

**FOCUS GROUP REPORT OF THE  
LONG BEACH  
YMCA YOUTH INSTITUTE  
INTENSIVE SUMMER PROGRAM  
2005**

**Sonia Leib Abels, M.S.W.**

**Facilitator and Researcher**

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## **Results of Youth Focus Groups of Current Participants**

### **Overview**

This report presents a compilation of participants' perspectives describing their experience in the Long Beach YMCA Youth Institute (YI) Intensive Summer Program 2005. The 38 adolescents, the total participants in the 2005 program, were divided into three focus groups that each met one time for two hours over a three-day period in August. The focus groups met with a trained facilitator and a volunteer assistant 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 of the 2005 YMCA Youth Institute Intensive Summer Program ranged from 13 to 17 years of age. The majority of youth were in the 13 to 14 year age range (68.5%). There were more females (58%) than males (42%). Latinos (44.5%) were the largest ethnic group, followed by African-Americans (23.5%), and Asian-American/Pacific Islanders (13.5%). Almost three-quarters (73.5%) of the sample were 8th or 9th graders when they began the YMCA program.

### **Learning About and Choosing the YMCA Youth Institute**

Across the groups there were common factors on how the members learned about the program and what led to their joining. These factors included: teachers, family members, friends from school, interest in technology, making movies, and having nothing to do for the summer. The three most appealing factors to the youth across the groups were the money offered (\$700), making new friends, and learning new technology.

*I learned about the program through this friend and the first reason I joined was because I wanted to learn new technology skills.*

*At first it was because of the money but then I changed my mind.*

*That's why I got in, because of the money, but like everyone else said, I started forgetting about the money, and became more interested in the program.*

*I got in because of the experience and because it looked good on a college resume.*

*I found out about this program through my cousin before I applied for it. I would always come with my cousin. I was used to the environment and also the people always told me to apply for it.*

*I basically got in because I was interested in publications, like magazines. I like to write a lot and I thought it would be a good experience to see if I really liked it. I learned about it from my mother because she is involved with the whole YMCA thing.*

*I joined because of the digital arts that they were going to teach at this program, which really attracted me to the program.*

*I wanted to join the program, because when I saw the applications there were a lot of things that they don't teach you at school; not only technology, but team building skills and communication. I thought that it would be a good experience. I learned about this program through my school. What interested me about the program was because I didn't really know about computers and technologies. I wanted to learn a little bit more, and I didn't have anything else to do during the summer.*

Friends, family, teachers, people connected to the YMCA, and schools were the mediums for learning about the program. Many 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,” perhaps highlighting a lack of positive summer activities for teens.

### **Program Activities**

The themes of being together and working together were prominent among the participants in the three groups. They also liked making movies, using the cameras, acting,

designing, and editing. It appears that the various technologies challenged them to learn and that learning brought feelings of accomplishment.

*What I liked the most was editing the movies because that's what I want to do when I grow up.*

*I like making the movie the most because it's real fun making a movie with a group, especially if you're close. Everybody was close, and we had fun making it. The editing was strenuous because you have to sit there all day editing. The thing I did was copy the object video, where we had to make a video in like half an hour. It was cool.*

*You can make your own music. It's fun because it's another language that is just so beautiful. You feel it and express your opinions and your thoughts with music, that's the program that I really liked.*

*I liked making a movie, but it was kind of hard and it was kind of stressful in that one scene when we had to do certain things. But then we came through, and we worked together and it came out good. I like knowing the web sites too because I like putting my pictures on it.*

For some, activities such as directing and photographing, that required participation from others, often drew comments such as: “everybody doesn’t listen, and it causes stress.” Many members found learning HTML difficult, yet challenging.

*The thing I really disliked was HTML, just because the codes. I liked it but there are so many codes to put in and memorize, I think it's cool. I just don't like the fact you use the codes.*

*The worst was the web design, because it's confusing but we have people that are helping us.*

The wilderness retreat was positively reviewed and appeared to provide new opportunities for “coming together.”

*I liked the wilderness retreat and the river the best.*

*I liked the wilderness retreat, because they did stuff that really challenged me.*

*I liked the wilderness retreat, because it was a new experience, and we did rock climbing and I had never climbed rocks that big before.*

Multicultural themes appeared integral to the activities throughout the program.

*I like the wilderness retreat program. It was a good experience for everyone who came together. Before, when we were getting onto the bus, nobody was talking, then as we got together over the week that we spent together and did all that we had to do and on the way back, everybody was talking to other people from different races, everybody came together and talking together. Without the program, I think I would still be talking to my own race, but here they teach us how to talk to different people. I had to meet new people from different races to help me out.*

*I learned that you can't just hang out with your own race. You have to hang out with everybody, because that's the way you learn these things about different people, and that's how you see, if you have anything in common with different people, and share your likes and dislikes. That's one thing that's going to stick with me for the rest of my life.*

Many of those in the program voiced views that were significantly affected by the intercultural/ethnic mix of the group. In each group, members made affirming comments about the group's multicultural composition. However, several youth noted that the positive changes they experienced toward people of different ethnicities was not reinforced at home.

### **Knowledge and Skills Gained and Shared**

Most everyone commented about learning leadership skills. Some linked learning technological skills such as using Photoshop or Cinema 4D with gaining self- confidence.

*I learned leadership skills and how to work together and how to trust other people.*

*I learned leadership skills, and I learned how to work with a team and learned that you can't take credit for everything and you can't do all the work and you're not going to want to. You have to even out the work.*

*I learned how to improve my leadership skills, like when I'm working, when my group seems to run into problems, somehow I end out finding a way to fix them and keeping everyone happy.*

*Well I learned many new skills like Photoshop. I never knew how to use Photoshop; the school never taught me. I learned how to be a team leader, team working skills, and I learned Cinema 4D. That was the hardest thing I ever did.*

*I learned some of the final cut Pro, DV Edit and a lot of knowledge of stuff like that. I also helped some people who came to the YMCA, if they needed it.*

*Stuff that you learn in this program is a lot more advanced than I have learned before, like how to manipulate certain images or make movies and animation and design for it.*

*I learned a lot. When I first came here I didn't really know a lot about computers or anything. I didn't know anything about Photoshop and other programs, and they were real hard, but I learned a lot of technology stuff.*

Other comments also included how to make relationships with others easier, and learning about the differences and similarities among people. One youth commented, “You can hang out with everyone.” The feeling of having learned to get along better with others, no matter how diverse, was a constant:

*How much you can have in common with different people, and share your likes and dislikes with them; that's one thing that's going to stick with me the rest of my life. And, that even if you don't like someone you should show and treat them with respect.*

*I learned how to trust people, and in a short amount of time I have become close to some people.*

*I learned to keep an open mind about everything, that way you can find a way to relate to any person. And I learned that even if you don't like somebody you should show treat them with respect. Even though you don't like them, that way you won't cause any conflict.*

Some described helping family members and friends to learn different technology programs. A few noted that it would be difficult to share their technology skills due to the lack of access to computers and specific programs at home and school.

### **Previous Computer Access and Use**

Although many of the participants suggested that they did not have computer access in this discussion; most said that they did have some access either at home, school, or with friends. When they used the computer they played games, watched online sports, used the internet, chatted with friends, and sometimes did their homework. Their answers about previous use, took on a different sense in comparison to other discussions. Their answers were shorter and more

reticent. As a grounded guess, from their comments, it appeared that they often did not have regular access to computers before joining the YI. All group members expressed some unease in their explanation of previous use. This facilitator suggests that many of the youth, considering their age and grade, surprisingly did not have opportunities for computer classes. Few students mentioned access at home or at school or the hardware and software available to them at the YI.

*We have access from the library and some classrooms and we did get to use classroom computers for Photoshop.*

*I had no access to a computer at all. I have some access at school, but you can only use the Internet and that's it. Everything else is blocked. When I go to my cousin's, he lets me use his.*

*At school we do have access, but some of the computers are really bad and they always shut down or erase files and they are really slow.*

*I basically used my computer for access to the internet and for looking online for stuff. I didn't really have any of the programs they have here.*

*I used it only for internet access, but I was really afraid to use the computer.*

### **Development and Sharing of Technology Skills**

All groups identified specific technologies they had learned. One youth noted he, “learned HTML so he could impress his friends.” Another person plans to use her technology skills doing community service work at elementary schools. Some noted they could share their knowledge, such as Cinema 4D, In-design, and Final Cut, but that their schools did not have these programs. One youth commented that he had previous graphic design skills, but now he could actually “help my mother design business cards,” and help others with Photoshop and with movies, because he had become “much better at editing.” Others pointed to learning HTML, and that they had “become more skillful in its use.” Unanimously, with a degree of pride, the members of all three groups identified the programs they learned: producing music, Photoshop, web logo design, In-design, movie posters, Dream Weaver, HTML, and DV Edit. Capturing the tenor of the learning experiences, one youth exclaimed: “Dream Weaver is the easy way; DV

edit is more of a challenge. It's fun because it's harder to do, and getting frustrated is good, because once you get it, you are happy that you finally got it."

Other youth listed the technology skills they had learned:

*I learned many new skills like Photoshop which I never knew before.*

*Before I came to the Youth Institute, I didn't know any programs except for AppleWorks and Internet explorer so I learned a lot of new programs including Cinema 4D, In-design, etc.*

*I leaned Cinema 4D. That was the hardest thing I ever did. It was kind of confusing.*

*I learned a lot of new programs like Final Cut and I-Movie.*

### **Current and Future Outcomes of the YI Program**

The youth presented a variety of ways that the knowledge and skills they had learned helps them now, and will help them in the future. The YI aided their sense of confidence, taught them a better way to approach others, and not to procrastinate on projects. The focus of the groups' discussions went beyond technology; they placed significant emphasis on personal growth and getting along with people.

*In the wilderness retreat they taught us to trust each other.*

*We can take the initiative, be more open-minded with everybody, and respect them, even if we don't like them.*

The imprint of communicating with and respecting others was powerful and many youth voiced that learning these things would have a long-term impact on them.

*Opening up to people because you know that they are worthy.*

*Getting to know people based on who they are, not how they live.*

*Being able to communicate with others, instead of being a loner and isolating.*

*People used to be harsh, but here, they get to know you.*

*It's made changes to us. It's made us more confident so we know how to approach people better.*

Several youth identified career skills they had developed by comparing themselves to professionals. Others identified the skills learned as a means to make their own company or to get a good job or a jump on college.

*They took us on a trip to Cal State, and they are using the same programs that we are, so now we are in a kind of competition, we are much younger.*

*When we started talking and getting to know each other, we got more communication skills that will help us in the future, like maybe when meeting a business partner or something like that and having to break the ice.*

*I learned a lot of skills like team working and getting along with people that I don't really talk to and getting to know them based on who they are and not how they live.*

*I learned a lot of things that would help me in my career later on, because like somebody said before, the programs that we are using right now, professional people are actually using.*

*It will help me do my homework, projects and stuff, and in the future it will help me make my own company or have a good job.*

A prominent skill attributed to the program was learning to teach oneself. Some youth came to the realization that staff helped them to teach themselves.

*The thing I learned most from this program was learning to teach myself. I had to do 13 units, including a geometry packet within four weeks and I asked one of the staff for help, but he said no, but I can help you to teach yourself. That's what I did and I passed the test.*

*They taught us self-government.*

The participants identified many positive aspects of learning which ranged the gamut, echoing earlier relationship building skills as well as the ability to take the initiative or stand up for what you believe in.

*Team building skills; how to make friends; coming together; teaching myself.*

*Not to be afraid to speak your mind.*

*Find your voice, take action.*

*The stuff that really impacted me the most was at the wilderness retreat. They taught us to trust each other, to take the initiative, and be more open-minded to everybody and respect them, even if you don't like them. That's what's really going to stay with me.*

*It builds self-confidence, because once you know how to do things, you can go and teach other people, and it makes you happy that you have helped another person. It makes you feel better about yourself.*

*Every day you learn something new; the program taught us a lot, there's so much, we can't really say it all.*

Several youth also made meaningful statements about the differences between the YI and high school. This sentiment was repeated and confirmed several times. Many youth stated that the program was different from other experiences.

*They actually accept you the way you are, in high school they don't.*

*At school, students are very, very harsh, even me, honestly. Most people, if they are not your color or they don't look like you, they don't dress like you, they don't have the same shoes, they won't talk to you. They will talk about you, but here, they taught us that this is not high school. You can be friends with people who are not your same race.*

*One thing I really like about this program is that it is different from school. When you are at school you want to hang out with certain groups and you base yourself on them. You do what they do, but that is not really you. But then when you come here, you actually get to find what you really are and what you really like. They actually accept you the way you are, in high school they don't.*

Some voiced concerns about being docked money when they broke the rules, like when they talked when they were not supposed to, or were late.

*The worst is that you get docked money, my money goes down the drain for stuff that's not even important.*

*Yeah...some kids got docked for little things, which is kind of true, because some people did lose \$10, \$25.*

*If you're going to get docked then why would you keep doing it? Why would you do something they would dock you for?*

*There are consequences for every action.*

## **Program Effects on Relationships to Others and Changes in Self**

The youth described changes within themselves as significant outcomes of the program. Their responses were thoughtful and straight-forward. They were extraordinarily self-reflective and revealing. They connected the changes within themselves because the program helped them to improve relationships with friends and family.

*I have become more open and willing to talk, and I don't really care what other people think because no one has ever insulted me or insulted anybody else, really.*

*I learned to talk to more people and learn stuff about them; here everyone cares about each other.*

*When I get home, my family are happy for me, because instead of being outside in the streets this summer, I am inside where it's safe and I'm actually learning something, and staying out of trouble.*

*I see changes in myself and others. I have more respect for myself, before I used to talk myself down. I feel like I belong somewhere after I came to the program and I see changes, drastic changes. I learned to step up to others and talk to them.*

Many of the youths' statements combined their feelings of self-doubt and how they have changed since being in the program.

*I learned how to express my emotions and not to keep everything bottled up inside. Before, I would just hide my problems. Now I don't hide from my problems, well sometimes I do, but it usually ends up coming up anyways. I have learned that everything that has happened, like my family, was really bad, but people, well staff, have told me that it's okay to cry. The Executive Director, always talks to me and makes sure I'm okay. The staff people told me its okay, you can come to us whenever you feel you need to.*

There were other commonly shared themes such as learning to be less opinionated, feeling more confident, and working harder at school. Other comments that were made about changes in self included:

*Became more cheerful.*

*Put problems a side, and just be myself, without having them affect me.*

*More tolerant of school.*

*More open, willing to talk,*

*I learned to open up more and tell people my problems.*

*I want to be in this program because it can take me somewhere, instead of wasting my time. I can be in here learning stuff.*

*This program, it takes up more time, so it keeps us away from drugs, peer pressure, and all the things that are bad for you.*

*I feel like I belong. You can rely on anyone, because when you are open to each other you realize you have something that loses the fear, and you can open up to them and let them know your feelings. This is the place where everyone is open to each other.*

### **Anticipated Changes in School Performance, Attitude, Involvement and Future Plans**

The participants were in the Youth Institute during the summer of 2005, therefore, their discussions about school related to what happened prior to their entrance to the Institute; and reflect upon the changes that occurred in themselves during the Institute. Many youth compared the YI program to school.

*The institute is a privilege, not a right, and schools should care more about the students.*

*Teachers should care more.*

*I had a hard time getting along in school.*

*I had a lot of friends, but didn't feel I belonged in school.*

*I don't have lots of friends at school.*

*I don't want the summer to end because I like staying here from eight o'clock till six at night. In middle school I had a hard time getting along with people, I didn't really belong. I had a lot of friends, but I didn't feel like I belonged. But when I came to the YI, I belonged somewhere.*

*Here at the YI we got to learn about people's culture and their family and where they come from. In school, we don't really get to know people. We're just there to learn and pay attention to the teacher and not really care about anyone else there. They are just there to get grades, and they don't care about anybody else.*

Across all three focus groups there were negative expressions about school in comparison to their experience at the YI. These findings suggest the importance of programs such as the YI in the lives of teens. They are also likely to reflect the importance of the youth development framework utilized by the program.

Relative to the future, one youth said “I can teach my friends a lot of what I learned about technology.” There was consistency across the three groups about being more “open and responsive; becoming less opinionated.” They acknowledged that the YI taught them a lot of social skills, plus technology; and that they could try harder at school now that they had the technology skills.

*It will be easier (school) because you can come back here, use the computers, and staff will help with whatever you need. They will take time to help.*

*I will try harder now that I have the technology skill. Now I can get more work done.*

*It will be a little easier because when you come to the YI, you can get help with homework and use the programs that they have here. You can come here after school and use the computers and stuff and the staff will help you with whatever you need.*

*I'm going to try harder in school, and communicate more with more people, like in study groups.*

### **Learning and Changes in Leadership Abilities**

Several youth spoke about learning how to take the initiative, take charge, and how to take on a leadership role without being bossy.

*They taught us leadership skills throughout the program.*

*I learned that if no one takes the initiative that your group is going to fall apart, everyone will be like arguing. If there's no leader, everyone will be saying “I want it this way and that way.” If no one takes the initiative and says no, this is how things are going to be, then it's going to go nowhere.*

Many of the youth saw leadership as an ability to complete tasks, coupled with knowing that if others' had better ideas, that maybe their ideas should be followed.

*I am a leader, but I know how to follow too. If I see or have an idea and somebody else's is better, then I will go with their idea. I'm not just going to stick with my idea, just because it's mine. If I like it then I will go with it.*

*I am kind of in-between. If I don't like your idea, I will try to come up with a better idea, but I also let others lead me too because if they have better opinions and stuff I will listen to them.*

*That you have to be a better follower before you become a good leader; that means loyalty and trust.*

*I learned that I'm not the only one that always has to take charge, and that I don't have to be the leader all the time. I can still be the leader and follower at the same time.*

Listening was identified as a quality of leadership, as well as learning to accept and use constructive criticism. Several youth described their experiences at school when given group assignments.

*I think that a good leader should be able to listen to anybody.*

*Well, at school, when we were given a group assignment, I would always be the one that just took whatever they gave me in the group. I would do what they wanted me to do. I learned that I don't have to take whatever is given to me. I can be the one who hands out the jobs. I can lead. I can also say no. This is because of the leadership skills that they taught us throughout the whole program.*

Some of the youth connected leadership skills relative to their future.

*I think that learning these leadership skills will help us succeed more in life. They will help us in college when we have group projects. It will help us stand out from the crowd and be more noticeable.*

### **Changes in Understanding Other Cultures and Influences on Future Plans**

Many youth expressed that the YI had opened their eyes to other cultures and made them more diverse. Several also mentioned how similar other cultures were to their own.

*I learned to be less stereotypical, and I also learned to think before I speak, because if you doubt, it may be a little thing, but everything can be big to somebody else. You may not mean any harm to that person, but what you say may really, really hurt them, and affect them.*

*I realized how my culture is very similar to other cultures, like how we have a lot in common. We are not as different as how we may look.*

*I have learned that women are strong people.*

Several youth assuring the others, said,

*It doesn't matter (the way you dress, or the music) what matters is who you are. If you are fun and cool to hang out with, none of that matters.*

One individual explained the importance of learning to accept people for who they are:

*I have learned to accept people for who they are and not their skin color. It's not like I was racist or anything at school or whatever. I am diverse in the classroom, but not really diverse outside. I talked to people outside of my race but I didn't really hang around them. I think that when I go back to high school, that my group, is going to be more diverse.*

A few youth appeared to have some confusion about relating to their own ethnic group.

*In some sort of way, I think I learned to relate to my own race. Throughout my life, I was kind of disappointed in my race. Just being able to just hang out with people of my own race, from the same background, families that went through the same thing, It was kind of hard to talk to them, because I thought they were all down about other races and that it was all about Asians and stuff. So that was one of the things that turned me away from kids of my own race. But then you go to the YI and know that not all of them are like that.*

Several youth said that the program aided in learning about other cultures.

*There are many races and the program teaches you to get to know them for the people they are.*

*We learned a lot more about each other's cultures, because we had a project where we had to tell about our families and their backgrounds. I learned about the Cambodian culture. I also learned about Hitler, the Holocaust; a lot of them died.*

### **Program Effects on Relationships with Peers, Family and School**

For some, issues regarding changes within themselves were emotionally charged. Some learned to listen more, and in turn, now people listened to them.

*I have changed because I didn't really listen to people before, and now I've learned that I should listen to them if I want them to listen to me. All my years at school, I never listened to people's opinions. But when I speak I naturally want them to listen to me.*

A plethora of family behavioral descriptions occurred in response to this topic. Some said that they began to listen to others' opinions, which they had not done before. Several youth noted closer family relationships, however, some said that their relationships at home did not change as a result of the program.

*My parents are proud of me, because I am in the program.*

*When my mom picks me up, she asks me what I did today. That makes me feel good inside, to know that she cares.*

*My relationship with my family has gotten closer. I used to consider myself different from them, but now I think I'm more open with my family; they listen to me more. We communicate more.*

*I get home at about 4:30 and my parents are proud of me, because now I work. It's like a summer job, they think I am responsible now. They're proud of me.*

*I don't argue as much with my brothers. I am the only girl. But now, when they try to start arguing with me, I just ignore it so I don't argue as much. Now we get along when we go places.*

Several youth talked about how when fights occur at home, they can go to friends or staff now. Several members agreed they've made a new family.

*My family has always been open and we talk to each other, but if we do get into fights, which does happen, then I can always go to my friends here.*

*The relationship with my family hasn't really changed, but I think I made a new family here.*

*I have made a new family here, but there are some people here that I really don't like.*

Some youth reported changes they thought may occur in school as a result of program involvement. Many of these youth focused on how their relationships with peers will change at school.

*At school, I guess I won't feel dumb anymore, like in school...with my friends ...I won't take anything they say so seriously, every time they call me dumb...just by joking, now I just laugh it out, I am not dumb. I am smart, just in different ways.*

*Well I say that things have already changed in school because I am already trying my hardest, and everything.*

*I will respect people more.*

*Maybe in school, my relationship with my peers might change, because while you are in school the whole façade thing kicks in, and people don't, well they obviously act different ways. At the YI, you see people for who they truly are, but at school, you know, people put on a different face. You really can't truly know what's going on, because things aren't always as good as they make it seem.*

*I think I can teach my friends, a lot of what I have learned so that they can learn more about technology like I did.*

*I'm going to try harder in school, and communicate more with more people, like in study groups and stuff.*

The majority spoke positively about changes in family relationships, with friends, and with school, paying tribute to the YI program.

### **Community Service Work with Elementary School Students**

The formalized community services program had not yet begun for these youth, however, they sometimes described individual acts of service.

*Honestly, before I came to CORAL, I didn't really care about the community. If there was a piece of trash on the floor, I would think, it's not my problem. But now, I think that I should pick that piece of paper up. Before I would litter a lot, but now I feel guilty because what if one of those plastic six pack things gets stuck on a bird and then it dies, just because you were too lazy to throw it away. The point is that you don't want that resting on your conscience.*

*When we go places and it's dirty there, we want to leave it clean. Like if we go camping or into the woods, we want to make it cleaner than when we came.*

*Some days, weekends, all the new class and alumni go outside and we just clean everything.*

*We cleaned up around the church. I give money to homeless people and sometimes I help elderly women with their groceries and stuff.*

## Relationships with Staff; Mentoring and Bonding Opportunities

The majority of comments regarding the YI staff were positive:

*The relationship between staff and students is like student and student and we're playful at times, but we have to work and they help us at other times.*

*They are really cool; they are really big on having you do stuff yourself; they are helpful.*

*I have a good relationship with everybody, and my goal is to know everyone.*

*I am really close to all of them, and the people I know, know that I like them. The teachers at school don't really care about you and here the staff tries to get to know you, they help you.*

*The staff are like mentors, they really care about you, they treat you equal; I am respected by all the staff, but I also feel they underestimate me. I am little and they think I am incapable.*

*One of the staff members was there the first day. He sat next to me on the bus on the wilderness retreat the whole night he was there talking to me.*

*Bob and I, and Oscar and I have a close relationship. Oscar was there when I broke down and talked about my family. Shaun and Vince were there to talk about my other problems.*

*My relationship with staff is good, we talk, we play around and have fun. Basically everybody has a good relationship with the staff; they help us finish our projects and homework.*

*The staff here has really helped us. They have encouraged us. They help us when we need help with anything. Even if we have family problems, we can talk to them and tell them everything. We joke around a lot and have a lot of fun too.*

*We are all a big family, so we always treat each other with respect.*

There were some negative feelings about staff. Most of the negative comments involved money docking, which some thought was done unfairly at times, while others thought the docking was usually deserved.

*You have to talk to the staff right or they will dock you money.*

*Some people are scared of some of the staff. Some people are scared because they know they can get docked by any of the staff, and they're protecting their money.*

*Some people are scared of getting docked but when they do, it's because they were doing something they had no business doing.*

*They don't normally just walk up to you and say you're docked. They warn you numerous times.*

A few participants noted mixed relationships with staff. Among these, there was sometimes a perception that staff was not always helpful. However, other youth said that this “lack of help” might also be a good thing.

*Before, everyone used to be scared of Bob. We would be like oh, Bob's coming and everyone would scatter and get quiet. Everyone was dead silent, but now, Bob is my friend, and then I am also closer to Shawn and Vince because I talked to them and they listen to me everyday, and Oscar because he was the first one to know about my goal, and because he bought me Starbucks.*

*I got closer to some of the staff and now I just don't bother wasting my time with them. But anyway, some of the staff, I got closer to, but some of them farther apart, because some of them you can talk to, and some of the them you can't talk to, and they would tell whatever you say to them to others. That's how I feel.*

*They are helpful when they are supposed to be, but there are a lot of times when they are not, because they want to see how we can work out stuff on our own, and I think that actually helps.*

*They are helpful, but if they taught you something and you ask for help again, they're going to get mad.*

*I think when some of the staff won't help us, it brings us closer together. We ask someone else from the class.*

*I have seen some of the staff not respecting each other, some of them will call each other names but when it comes to the class they are respectful most of the time. I think it's more effective when they are respectful to each other because we see that and want to respect each other.*

### **Recommending Friends to the Program**

Everyone agreed that they will encourage others to participate in the program. They easily and happily described, listed, and commented about the specific benefits and skills they gained at the YI program and thought others would gain. These included: communication,

computer technology, diversity, film making, knowledge of the world, money, and material and social skills.

*Friends, computer and filmmaking skills.*

*You learn to meet new people, you learn to speak up, you learn to trust.*

*There are a lot of things that you gain from this program; you get some respect for yourself and others.*

*Discipline and computer communications.*

*Besides the money, because everyone says money is nice, but the skills will help you in life, and the friends you meet.*

*I would definitely encourage my friends to join. You learn skills and you learn about trust and everything you need for life.*

At the end of one of the group sessions the facilitator said, that had been the last question, asking, “Does anyone else have something they want to say?” and the response was: “*THIS IS A REALLY COOL PROGRAM!*”

### **Conclusion**

The palpable effect of the Youth Institute summer program on its participants was revealed in these focus group discussions of August, 2005. The facilitator found the group members and their discussions open, thoughtful and serious. They appeared deeply affected by their YI experiences, and the information they provided, strongly indicated the positive values and skills that the YI program offers. Perhaps the question, as to whether or not they would recommend others to the program highlights how these youth felt about it.

*This program has been one of the best things, and not just for me, but for the past students as well. I honestly think that this experience has been the best experience of all our lives.*

*There should be more YI programs everywhere, not just in Long Beach. We can use them everywhere. A lot of kids would like to have more programs all over the state.*

*I will also recommend the YI and tell friends that it could change them and it would give them something better for their lives. It would give them that support system that you don't have, and that this program has really helped a lot. The one thing that really impacted me about it is that I know I am not just another government statistic, not just another city kid who is not going to go anywhere in life. I know what I want to do and that I'm not just another statistic.*

*I would definitely recommend it to one of my friends as a good program. The staff are good people that listen to you. If you have any problems that you need help with, they come. They stay late for you if you need to finish something. They are good role models and they can help you with whatever you need help with.*

*I would tell a lot of people honestly, because especially if you are having a lot of problems at home. They really, really help you with your problems at home. They teach you a lot of things that you wouldn't learn ever without coming to the program. So you will really learn a lot of stuff.*

*I will really encourage a lot of my friends to come, because it is a once-in-a-lifetime experience. It will be good to have. I don't know any other program that is like this.*

*I am very happy, because I never really had a real friend in my life. In this program, I met a true friend, my best friend. I'm very happy to have that friend, and he makes me proud, he makes me happy. So I am very happy that I came to this Youth Institute, because I made a friend.*

*I would recommend the Youth Institute Program, and I will, because it is a once in a lifetime experience.*