youth also compared their relationship with SYI staff members to their relationship with their teachers.

The staff notices if you are down, not like the teachers when you go to class. They see that you are sad, but they won't do anything about it, but during after-school some of the staff will try to find out what's wrong. I don't really want to say anything bad about teachers, because some of them really do care for you, but staff, I don't really know how to explain it, they are a lot better than teachers, because some teachers will care, but not as much as the staff, because the staff will really care for you no matter what happens. I feel like they are always there for us. They go beyond just one year of school.

The teachers only give us advice on how to get good grades and how to do better work. But the staff always gives us advice on life so that our lives can be much better. They guide us to live better lives and help us succeed at what our main goals are.

It is really easy to get attached to the staff here compared to the teachers at school, because in school they are mostly old, so it is not that easy. For the most part, I have gotten closer to Phyras, because he knows what my future goals are and will help me stay optimistic. You can really trust him, he gives you good advice.

Overall, it appears that these youth have really bonded with the SYI staff members. They seemed to trust and feel comfortable talking to SYI staff about a wide range of concerns. These findings suggest the program is meeting its goal of increasing bonding to positive adults.

Recommending Friends to the Program

All 16 (100%) participants responded to this question. Everyone agreed that they had and will encourage others to participate in the SYI program. They easily and happily described, listed, and commented about the specific benefits and skills they gained in the SYI program, and thought others might gain as well. These included meeting new friends, communication, computer technology, diversity, film making, knowledge of the world, money and social skills.

Yes, I would encourage my friends because they might think it is just a boring computer technology class where all the geeks and nerds go, but actually it is the opposite. It is just the people who want to learn more about others and learn more about technology.

I would encourage people to get in, because as kids we learned some stuff that adults don't even know about and for the future. We are going to be advanced and stuff so in the future it will not be bad.

I would encourage friends to get into the Youth Institute because it is very fun. You get to learn, and at the same time, you get to meet and work with new people, from different races, which is cool.

I would most definitely encourage my friends, because here you get to learn about diversity, going with different people and knowing different types of races. Some of my friends have heard stereotypes about other races or cultures, and I will say, "that is not true, they are the same as me and you." I would like them to come and join so they can see that they are cool, and that they could jump into other groups and make more friends of another culture. Now that I think of it, I don't only want to encourage my friends, I want to encourage other people that don't have a clue what this is.

Some of the youth made a point of saying that while the stipend money was a factor in getting them to join the program, it became much less important once they were immersed in the SYI program.

I have encouraged a couple of my friends to be in the summer program and I have told them what we do and they are really interested in it. At the end I would tell them that you get \$700, and then they would say, "wow, how do I get in it?" It is really interesting how people are just interested because of the money. I can't deny it, when they told me that money was involved, I thought about how I needed money for my school things next year. But once you are in the program, it changes the way you think, and you forget about the money.

I have encouraged a lot of my friends to join. I agree about what they all said about the money; it just disappears from your mind. I want to encourage more people to join, and I hope that more people will be able to get in, so they can pass all this on to future generations, and make the world better. It is much more than about the money and the technology. You are making friends and learning about yourself and others. It is good for you. You learn about caring for each other and being kind. In the SYI, the expectations are higher than the school's expectations and that is really good.

Several youth stated that they would like to put up a billboard or make a television commercial promoting the benefits of the SYI program.

I want to put up a billboard that says "join the YMCA and call this number, you will have the time of your life." I wouldn't even mention the money, just to see how many people truly want to be in a different group and learn about new technology.

I wouldn't just encourage a friend. I would like to get on TV and tell people about this program. There needs to be more programs like this. This program has helped so many people, and has gotten so many people computer skills and everything.

Other youth pointed out that the summer SYI program gives kids something positive to do and keeps them off the streets so nothing bad can happen to them.

Of course I would encourage my friends to come because the program really helped me. It would be nice if I could help them too, so they don't have so many problems. I would encourage friends to come and family too, because it is right here in the neighborhood. It is not that good of a neighborhood, but it gives you something good to do in the summers so that you are not out on the streets. Bad things can't happen to you here. If my friends were here, than nothing bad could happen to them either.

I would definitely encourage family and friends to come to this program. Most of the time, they don't have anything to do, so they just hang out with the wrong crowd and do things they wouldn't normally do. But at the SYI, they help us with all the problems and help us throughout our lives and help us figure out what we want to do for a living.

I would encourage my friends to be in the youth Institute to keep them off the streets, stay out of trouble, and just make their lives good.

Many of the youth thought that being in the SYI program had really helped them with their problems. They wanted their friends to have this opportunity too.

I will encourage family and friends because they feel lonely sometimes, but here at the Institute, they will make them feel like family, and they will help them out with their problems.

I would encourage my friends, because the SYI is like a second family. It helps you with your problems and it will give you a good idea of what you want to do in the future. And it would keep you off the streets because it is a lot of fun here.

The youth gave many reasons as to why they would recommend the SYI program to their friends and family. Two of the most common themes were giving their friends something to do and keeping them out of trouble, and the trusting relationship that these youth had formed with the SYI staff and how they felt that now they had people in their lives that they could count on. Other common reasons were so their friends could make new friends, learn about diversity, learn technology and learn about themselves.

Miscellaneous Comments

At the end of the focus group sessions the facilitator asked, “Does anyone else have something they would like to say?” Twelve (75%) participants made comments in response to this question. One of the groups expressed their excitement about the field trips, especially the wilderness retreat and the trip to San Francisco. The youths also seemed to enjoy doing community service work with younger children.

Now that you're done with the questions we want to tell you more, like about the wilderness retreat. That's where we actually got to bond with each other because of the activities and all the games that we play in the groups. You just don't want to go away from it. It is that fun. You don't want to go home.

Like the wilderness retreat is a really great place where you can look back at your life. You can really see how different the city is from the mountains, and how you could get away from all your problems.

San Francisco was amazing. Before the program I had never been anywhere. I had never been camping. I had never been to San Francisco, and I never really did any community stuff. I had never been to the wilderness at all. But once I got there it was like a wow, the stars at night and the smells, you can't really do that here because the air is polluted. At the picnic, when we got to work with little kids, it was cool because they would ask you if you can paint their face. Even though you didn't know how to, they still liked it. One of the staff said that the little kids see us as being cool. We are their inspiration, their models, so this program is not just a summer. It is a lot more. By being in this program you get other opportunities. Some students are going to Chicago to film. You get different opportunities to do different things and it's really a great program.

I had never been to San Francisco. That trip was pretty much the first time I had been out of Long Beach. My parents hadn't even been to San Francisco. I joined this program, and it allows me to do things. I will be going to Chicago this summer, and I was chosen to go, because they thought I would actually work, because they give you deadlines, and you actually work.

Several others pointed out how much the SYI staff cares about them and pushes them to succeed, and how much that means to them.

To prove our point that it is not like school, at school, if you fail, they just let you fail, but here if you fail they keep pushing you until you actually succeed at what you are doing.

They do check your grades. And if they notice that your grades are not good, they will help you, and they never do that in school. You feel better because, you know these people, and they will protect you. And, yeah, they care, and it makes you feel good about yourself that people care about you.

At school, if you fail, they are just going to let you fail. Teachers still get paid the same amount. Here at the SYI, they keep pushing us and pushing us, they are our support system. They are the ones that know that our families or anyone at the school aren't there for us. We know we can fall on to them, they can pick us up and help us out and be there for us. We will always have someone, someplace to go to if we have problems.

Other youth wanted to talk about how the SYI program brings people together and helped them make new friends, how it got into their hearts, and how it helped them learn how to express themselves.

There are some people in here that I never thought I would actually become friends with. But throughout the Institute they were there too and I became good

friends with them. And I just never thought it would actually happen. It helps bring people together and you make a lot of new friends.

It gives you twice as many friends as you already have. And it just puts you out there in a diverse setting. It's like a second family to you, and it helps you with other problems and stuff that you have. It's just a really good program.

This program really gets into your heart. It really gives you ideas and it really makes you think outside of the box.

With the SYI, when you make your movies, it gives you a voice. The community hears you because often they don't think that kids have a voice.

Some youth pointed out that the world needs more programs like the SYI, to keep kids off the streets, out of gangs and trouble, and to point them in the direction of college.

The SYI program is like finding a rare treasure. Something that is hard to find. So, I think there should be more programs like this so that kids can stop killing each other for dumb reasons, you know, like gangs and stuff like that.

There are gangs all over and people are dying here and dying there, but I think if there were Institutes all over the world for kids to join and maybe even teenagers, it would really help everybody out across the world. When they grow up there would be a much higher percentage of their being world peace and no wars, and no racism across the world.

There are a lot of neighborhoods that need this program. This program keeps a lot of people off of the streets.

There should be more programs like this one to help other kids because it is an honor to be in the program and other kids in another neighborhood, they need it.

If there were more programs like this throughout the nation I think that there would be a higher percentage of kids going to college. This program really pushes you to go to college.

Conclusion

The tangible effects of the Stephens Youth Institute program on its participants were revealed in these focus group sessions with the 2005 alumni. The facilitator found the group members and their discussions to be up-front, forthcoming, open, thoughtful and serious.

The three components of the SYI seemed to have taught these alumni a variety of new skills and given them inspiration for their futures. The in-school class and after-school program

seemed to have taught them new technology skills and the importance of community service (helping teach other kids). The leadership and technology skills that the youth learned in the SYI program, are, and should continue to have a positive impact on their school performance, as well as on their hopes and dreams for their futures. The summer program seems to have taught them teamwork, the importance of diversity and being different, how to make new friends, the importance of not judging a book by its cover, and how to step-up and speak about what is on their minds without worrying about being judged by others. All three of the components of the SYI program seem to come together to give these youth a new found confidence in themselves and a trust in one another.

The 2005 SYI alumni appeared deeply affected by their SYI program experiences, and the information they provided, strongly indicated the positive values and skills that the SYI program offers.