EXPANDING YOUTH-DRIVEN SPACE ACROSS SOUTHEAST MICHIGAN

EVALUATION REPORT 2018-2019 (YEAR 1)

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NZ YDS Youth Driven Space

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EVALUATION OVERVIEW

Evaluation Overview

Started in the summer of 2018, the Evaluation of Expanding Youth-Driven Space Across Southeast Michigan is a three-year project funded by the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation. The Youth-Driven Space (YDS) refers to a positive youth development environment where youth partner with adults to meaningfully engage in decision-making throughout the organization's governance and programming activities. Led by the Neutral Zone, youth-serving agencies participating in this initiative receive intensive coaching and training supports to promote youth leadership, social-emotional learning, and effective school and community change. The first cohort includes five diverse youth-serving agencies that completed the first-year activities: ACCESS, KnowResolve, Give Merit, Congress of Communities, and 482Forward.

Since 2010, MSU's University Outreach and Engagement (UOE) has established an extensive and mutually beneficial partnership with Neutral Zone (NZ), with a common goal to empower youth in communities across Michigan. The objective for this current initiative is twofold: (1) to support NZ and the participating agencies with timely feedback so coaching and training efforts can be best utilized, and (2) to identify best practices and effective ways of enhancing youths' experiences in meaningful decision-making, identifying mentors, co-learning with adults, and feeling connected to their organizations and the community at-large. These experiences represent the four key aspects of youth-adult partnerships and are aligned with high quality program standards. Working together with NZ, our goal is to transform these organizations into YDS model sites where teens are able to find a collective voice within themselves, their organizations, and the local communities. The Year-1 evaluation activities included: Institute observations, Summit surveys, Formative Index Rating, youth program meeting observations, youth pre- and post-surveys and adult interviews.

"The lessons from YDS is that there are so many benefits of having a youth-driven space. It intentionally provides a physical and communicative space for marginalized voices, so we get a full picture. It brings to the table a lot of things society neglects"

~ from a YDS agency adult (May, 2019)

Highlights of Findings

INSTITUTE

The two-day Institute was held in mid-October, hosting 16 adults and 40 youth from 5 organizations. Among the many activities youth and adults participated in at the Institute, the most notable were when youth and adults discussed perceptions, misconceptions, and corrections in how they viewed each other, how to create effective meetings, and lastly a Venn diagram activity in which youth and adults identified the resources, skills, and experience from which they can benefit from each other and the community.

SUMMIT

The one-day Summit was held in April 13th, hosting 13 adults and 43 youth from all 5 organizations. Youth and adults shared out their YDS experiences and the desire for their programs to become increasingly more youth-driven. There was overwhelming feedback from the participants to extend the length of the Summit and participants expressed the appreciation of having the opportunities for their personal, professional and community growth.

PROGRAM CHANGES

Once per semester, pre and post meeting observations were conducted for each organization. These observations were based on the Youth-Adult Partnership Rubric[1] (Wu, Weiss, Kornbluh & Roddy, 2014). Throughout the observations, positive changes in the organizations were widely seen.

YOUTH SURVEY FINDINGS

All youth showed gains in Social-Emotional Learning assets. The most important contributor to the gains was giving youth a choice and allowing them to participate in activities that they were most passionate about.

YOUTH AND ADULT REFLECTIONS

Youth identified necessary changes needed in order to fully optimize youth-driven spaces, more specifically with regards to their capacity building in public speaking, organizing and facilitation skills. Sometimes, youth felt unprepared and relied on adults to lead. Youth wanted to learn how to jump in and take initiative, increasing positive energy and motivation. Adults showed an increased awareness in supporting youth to be leaders in their organization but were also confronted with power dynamics and expressed the need for more time and support in trying to find the right youth-adult balance.

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[1] https://cerc.msu.edu/yaprubric

Institute

Serving as a kick-off event for the YDS in Southeast Michigan initiative, the two-day Institute was held in mid-October in Jackson, Michigan. A total of 6 Neutral Zone staff and 3 teens hosted the events and offered a wide variety of activities for 16 adults and 40 youth from 5 youth organizations (482 Forward, ACCESS, Congress of Communities, Give Merit, and Riverside Arts Center/Ward 1 productions). Some highlights of the activities are as follows:

Opening Activities

There were a few ice breaker activities for the warm-up. These opening activities were designed to encourage all participants to:

- Identify youth-driven space as a restorative zone
- Practice breathing activity to help youth become mindful and aware of any stressors or anxiety
- Share pronouns if comfortable
- Give youth the opportunities to let their voices be amplified & creating group norms
- Recognize privileges.

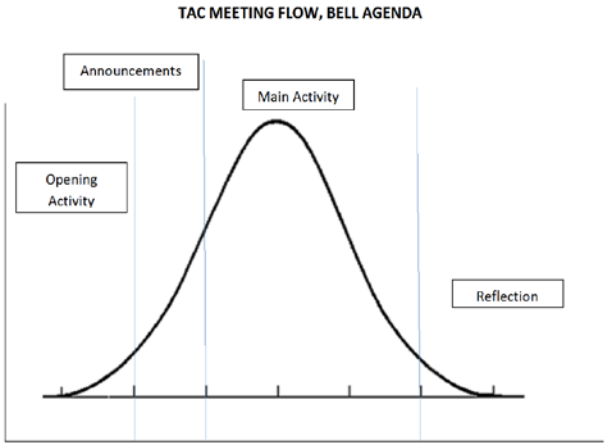
Perceptions, Misconceptions, and Corrections

One notable activity was when youth and adults were put into groups and asked to discuss perceptions, misconceptions and corrections they have about each other based on their experiences. After the activity, both youth and adults recognized having similar perceptions about each other but were in different stages in life. This activity showed the perceptiveness of youth and adults, and a consensus that they should not underestimate people and what someone has to offer, regardless of age.

What adults think youth think of them?	**How youth think adults think of them?**	**Youth and adults come to consensus about each other**
✓ Bosses ✓ Close-minded ✓ Experienced ✓ Having control of everything ✓ Pass on beliefs ✓ Responsible ✓ Strict ✓ Think they are always right ✓ Wise	✓ Dependent ✓ Ignorant ✓ Immature ✓ Lazy ✓ Less than ✓ Naïve ✓ Pathetic ✓ Rebellious ✓ Troublesome ✓ Unfocused ✓ Wild	✓ Ability to make change ✓ Determined ✓ Diverse ✓ Follow own dream ✓ Hardworking ✓ Know what is best ✓ Leaders ✓ Intelligent ✓ Misunderstood

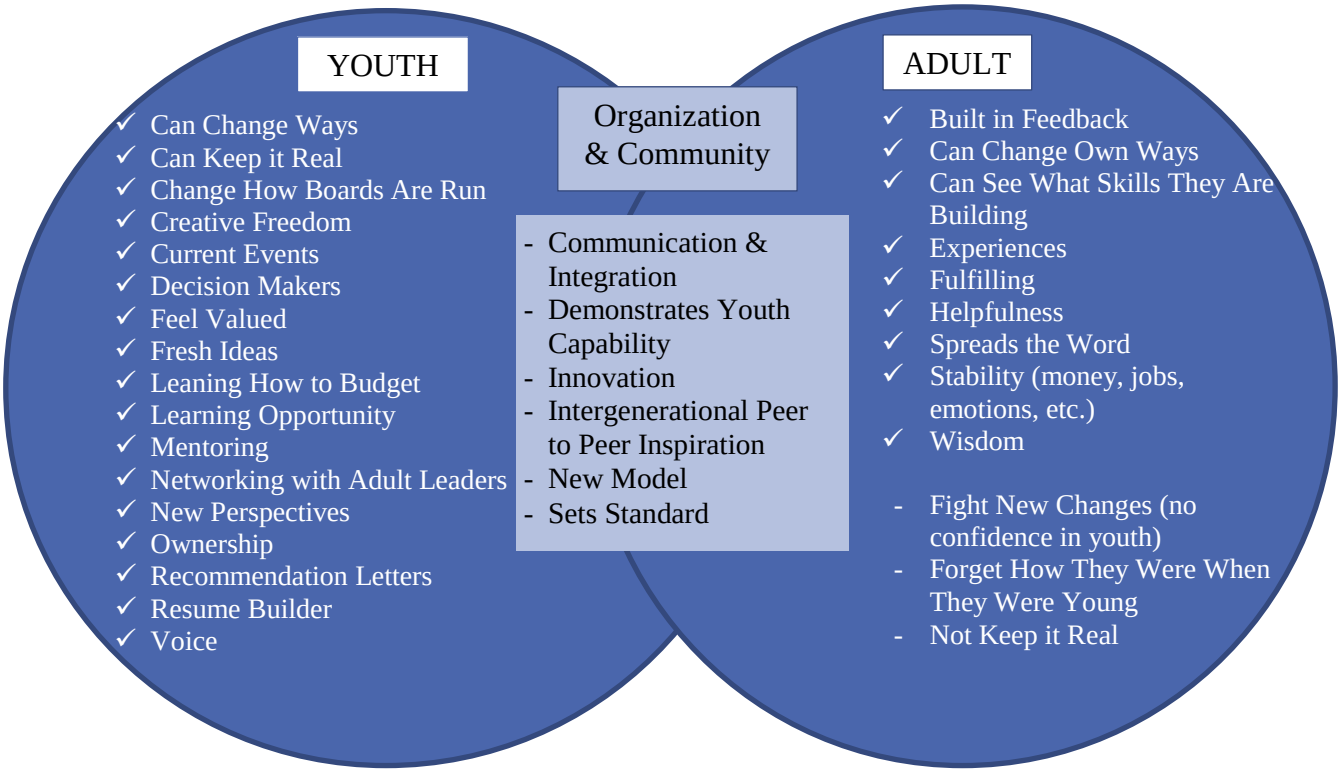
Effective Meetings

Youth and adults were exposed to the principles and characteristics of running effective meetings. The concept of "Roberts Rules of Order for Meetings" was introduced and participants were encouraged to use strategies such as setting up ground rules, running ice breaker/check-in activities, focusing on main activities/ discussions, setting up next steps and giving people opportunities to reflect. At the end, youth shared that it is important for them to acquire these skills, and they look forward to applying the knowledge in their own organizations. They also expressed the desire of having more teen space - a space that they can share own ideas and positive energy among themselves.



What Youth and Adults Can Bring to the Table?

The purpose of this activity was to identify the resources, skills and experiences that youth and adults can benefit from each other and the community, as well as how they might contribute differently. What came out of this activity was the need for both youth and adults to be more intentional with their relationships and the opportunities youth serving organizations can provide for both youth and adults to utilize their resources, skills and experiences for the community.

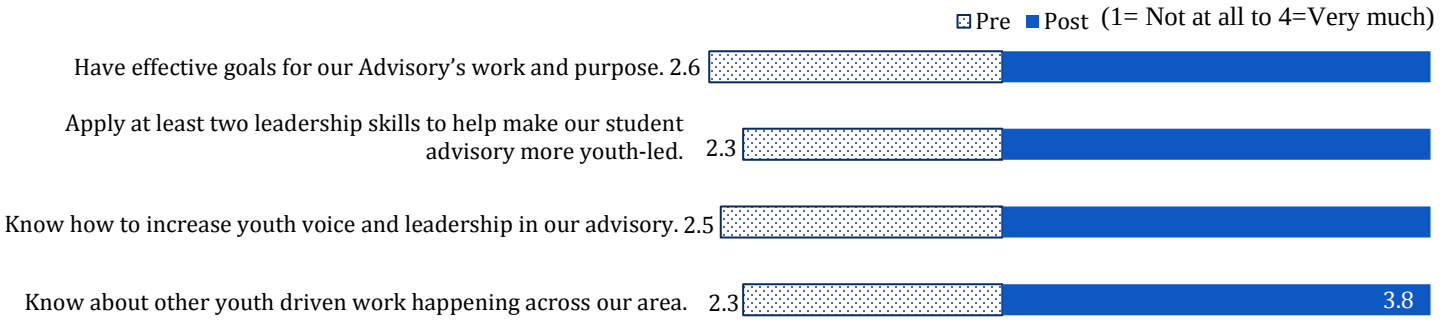


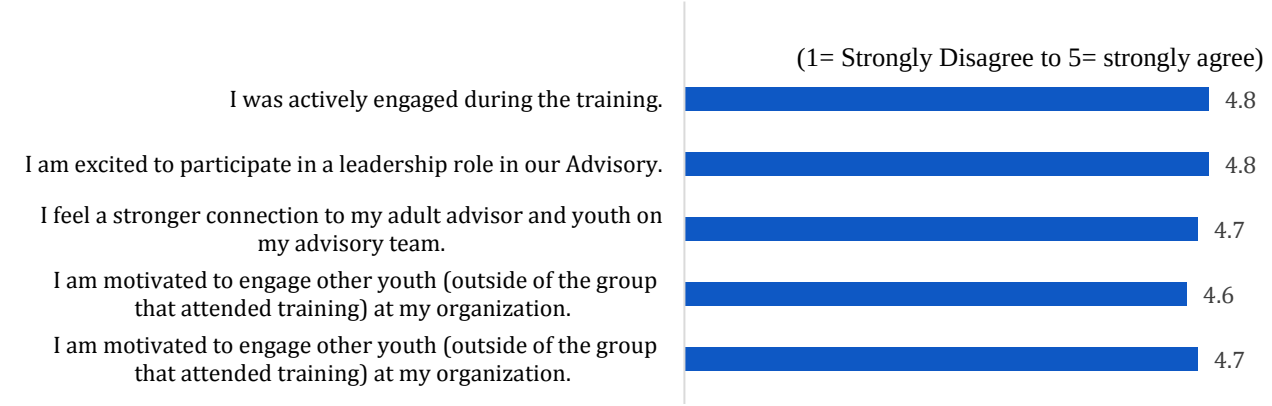
Summit

The Institute was held on 04/13/2019 at the Neutral Zone in Ann Arbor, Michigan. There were 13 adults and 43 youth from all five organizations participating in the one-day event ("Riverside Arts Center/WARD 1 Productions" dropped in the winter). Neutral Zone provided 5 adult staff and 4 teens to facilitate small group discussions and lead the community activities.

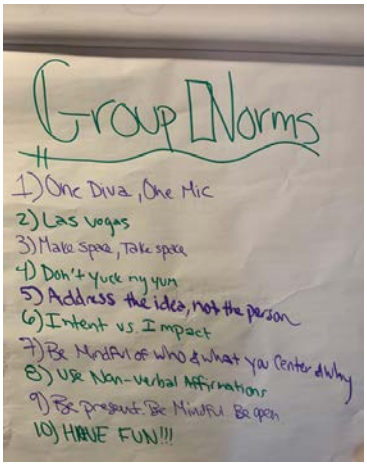
Overall Satisfaction Survey

There were 33 participants who completed the retrospective summit evaluation. Participants gave a very positive feedback on the event, with an average rating of 4.7 out of a high score of 5 points for excellent. Participants indicated their own skills before and after the Summit, showing big improvements consistently across all items and reported that they're highly engaged in trainings.





One word to describe your day at the Summit



SUMMIT

What was the MOST valuable part of the Summit? Please explain.

The Overall High-Quality of the Breakout Sessions

- Time to talk in small org-based groups to discuss next steps.
- Loved the breakout workshops, the resources we were provided & the planning session.
- Having more than one thing to work on.
- Talking about continuum of youth leadership into organizations and how as an organization we can grow. Splitting up youth and adult and bringing them together was super helpful!

Restorative Practice

- Restorative practice role play.
- The Restorative workshop. Valuable info everyone should know.
- Learning about restorative actions. Now I know how to help others.
- With every punitive problem there is a restorative way to solve it.
- Show love to be loved.

Fundraising

- It helped plan our project.
- Talking about fundraising and the agenda problem.
- The funding workshop because of issues.

Networking

- Having the ability to learn and interact with other organizations is a huge bonus

- Getting up early because I was tired.
- Time to talk to everyone not related to the activities.
- Having so much time in our groups.

Breakout sessions

- Smaller breakout sessions.
- Be sure breakout sessions are in the main space. Limit their people to "one mic, one voice." It was difficult to hear.
- I think more time talking to other groups about how they could make changes.
- Have a bit more time after the breakouts to debrief what we learned and summarize with the group.
- Having more breakout sessions.
- Make it longer.
- Being able to interact with other groups.
- Having each workshop for all or almost all to experience.

Timing

- Spreading out breaks and active activities.
- Length of summit and youth attention spans.

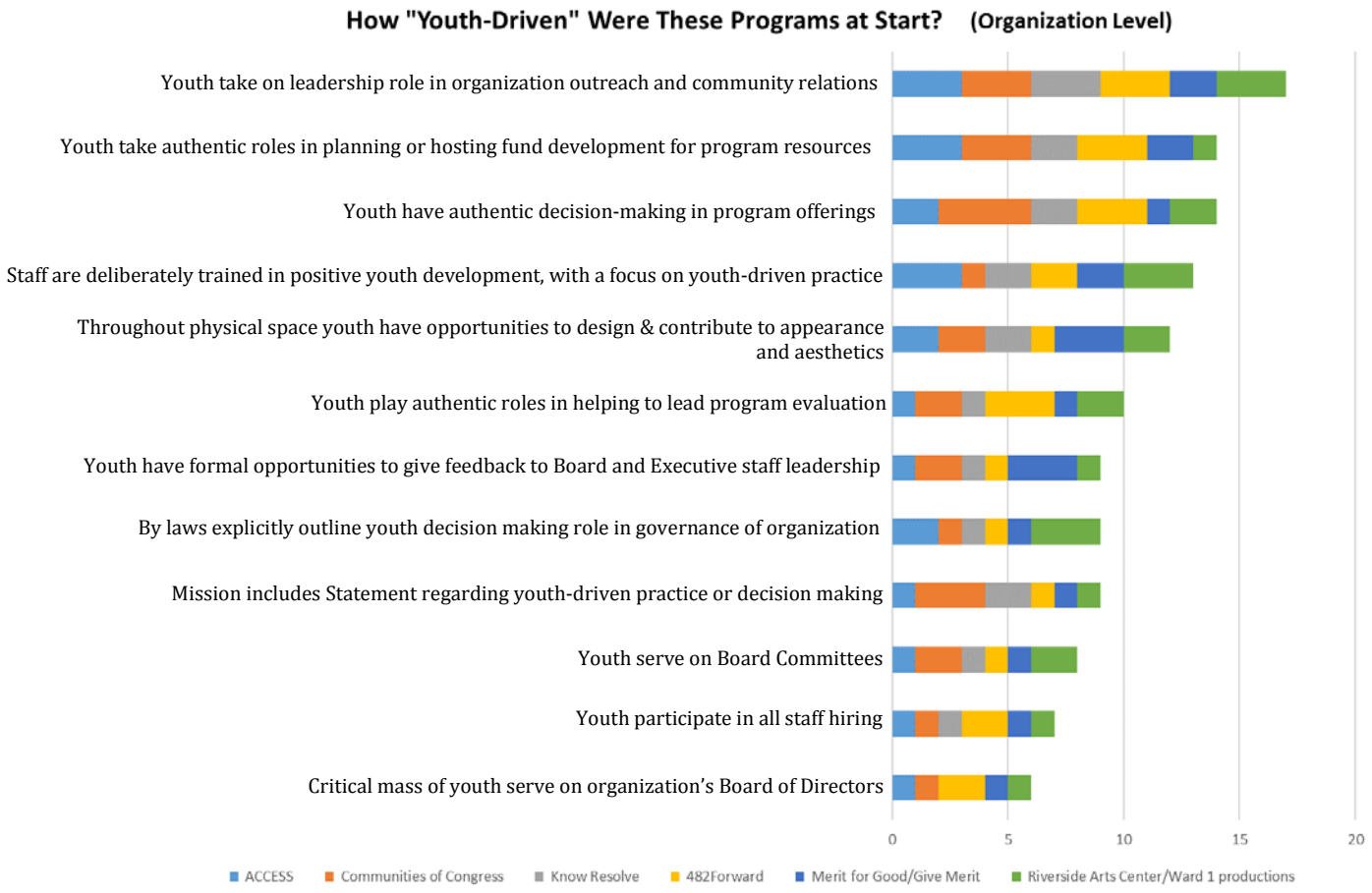
- Listen better.
- Improve communication and leadership sharing.
- More youth led initiatives.
- I plan to use the restorative questions to help people.
- Implement what skills I learned in the breakout sessions.
- Be able to bring back these new skills to our group and implement the new ideas.
- Increase/agree and decide on leadership roles for the youth in our organization.
- Create a better communication strategy between youth and adults – clarifying roles.

- Everything went really well besides getting up early.
- Before I was unskilled in conflict resolution, now I'm skilled in restorative conflict resolution!
- I'm very grateful for this opportunity.
- I had a lot of fun!
- More Summits!

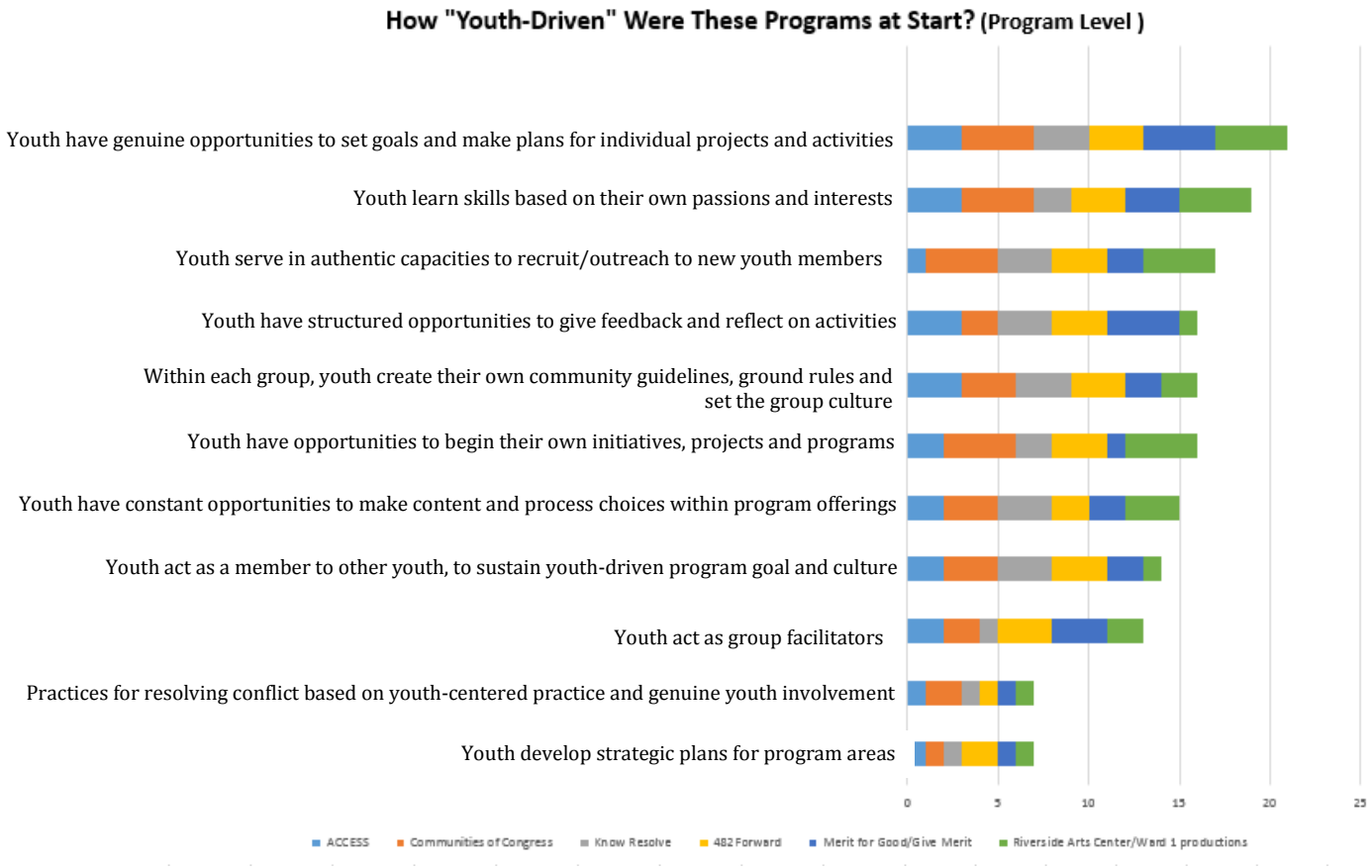
Program Changes

What Were the Youth-Driven Practices at Start?

Programs used the "YDS Formative Index" with scaled ranging from 1 – 4 to review their own practices at the beginning of the initiative to help identify how they would utilize the coaching supports. At the organizational level, having youth take on leadership roles in organizing community outreach and relations, planning or hosting fund development, and determining program offerings were the top three most popular youth leadership activities in the program. On the other hand, having youth roles built in the mission statement, board committees and hiring were least prevalent among the programs. At the programming level, youth were most likely to set goals and make plans for projects and activities, and learn skills based on own passions and interests. Organizations might need additional training on youth-centered conflict resolution and supporting youth to develop strategic plans. Overall, programs rated higher at programming level practices and lower on organizational governance aspects. Among all organizations, Communities of Congress had a relatively higher start on several youth-driven practices, such as youth authentic decision-making in program offerings, having a youth-driven idea in the mission statement, as well as allowing youth to begin their own initiatives.



PROGRAM CHANGES



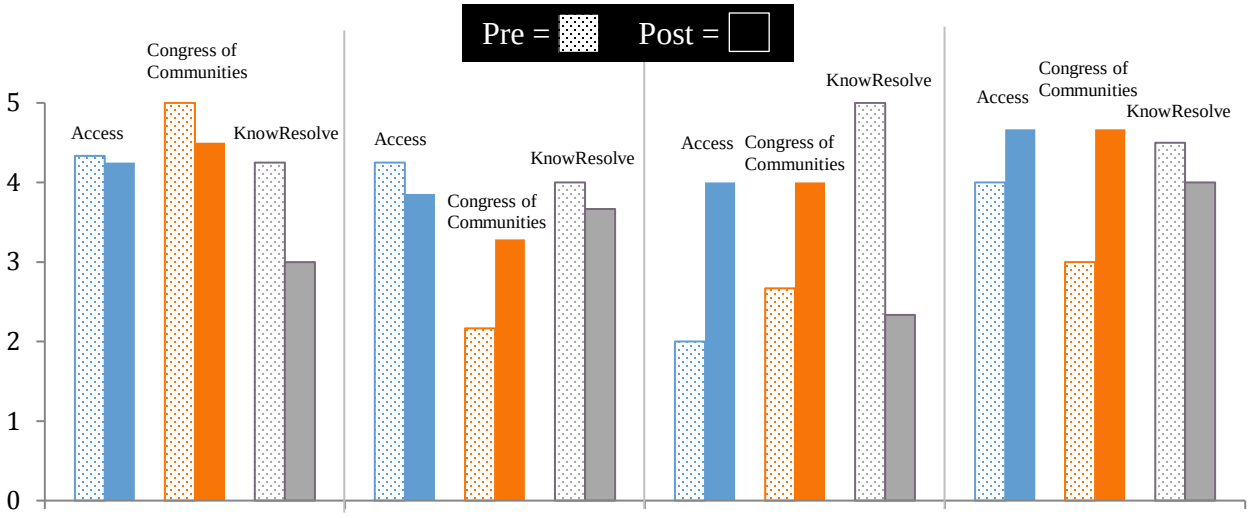
PROGRAM CHANGES

Changes in Meeting Practices

To understand how adults and youth relationships and interactions changed over time through the YDS initiative, pre- and post- meeting observations are held with scorings based on the Youth-Adult Partnership Rubric (https://cerc.msu.edu/yaprubric). With program consents, five pre-observations and three post-observations were conducted on the following dates:

Organization	Pre-Observation Date	Post-Observation Date
482Forward	10/10/2018	--
ACCESS	10/19/2018	05/17/2019
Congress of Communities	10/23/2018	04/30/2019
Give Merit	10/31/2018	--
KnowResolve	03/10/2018	05/10/2019
Riverside Arts Center/WARD 1 Productions	--	--

Knowing the meeting observation was only conducted once at pre and once at post, the data is considered as a snapshot of the existence of the practices that reflect the four dimensions of youth-adult partnerships: (1) Youth in authentic decision-making, (2) adults as natural mentors, (3) reciprocity between youth and adults, and (4) the extent to which the meeting discussions were connected to the organization and the larger communities.



- Access and Congress of Communities had high scores (above 4 out of 5) on this domain.
- KnowResolve's post-meeting was noted as having obvious power differences between youth. This resulted in low rating on "1.4 all youth fully participate in the conversation."

- Access and KnowResolve had median to high scores on this domain at pre, and a slight reduction at post. The reduction was mostly at "2.5 adults are active listeners; youth reflect and develop own ideas."
- Although improvement was shown, Congress of Communities had lower ratings. It's noted as addressing issues at a very surface level, not gaining critical thinking or social capital when possible.

- Access and Congress of Communities had a big jump on this domain. It's noted the meeting became more collaborative and a shared learning experience.
- The decrease in score for KnowResolve's post meeting featured separate groups for youth and adults. There was not enough evidence for co-learning or interaction before ended. It does NOT suggest regression of practices.

- Access and KnowResolve showed a stronger community from the get-go.
- Congress of Community's pre-meeting did not involve activities that might contribute to the development of youth's social capital. As activities evolved, the post meeting showed significant evidence of youth actively exchanged ideas with a community member and a sense of further developing the community.

PROGRAM CHANGES

Positive Changes in the Organization

Youth worked as a group to reflect on what benefits they had seen in the organization since participating in the YDS initiative. All youth were able to give examples around the projects and events they had accomplished. The other major themes were launching the teen advisory committee, seeing increased participation and youth taking on more leadership roles.

Organization	The Launch of Teen Advisory Committee	Increased Participation	Increased Youth Leadership	Projects/Events Accomplished
482Forward			- Met with the superintendent	- Listening campaign - Blog with PBS - UNResource fairs
ACCESS	- TAC launched	- Brought in underrepresented youth	- Took on "Hate Youth Group"	- MOVE Conference
Congress of Communities				- Mural painting - Youth council recruits - Nuestro Futuro
Give Merit	- Student Leadership Committee		- "Fate Professional Academy"	- Showcase 11th grade event
KnowResolve		- Grown connections		- Fundraising

Organizational Challenges

Despite the benefits, youth also reflected on the challenges they've faced in making their organization more youth-driven. Youth from three organizations mentioned about the difficulty of having youth follow through and commit to show up and reaching consensus. Others mentioned about having communication issues and staff turnover.

Organization	Time Commitment	Voice not Heard	Reaching Consensus	Stability
482Forward	- Personal commitments - Keeping alumni involved	-Need to improve outreach and turnout	-Difficulty in forming long-term goals	
ACCESS				
Congress of Communities	- Attendance/ dedication		-Struggling with mural ideas	-Staff turnover -Location change
Give Merit			-Coming up with event concepts	
KnowResolve	- Attendance/ dedication	-Communication issues		

PROGRAM CHANGES

Upcoming Events

Youth from all organizations expressed excitement about their upcoming events. They all had community events and two of the organizations also had grant applications that youth would be involved.

Organization	Community Events	Grant Applications
482Forward	- Youth Summit - Institute - Fall conference	
ACCESS	- Arab Service Day	- TGI Granting
Congress of Communities	- Money for mural	- KIP Grant - Community foundation grant
Give Merit	- Showcase 11th grade event	
KnowResolve	- Pre-Grand Opening	

YDS Impacts on Youth

Youth Survey Samples

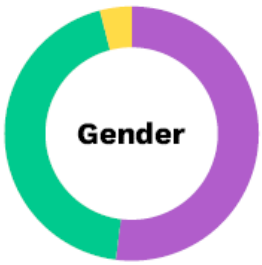
Pre and post- youth surveys were disseminated to all youth participants. The surveys were designed and sponsored by HelloInsight, an online survey platform designated for youth program professionals to assess a wide variety of program experiences and youth assets. To increase the likelihood and quality of survey completion, the surveys were printed by the Neutral Zone and disseminated at the Institute (pre; Oct 2019) and Summit (post; April 2019). Once the surveys were completed, programs use the pre-stamped envelopes that Neutral Zone provided to mail the surveys to MSU for data entry. There were 170 youth who were identified as YDS participants by the program staff; 53 youth participated in the pre-survey and 25 completed both the pre- and post-surveys. The key findings below were from the 25 youth, representing 15% of the program participants.

Organization	# of Pre-Survey	# of Post-Survey	# of Matched Surveys
482Forward	11	5	5
ACCESS	9	7	2
Congress of Communities	7	5	5
Give Merit	9	8	7
KnowResolve	13	16	6

Demographics

The sample includes 40% youth who identified themselves as Black/African American, 28% White/Caucasian, 24% Latinx and 8% others. Thirteen youth were females, 11 youth were males and 1 chose not to describe.

	# | %
Black/African American	10 | 40%
White/Caucasian	7 | 28%
Latino/Hispanic	6 | 24%
Other	2 | 8%

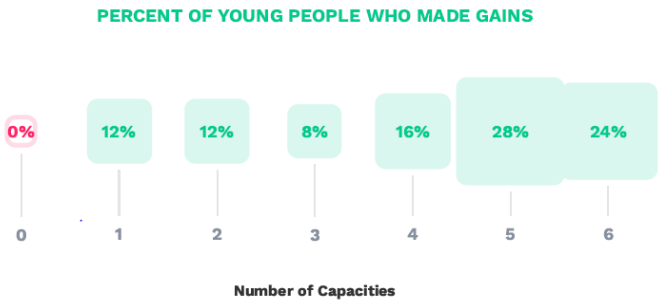


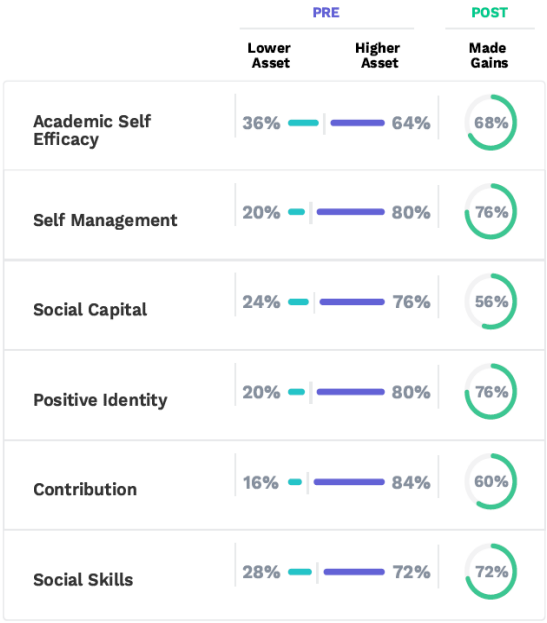
	# | %
Female	13 | 52%
Male	11 | 44%
Chose Not to Describe	1 | 4%

YDS IMPACTS ON YOUTH

Positive Changes in Youth Social-Emotional Learning Assets

The survey focused on the change of six Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) assets: Academic self-efficacy, self-management, social capital, positive identity, contribution and social skills. The results showed the majority of youth gained assets, especially around self-management, positive identity, and social skills. All youth had shown at least one gain, with more than 52% of youth showing gains in 5 or 6 assets.





High Level of Program Attendance and Satisfaction

The youth who completed the surveys reported high level of program attendance and satisfaction. All youth expressed satisfactory experiences with the programs and would recommend the programs to a friend.

Youth Attendance

Assessing a young person's experience of their attendance can help programs gauge their sense of engagement in the program and also alert staff that there may be barriers preventing a young person from being able to attend the program regularly.

All of the Time	44%
Most of the Time	36%
Some of the Time	8%
None of the Time	0%
No Response	12%

Youth Satisfaction

At post, youth were asked to report on a scale from 1 (Definitely Not) to 5 (Definitely Yes) whether they would recommend the program to a friend. We used this question to create the Youth Satisfaction rating. In your program, {percent}% selected a score of 4 or 5.

Definitely Yes	**92%**
Probably Yes	**8%**
Kind Of	0%
Probably Not	0%
Definitely Not	0%
No Response	0%

YDS IMPACTS ON YOUTH

Critical Practices that are Most Important for Making Overall SEL Gains

Based on the survey responses, the following program quality will mostly likely increase YDS youth's gains in SEL assets:

	Interest Exploration	Goal Management	Priority Youth	Peer-to-Peer Engagement
Potential for Impact				
Top Priority	Create opportunities for young people to do things they enjoy.	Review individual and collective goals with youth and help them track their progress and adapt their approaches as needed.	Express to youth often that you expect them to try hard and do their best.	Encourage youth to help one another when they need it.
Second Priority	Build choices into your program.		Take a moment to point out when you see youth working hard.	Strengthen peer-to-peer relationships through team-building and other activities that build connection.
Third Priority	Encourage youth to push themselves, especially when they tackle something hard.		Express to youth often that you believe in them and their ability to succeed.	Make sure your program includes opportunities for youth to engage with people who are different from themselves.

Youth and Adult Reflections on YDS

Recognizing the Importance and Needs of Developing Youth Leadership under the Youth Organization Context

During the summit, various youth spoke about their experiences throughout the year and necessary changes needed in order to fully optimize youth-driven spaces. Many expressed the need to build up their independence and confidence, especially while publicly speaking. Other youth identified the need to build upon facilitation skills through creating opportunities to practice, such as mock meetings, role playing, and planning meeting agendas. All youth emphasized the importance of becoming more vocal, taking responsibility, breaking out of their comfort zones, increasing open-mindedness, and diversifying leadership; youth need to learn how to jump in and take imitative. However, some youth expressed that they felt that they were never taught the basics of being put into leadership roles, and they struggled with communicating with others or working as a team.

Youth Quotes from the Summit	Adults Quotes from the Phone Interview
● "School isn't about basic life skills, it's all about the grade." ● "Boosting youth leadership is an investment in both the organization and the youth." ● "When we get into these leadership positions, we really don't know the basics. We're never taught how to communicate, how to work in a team like this." ● "We need to build up our confidence. Every time I make an important speech in front of alumni or donors or other adults I always run to (adult facilitator) and ask how they thought I did or what I can do better next time." ● "Adults are the crutch but they shouldn't be, we rely on them because it's easy to." ● "When new members join our organization, they don't really know what's going on or what we've done in the past. It can be pretty intimidating. We need to create a crash course for new members."	● "Sometimes it takes twice as long to do what we want the youth to do ...but we have to do it. Partnerships with the youth and providing support are important for developing youth leadership capacity." ● "It is important for adults to 'relinquish power' in order for youth to have opportunities to lead and grow." ● "We are challenging youth to lead." ● "The challenge is that things take time, to be able to be reflective and mindful of wanting to add other elements but it will take time which will be a challenge. You have to do it in the right way and in an impactful way"

Programming-level Strategies to Build Youth Capacity: Break Routines and Youth being Facilitators

Both youth and adults mentioned the need to break routines, and further stressed the need for youth to co-design agendas and run meetings.

Youth Quotes from the Summit	Adults Quotes from the Phone Interview
● "Break routines": Switching up the structure of meeting and alternate the facilitator roles weekly. ● I would like to increase facilitation opportunities on trainings that the facilitator feels passionate about and confident in. ● Youth should create agendas and plan meetings ahead rather than the adults.	● "One thing I want to change as a facilitator is to actually give everyone a chance to speak and to allow our teens the ability to feel comfortable to talk amongst everyone, not just certain people."

YOUTH AND ADULT REFLECTIONS ON YDS

Governance-level Strategies to Build Youth Capacity: The Culture, the Board, and the Youth Council

Youth came to a general consensus speaking to the importance of forming youth leadership culture and creating an Alumni Council to further sustain and support youth leadership. Many adults also expressed the need for new members to understand the organizations culture and youth roles.

Youth Quotes from the Summit	Adults Quotes from the Phone Interview
• COC discussed the importance of creating an Alumni Council to further sustain and support the youth leadership culture. • "We have this conference every year, but this is the first time it is youth-led" --482 Forward youth talking about the cultural shift with the upcoming youth-led educational conference.	• Many organizations described the new ways in which youth were now included in leadership roles (e.g., youth advisory boards, and youth-led projects) after starting YDS • "Our organization [Know Resolve] has always been youth-focused, but we are experiencing a culture shift to include youth more in leadership. (For example creating youth spaces, having youth on advisory boards, etc.)" • "When a new intern comes in, it is important for them to know the culture of the organization, so they understand 'this is the expectation' (that youth are included as leaders)." • "My organization is not particularly engaged in youth leadership, there is a disconnect they don't really get. They see youth as an audience to get more grant money but don't care what they have to say"

Increasing Attendance & Involvement

Youth mentioned their preferences towards small meetings with times that better align with their schedules. Both youth and adults mentioned unengaged youth in meetings, and the need to be intentional in recruiting and in roles youth are assigned.

Youth Quotes from the Summit	Adults Quotes from the Phone Interview
• "Absences really impact the culture"--Youth feel that it is important to improve peer accountability to improve meeting attendance rather than having the adult leaders be in charge of this. • Switching meeting days/times to better align with youth schedule (even on weekends). • Youth would prefer to have a small, engaged cohort rather than a large group that doesn't engage. • Each youth should have their own role in the meetings to increase their accountability and ownership to the group.	• "We tend to attract over committed students, so they have interest at first but then lose it (just want to put it on their resume)." • "We need to be intentional of recruiting younger high-schoolers." • "All youth are essential."

YOUTH AND ADULT REFLECTIONS ON YDS

Improving Communication

Both youth and adults mentioned that communication has been a challenge within their organizations. Youth want to be aware of adult's expectations and feedback. Adults want to find ways to efficiently reach out to youth in their organization, which is difficult as students are in school, have jobs, homework, activities, etc. Adults are competing with youths' times, so they have to learn how to balance talking to them when they think they are free.

Youth Quotes from the Summit	Adults Quotes from the Phone Interview
● "I always want everybody to feel welcome and to jump in the conversation by doing group icebreakers for example." ● "I want to change the way I think and comprehend people's thoughts and ideas… hearing people explain their thoughts and ideas might help with that." ● "Adults need to listen to the needs of the teens." ● "Youth want to be aware of adults' expectations for them." ● "We want feedback from adults and want them to validate our good ideas." ● "Feedback should be direct, not sugarcoated."	● "Adults find it difficult to be confrontational." ● "It's difficult to talk to them (youth) once they are in school, so it's learning to balance to talk to them when I think they are free." ● "We are competing for their time already." ● "For ways of communication, bullet points and asking for confirmation are best, like asking them to send back a thumbs up emoji. It's more about informal text language."

The Power Struggles between Youth and Adults, and the Path to Finding the Balance

Both youth and adults stressed the importance of each other's roles within the organization. Youth expressed their concerns on having too much support from adults, while also expressing the difficulties of navigating the pre-existing hierarchy between youth and adults. Adults have felt emotionally challenged and have had to find a personal v. professional balance when talking to the youth in their organization in order for them to have the best mentor and experiences.

Youth Quotes from the Summit	Adults Quotes from the Phone Interview
● "Adults shouldn't be completely left out because they're the ones that actually get stuff done." ● Adult allies' step on our toes. They offer too much support or "excess support." They think "okay I'll just do it, because it is easier." ● "I find it hard to give feedback to adults. I don't want to come off as aggressive, I want to give ideas. It is hard to balance power dynamics." ● "Adults might get upset if you call them out." ● "Don't want them to take it out against you" ● "Adults have been on earth longer than youth, but everyone has flaws and needs to work on things…. Adults have an authority complex. They don't get called out often, so it is important to do it." ● "We need time away from adults and more time and space to express ourselves as teens."	● "I lean towards personal versus professional because we have a lot of shared experiences which helps a lot more." ● "I've felt challenged emotionally, like for example if I give them ownership and they let me down." ● "If you're expecting someone to be vulnerable, you have to be expected to share too." ● "There's a difference between being a friend and being a mentor. We want to share experiences and be open but also be specific about being not just a friend."

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