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RESEARCH

A Pilot Program on Youth Engagement

Lessons from Youth ECHO

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Overview

Starting in the fall of 2007, the Red Hook Community Justice Center, a project of the Center for Court Innovation, implemented an experiment designed to address the positive perceptions of youth crime held by many young people residing in the Red Hook Houses, which is the largest public housing development in Brooklyn, New York. The teenage residents are predominantly low-income and Black and Latino; many are disconnected from mainstream social institutions and are involved in the neighborhood's drug trade. The original funding for the experiment, known as Youth ECHO, was for a program that would try to increase pro-social behaviors and change attitudes about crime among Red Hook youth, employing a marketing campaign to achieve this goal. The experiment operated out of the Red Hook Community Justice Center, a community court that uses the authority of the judicial branch to solve neighborhood problems. Launched in June 2000 in a low-income community in southwest Brooklyn, the Justice Center handles cases from Criminal, Family and Housing Court in one courtroom in front of a single judge. The goal is to bring the court and the community together to solve local problems, including drugs, delinquency, and quality-of-life crime.

This report describes the design of Youth ECHO and presents research findings from its first cohort of 15 youth who participated in the program from March 2008 to August 2008. The report concludes by examining program strengths and weaknesses and program revisions for the program's second cohort, which includes 13 young people, started October 2008 and will go to June 2009.

Program Planning and Curriculum

Step 1 – Ethnographic Research

As it was initially conceived, the first step of this program – drawn from public health safe-sex models – involved using ethnographic research methods to identify young popular opinion leaders in the community to target for recruitment for program participation. Three researchers conducted 23 semi-structured interviews with Red Hook teenagers between the ages of 13 and 18 over the course of two months.

The interviews revealed that social networks in Red Hook are tightly organized around name and notoriety. Even those young people who were not part of a well-known or competitive “crew” – essentially a formalized peer group with a group identity based on a common talent or quality (e.g. dancing, rapping, well-dressed) – have adopted the trappings for their own friendship groups. Young people desire a group of friends that makes them feel included, accepted, and simultaneously helps them gain social visibility. Young people who are involved in fighting, drinking, and doing drugs are the most visible. This visibility appears to be one of the primary things that gives them social cache.

Further, the data showed that there is not a clearly defined group of young people in Red Hook determining the social trends for the entire community. Instead, there are subgroups of 10-40 youth who function relatively autonomously. Every young person interviewed broke down their social groups into immediate friends – connected by trust, loyalty, and shared interests—and

extended social networks of 10 or more “associates.” Many youth reported using peer pressure with their closest friends to encourage behavioral change—both positive and negative. However, the importance of feeling trusted and connected to other youth is underscored by the fact that all the youth interviewed feel they are not trusted by adults, whom they believe perceive them as out of control and disrespectful.

Across the board, the young people interviewed felt the need for programming that reflected their experiences and provided a sense of connection to and community among other young people and adults. All expressed feeling a deep sense of mistrust of their peers; consequently, creating a program that provides safety and structure seems vital for young people to feel confident about taking a positive message outside their immediate, trusted friend network. Young people are eager for a chance to take on responsibility and play an active role in creating such an environment. Beginning the program by listening to and learning from youth went beyond simply “involving stakeholders” and “getting buy-in”; it indicated to young people that they would be central to the endeavor – that they are specialists about their own lives and needs. More than just being served by the program, they are essential partners in its creation.

The results of this initial ethnographic research are detailed in a separate publication (White, 2008).

Step 2—Literature Review

In addition to field research, Youth ECHO staff also conducted a literature review, concentrating on three major areas: 1) messaging, social norming, and pro-social peer-to-peer health models; 2) positive youth development; and 3) successful after-school program models.

Research showed that pro-social messages directed at urban youth often failed for a number of reasons, but mainly for not taking into account the culture of the audience. The first important finding was that campaigns can have unintended effects. In “Taking a Bite Out of Crime: The Impact of a Public Information Campaign,” O’Keefe (1985) found that while the McGruff the Crime Dog and the national “Take a bite out of crime” campaign successfully increased awareness of crime prevention, it also made people more fearful of crime in general and more likely to see themselves as vulnerable to it. Studies have found that anti-drug commercials that are intended to increase negative attitudes towards illegal drugs have actually had the opposite effect (Feingold and Knapp, 1977). Urban youth culture seems to shun direct persuasive appeals such as “Don’t do drugs.”

Patrick McLaurin’s 1995 article, “An Examination of the Effect of Culture on Pro-Social Messages Directed at African-American At-Risk Youth,” highlighted some additional important points to take into consideration. Source credibility is a major issue, in particular the perception of the messenger’s insider or outsider status. People able to speak “within” the frame of the culture, McLaurin found, have the credibility to speak on subjects and matters relevant to the community. On the other hand, if youth feel that the speaker is an outsider and the messages are associated with mainstream cultural sources, then any pro-social message is immediately suspect.

McLaurin also talked about the importance of “street acceptance”; the shared culture of urban teens requires that messages be able to be passed around and ultimately have acceptance on the street. Even if messages are entertaining and have high recall for the individual, the message loses significance if it is not shared with peers. Also, the “life” of a message on the street is determined by how long it maintains its appeal as part of the culture. It is also necessary to ensure that the rejection of anti-social behavior (i.e., the behaviors the message is against such as staying away from drugs) does not unintentionally reject the culture of the intended audience.

Finally, the literature suggests that for low-income urban youth of color the peer group has supplanted the family unit as the primary identity source (Anderson, 1990). Peer pressure becomes much more intense for youth in this environment, as does group solidarity. So for teenagers, going against a perceived group norm feels very risky.

Researchers seem to agree that youth need to be engaged in developing positive messaging and programming for themselves and their communities rather than simply targeted by already-developed messages or engaged in “spreading the word.” For instance, work by the Search Institute suggests that for youth to practice pro-social behavior, they need access to various building blocks of healthy development, including empowerment, support, boundaries and expectations, social competencies, and positive identity, among others. Shawn Ginwright and Julio Cammarotta (2002) argue that “at-risk” youth of color, in particular, need programs that address not only these areas but also actively engage them in developing realistic solutions to the issues in their communities.

Based on these findings, Youth ECHO staff decided to structure the program using a positive youth development model that stressed social justice, ethics, and civic engagement components.

Step 2 – Program Development

Before the curriculum could be devised, there were numerous programmatic protocols (e.g. behavior management, recruitment, and interview structures) that needed to be put in place. Many were drawn from another Center for Court Innovation youth engagement project, the Youth Justice Board, which seeks to bring youth voices and input into the policy decision-making process in NYC. These policies and practices had been tested over the Board’s lifetime and seemed a strong place to start.

Recruitment for youth programs is often done at schools, community-based organizations, and other places where youth come into contact with adults. Youth ECHO was intentionally designed to engage a cadre of teenagers who are disconnected from mainstream culture. Consequently, recruitment was done at alternative schools (for young people who have had difficulties in traditional school environments), at popular hang-out spots in the neighborhood like The Chicken Spot (a local take-out restaurant), the park, and through word of mouth. Program staff were repeatedly warned that it would be difficult to recruit Red Hook youth, who are traditionally very reluctant to engage with programming. Staff had no problem identifying 15 participants; many ECHO members said later they decided to interview for the job because it was “something new” and didn’t yet have a reputation among teens. A broad range of youth were carefully and intentionally selected, from those who were enrolled in school and possessed

relatively high levels of executive functioning to those who had been in and out of the criminal justice system, were unemployed, and had dropped out of school. This mix provided a vital spectrum of youth experiences and lent a necessary credibility to the program and its message.

The curriculum was designed to engage the participants on three different levels: individual, social, and global. At the individual level, the focus was on promoting positive social and cultural identities; at the social level, thinking critically about community issues; and at the global level, understanding how their individual identities, the decisions they make, and community issues can be situated within a global context. With these three levels of awareness, the hope was that participants would become more intentional about their life choices and begin to influence others.

Youth were to be heavily involved in what happened on a daily basis. As the background research showed, the program's pro-social message needed to come from them in order for it to be relevant and to resonate with their peers. Staff anticipated that giving the young people a say in the issues to be addressed and the resulting strategies and projects would lead to 1) greater commitment among participants to program, and 2) greater commitment to the message itself. Having the campaign be youth-driven would hopefully give it the source credibility and the street acceptance it would need.

The pilot curriculum consisted of three primary sections. First, a two-month social awareness and skill-building portion provided youth with information about how power functions on the personal, community and national level, focusing on exploring the root causes of crime in the community: how did it start, and why does it continue? What are the social, cultural, economic, and political factors that sustain crime? Numerous group discussions provided youth with a forum to discuss what was going on in Red Hook in a safe, structured environment. Lessons also focused on conducting research, interviewing, active listening, and communication skills.

Following this initial phase, youth paired up for a month-long community mapping project. Participants conducted research with their peers, designing semi-structured interview questions that they used to interview friends and other youth in Red Hook. Questions were designed to map community strengths and weaknesses. Each group presented their findings to the larger group and made recommendations about what they thought Youth ECHO should address in its message campaign. Findings were compiled into a bound book for each participant.

Third, the last three months involved selecting an issue for Youth ECHO to address through a message campaign. Youth worked with the alternative advertising agency Interference Inc. to create the campaign to bring to their peers. After lessons on messaging, identifying target audience, and tools of communication, youth once again worked in small groups to create message campaigns to present back to the group. Following presentations, the young people selected the strongest elements of each to create their final campaign.

Youth ECHO participants' final message – “Dealing Drugs: It's Not Worth It” – was developed after a series of discussions. All felt that drug dealing had a negative effect on the neighborhood. Many had parents or guardians whose drug use dramatically impacted their childhoods. However, many were also recreational marijuana users. Their decision to focus on dealing,

rather than using drugs, meant that they wouldn't be perceived as hypocrites by peers. The emphasis on "worth" had a double meaning, referring both to the relatively little money low-level dealers make and the huge consequences to dealers and their families.

With their message decided, youth looked at how to circulate in the community. They partnered with another Red Hook youth program, Hook Productions, to create a ring tone which could be downloaded from Youth ECHO's website. Using a stencil, they spray-chalked their message in areas in the Red Hook Houses where kids deal drugs. They worked with Archie Bell, an art director from marketing company Arnold Worldwide, to design a logo and t-shirt, playing on the importance of fashion and branding in the neighborhood. Working with a Park Slope, Brooklyn literacy non-profit called 826NYC, the young people created a documentary about the impact of drug dealing on three of Youth ECHO's senior members and on the neighborhood in general. The film, *Knock the Hustle: The New Movement*, was debuted for 100 Red Hook youth at an August 8th block party in Coffey Park, the large park next to the Red Hook Houses. In addition to the documentary screening, the block party included a bouncy castle for kids, a D.J. from Power 105.1, a talent show (or "swag" show as they billed it), and food. At the end of the event, goodie bags that included a Youth ECHO t-shirt and other miscellaneous items were given to teenagers who completed a short survey about the film. The survey included basic demographics questions, questions about knowledge and recall about specific statistics that were quoted in the documentary, as well as questions about attitudes towards drugs and drug dealing. The film was also shown at Brooklyn Academy of Music at 826NYC's youth filmmakers celebration and at the Red Hook Film Festival.

Program Evaluation

Block Party Survey Results

Of the 28 teenagers who completed a survey at the block party, 54% were female and 86% lived in Red Hook. The average was 15 years old. Sixty-three percent had seen Youth ECHO messages (spray chalked slogan, flyers) around the community before the event.

The film reported statistics that the Youth ECHO participants themselves had calculated. Of the teenagers who took the post-film survey, 54% reported that before watching the documentary, they did not know that half of Red Hook teenagers report knowing five or more people that sell marijuana and five or more people that have been negatively affected by drugs. Additionally, half reported that they did not know that Red Hook teenagers know five or more people who have been locked up for selling drugs. Only three people (11%) said they thought drug dealing was cool, and 2 of those 3 said that watching the documentary made them think it was less cool. Finally, six people (22%) said they had thought about selling drugs, and 4 of those 6 said that watching the documentary changed their mind about it.

Participant Survey Results

Program participants (N = 13) took a survey at the start of their time in the program and the same survey again at the end of the program. The survey covered the following topics: demographic information, positive assets, feelings of optimism, attitudes towards work, experience with

discrimination, civic engagement, weapons/fighting, attitudes towards crime/delinquency, and risky behaviors. Most survey questions were pulled from national youth surveys¹ that had been tested for reliability and validity.

While full survey results have been compiled, only key indicators will be discussed. The changes from the pre- to post-survey were puzzling at times. With question responses ranging from 1 to 4, with 1 indicating “rarely” and 4 “almost always,” the following were the means for some of the civic engagement questions.

N = 13	Pre	Post
I stand up for what I believe in.	3.54	3.08
I am helping to make my community a better place.	2.62	3.00
I am serving others in my community.	1.69	1.85
I am trying to help solve social problems.	2.15	1.77
I think it is important to help other people.	3.23	2.69

Because civic engagement is one of the major components of the program, higher averages were expected at the post-program survey. As the table indicates, in some cases scores declined. One explanation could be that the youth interpreted the questions differently after being in the program. For example, “social problems” may not have been a term they were familiar with before they came to Youth ECHO and, as a result, they may have been more likely to assert that they were actively solving such problems at the start of the program.

On some questions where a positive change was expected, a negative one occurred. When asked a yes or no question about whether they would be able to make a comment or statement at a public meeting, 77% said yes at pre-test, but only 54% did so at post. A possible explanation is that they had never had the opportunity for public speaking and assumed they could do so, but once given those opportunities in the program, realized that it was harder than they had thought.

Other results saw a negative change that was extremely confusing. Given that their whole marketing campaign was around not selling drugs, their responses to how wrong they thought it was to do certain behaviors was surprising. On a scale of 1 to 4, with 1 being very wrong and 4 being not at all wrong, the following were the means for some of the attitudes towards crime questions:

N = 13	Pre	Post
How wrong do you think it is to smoke marijuana?	1.83	2.23
How wrong do you think it is to sell marijuana?	1.46	1.62
How wrong do you think it is to sell other drugs such as cocaine, crack, or heroin?	1.00	1.31

¹ Some of these surveys include the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System, the National Household Education Survey, the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, and the Black Youth Survey.

A possible explanation for this was at the beginning of the program, participants were more likely to respond with answers they thought the program staff wanted to hear. There was some positive change on risky behaviors questions, however, as shown below.

N = 13	Pre	Post	YRBS²
Percentage of respondents who were in a physical fight one or more times during the past 12 months	54%	39%	36%
Percentage of respondents who had at least one drink of alcohol on one or more of the past 30 days	46%	39%	45%
Percentage of respondents who used marijuana one or more times during the past 30 days	31%	23%	20%

Yet, the number who reported ever having been arrested doubled, going from 3 to 6.

Focus Group Results

Though survey results did not appear to demonstrate much positive change, a qualitative evaluation component captured significant changes in the young people’s feelings of agency. In August 2008, at the end of the first Youth ECHO cohort, a focus group was held with 9 of the 13 program participants. Students were asked questions regarding their experience with the program; specifically, they were asked about their message campaign, what they learned (including what they learned about marketing and how they used it in their campaign), whether Youth ECHO made them want to get more involved in their community, and how they thought the program could be improved next program year.

Participants were able to describe the different components of their “Dealing Drugs: It’s Not Worth It” campaign, as well as describe how they collected data for their documentary through a community survey. They were surprised to find their research showing such a high percentage of people who knew people that sold drugs or were involved with drugs. They decided to target their campaign to a younger audience, stating that “In the documentary, we was tryin’ to get to the younger kids ... because ... it’s probably too late for this generation, like, we was tryin’ to tell those kids, the young kids now, it’s not cool to sell drugs.” As one participant stated, “Our main focus is ... the kids, ‘cause, you know as, you know kids’ minds they easily, that mean they can go anyway, like, when you older, the older you get the harder, like for you to change because you’re stuck in your habits.”

The group felt empowered by their work, and felt they meaningfully contributed not only to the betterment of the community, but to the foundations of the Youth ECHO program, in large part because the structure of the program gave them a lot of decision-making power. They were enthusiastic when discussing their role in creating the “permanent Youth ECHO logo” of a microphone with red hook at the bottom. They felt their input was heard in the design: “We put

² The Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBS) is a national school-based survey conducted by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention.

in ideas, yeah, like, the mic ... the mic represents ... voice, the music, it represents hip hop, and it represents, like, just us, like, our culture and everything.”

When talking about their block party, they referred to it as “hot.” They also felt they learned a lot about working together. They reported that things were rocky at first because they all knew each other from Red Hook and had their cliques and wanted to stay in their own groups. But they said that staff “kept on putting us into groups and changing it,” and that forced them to work together with people they would not have chosen to work with before. Indeed, this helped break down barriers; as one student suggested, he was nervous working with some of the other participants because they were gay, but now he felt like they were all cool. This helped them work together on all aspects of the campaign. As they described, their message slogan was chosen democratically. Everyone was able to contribute to brainstorming a list of possible slogans, and they debated the different ideas and finally voted on which one to use. This was the same process used for naming the documentary.

Participants were asked to talk about some of the important things they learned in the program. One thing that surprised them and, indeed, helped to inform their message campaign, was when they learned how little money drug dealers actually make. They compared the money drug dealers made with that of a McDonald’s worker. They were also surprised that one of the sessions they enjoyed most was when police officers from the local precinct came and performed role-playing skits with them. They said they thought “it was cool” and “fun,” and that “nobody felt tension ... everybody was just cool and relaxed.” This positive experience with the police officers was repeated when they were asked about how they felt about coming to the courthouse for the Youth ECHO program. They said their interactions with the court officers were good. “I be like, ‘What up y’all,’ they be like, ‘See you later! Good night!’” said one participant, and another said, “They be saying good morning to me!” It was clear that being in a court and having to interact with court officers did not reduce their commitment to the program.

Issues related to jobs and power were also identified as important concepts they learned in the program. When discussing a presenter from Added Value, a local agricultural non-profit, one participant recounted a major theme of jobs in the community:

He started to talk to us about, money wise, he was talking about money ... he was talking about how, um, how, why money is so low in this community because everybody’s building places, like, before back in the day, like, you know, everybody, like, like, every job, everybody’s job was like, alright, if you had this job, like, say you worked at a deli, that person that worked in the deli lived in this neighborhood, so when you buy something, you’re feeding them, like you’re feeding them. Now, it’s like, everybody that has like a job out here they don’t even live out here so our money is being sent somewhere else, and it’s being spent here but being sent somewhere else.

Another participant discussed the need for more programs for kids and for more jobs in the community, “so people can stay off the streets.” When asked about the potential of Ikea, which recently opened a store in the neighborhood, helping with unemployment, one person stated that, “They hire Red Hook, and then they fire them. Like, that’s not right, yo.” Another stated that, “There’s mad people from Red Hook who work there for like two months, then they drop them,” and another still said, “I don’t think they like people from Red Hook working in Red Hook, basically.” One person summed up everyone’s thoughts when she said, “When they hire people

from Red Hook, I think it's only so they can, like, um, get y'all to back their idea to have something new in the neighborhood, just to get y'all on board, but then they drop you and there's nothing you can do about it." One participant mentioned that he learned about "people in power," and how "it doesn't matter about blacks and whites anymore, it really matters who has money," and who is "marginalized."

Interestingly, this issue of power came up in an unexpected way that the group discussed: publicity of their own program. A local newspaper in Cobble Hill, Brooklyn wrote an article about the Youth ECHO program, and while they were excited about being in the newspaper, they were upset by the headline that stated the program was giving at-risk kids a chance. "I didn't like that shit. I'm not at risk. And they trying to say that 'cause we in the hood..." They were upset that the title seemed to imply that the program was good for them because they were poor and from Red Hook, and didn't recognize the work that the young people themselves did to try to help their community, i.e., the title focused on how good the program was for its participants, and not how good the participants were for the community.

Gauging what participants learned about marketing proved difficult. The participants could not remember the major themes from the marketing presentations and workshops and were confused by the term "marketing" itself; they were not able to explicate what they learned from these workshops. However, one participant did state that the presenters helped them generate campaign slogans, and another stated that he learned that people do not look at flyers, so when they did their campaign, they "had to make things stand out so people will look at it ... we learned to put our flyers at places where people hang out at," so they flyered at what they called "the hotspots": the barbershop, The Chicken Spot, and the library.

Overall, the participants were extremely positive in their feedback. They not only felt good about their work, they felt empowered and motivated. One participant stated, "We are the new movement," while another said, "We learned a lot from this program. Word, like, a lot of us has changed." One student, who was a bit shy when she started the program, said that she "learned how to speak out on stuff." Others expressed that at first they were in the program just for the stipend and they did not care at all, but that "you change, you actually, actually want to help, learn, it's an experience. Not a lot of people get to say, like, yeah, I did this, I learned this." Everyone felt that they now wanted to get more involved in their community, because as one participant stated, they "can make a difference now." Another stated, "We got a chance, we have an opportunity, it's a real open opportunity for us." "I feel like we got to people, and that's the most important thing."

Additionally, they felt like the activities were fun, that they liked coming every week, and one participant stated that the program kept him out of trouble. All the participants thought the program was great, they would not change much, and expressed a desire to return to the program for a second term.³ The few suggestions they did have for next program year were: the program should go later (to about 6:45pm), they should take more trips (one a month), and have better snacks.

³ Seven cohort 1 participants reapplied for cohort 2, 4 of whom were accepted. An additional cohort 1 participant was hired as a full-time AmeriCorps member to work with the program.

Changes in Program for Cohort 2

Program Strengths

Staff were able to identify 15 participants for Cohort 1; many ECHO members said later they decided to interview for the job because it was “something new” and didn’t yet have a reputation among teens. Again, staff recruited these young people based on their behavior in group interviews, one-on-one interviews, and their social networks, intentionally recruiting a mix of kids who “stay inside” and regularly attend school and those who “be outside” and participate in “antisocial” behaviors like dealing or using drugs, cutting school, and public drinking.

Participants clearly felt ownership over the program, their message, and the campaign. They showed themselves to be willing and able to think critically about the social forces affecting their neighborhood and about the role of youth in promoting both positive and negative behaviors. One example of their commitment to the program was their adoption of the t-shirts. Once the Youth ECHO t-shirts were made and distributed, the young people wore them around the neighborhood all summer, even after the program was over.

The degree of decision-making power granted the youth helped to create buy-in and also gave the final products the street credibility they needed. Despite some initial concern that youth participants would be perceived as less cool because of their participation in the program, staff actually found that most program participants wanted to return for a second year and that even those who decided not to return referred close friends or siblings. Many of the participants described showing the documentary to friends who thought it was “poppin’” because it depicted “what really goes on out here.”

The block party was successful in demonstrating the work of Youth ECHO. Participants were excited to have a venue where they could be seen as hard workers with jobs. Additionally, they were equally excited to show their friends and family members the work they had completed in the program. There was great turnout for a first time event, particularly with teenagers aged 13-16.

Program Weaknesses and Changes

Despite Cohort 1’s many achievements, there were inevitably hitches that arose, many of which were addressed head-on in planning for the second year. The recruitment and interview process for Cohort 1 identified youth who were well-connected and smart, but it did not do a sufficient job of identifying young people who were inclined to be interested in discussing social issues or marketing. As a result, during the pilot program year, at any given time there were a handful of participants actively engaged and a handful who were relatively disengaged. The latter group still demonstrated interest in being a part of Youth ECHO, but for various reasons (learning disabilities, cognitive development, and maturity level) occasionally had difficulty connecting to the material.

In preparing for Cohort 2, staff consulted with a program in Boston called Teen Empowerment, which works with a similar population. Many of the program alterations for the second year

were developed based on recommendations that came out of those discussions. For instance, the interview process was restructured to include immediate discussions about the issues youth face in Red Hook. By integrating brainstorming opportunities into the interviews and conducting two rounds of interviews, youth had the opportunity both to see that the program took their experiences and opinions seriously and that they were expected to participate and demonstrate commitment from the beginning. The revised interview structure also enabled staff to see which young people wanted to talk about social issues, who took charge and was respected by peers, and who wasn't really capable of engaging in discussions of this nature.

The twice-weekly, two-hour session structure was effective during the school year. Because the program started in March 2008, however, it had to run through the summer. This became a problem when many participants wanted to find full-time summer jobs, most of which ended at 4 or 5pm. Youth ECHO also struggled with absence and lateness policies. In response, several changes were implemented for the second year. The program shifted to an October-June schedule, parallel with the school calendar. The start time was moved a half hour later to accommodate youth who travel longer distances to and from school. Youth who aren't in the room by 4:30pm are considered late and get docked pay. Youth who are absent must either show a note or they get docked pay. So far, this tighter structure has had a positive effect on attendance and promptness. As a rule, participants are on time, attend regularly, or are absent for legitimate reasons. The stricter structure also prepares them better for standard policies in future jobs they might have.

About half way through the pilot year staff realized that youth joined the program because they wanted to feel like they were working. While participants enjoyed the discussions about Red Hook, crime, and urban policy, it was clear they didn't always see how these issues related to the task of creating a tangible message campaign. Further, because the introduction of marketing was saved until the last three months of the project, the participants had less opportunity to review the marketing information before they were asked to apply it, which may have negatively affected information retention.

This year's curriculum will front-load work on healthy communication, active listening, team-building, and leadership styles in the first few weeks so the group can develop a sense of cohesion and a healthy group identity. At a weekend retreat, these skills will be further developed. The group will also decide the issue it wants to address right away. As a result, when the curriculum transitions into research methods, organizing methods, and marketing methods participants will have a concrete anchor for these more abstract concepts. These latter components will first be explored in sessions led by program staff and then by various marketing agencies, who will lead specialized presentations/discussions on alternative advertising methods and innovations in the field.

Next, participants will explore their topic and design their campaign. The participants will again devise a research project to learn more about the issue at hand, including how it is affecting young people, how they are thinking about it, and how they are talking about it. In short, youth will conduct market research. They will also conduct research with adults involved in the issue (e.g. police, teachers, parents, community leaders, and/or court staff). They will compile this

research and analyze it. Based on their findings and drawing on the marketing and organizing lessons, they will create a multi-stage campaign to address the problems they identified.

In the final section, youth will partner with marketing professionals, other youth programs, or various professionals as appropriate to carry out their campaign. Over the course of the remaining four months, youth will have the opportunity to develop a much more nuanced and sustained campaign than they did during the pilot year.

Cohort 2 started October 2008 and will run to June 2009. Fifteen young people were recruited, but immediately, two were unable to participate for family reasons, so the program has been running with 13 participants. Participants are 70% African American and 30% Latino, 60% male and 40% female, between the ages of 13 and 18, and all are Red Hook residents, with 90% living in the Red Hook Houses.

Changes in Evaluation Plan

Because the focus group provided rich data, the qualitative component of the evaluation has been expanded to involve an additional focus group at mid-year, as well as possible one-on-one interviews at the end of the program year. The survey has been revised to capture more of what the program seeks to change (e.g., improved research and public speaking skills, increased knowledge of marketing strategies, increased knowledge about the topic they have chosen to organize around) and less of the traditional youth development goals (though some of the questions from the original survey will remain). The survey will be administered at three discrete points throughout the course of the program: a few weeks into the program after they have chosen their campaign topic, mid-year, and end-of year, so that program staff can gauge change in knowledge earlier on in the year, and if they don't see change on certain indicators at mid-year, they will know which topics they have to focus more on the second half of the program year. Additionally, a pre/post survey regarding attitudes towards courts, police, and laws will be administered, as one of the interesting findings from the focus group was that they enjoyed their workshop with officers from the local precinct.

For Cohort One, participants were asked to identify peers to come in to participate in a survey in order to assess how much influence participants had on their peers. While they were able to successfully recruit many peers at the start of the program, the number who came to take the follow-up survey was significantly lower, and none of those who came back were able to identify drug dealing as the focus of the Youth ECHO campaign. This component of the evaluation illuminated a few things about teenager peer groups, mainly that peer groups at that age are transitory, especially once summer comes and they no longer see their peers daily at school. Moreover, because the expected change in the participants' survey results did not occur, it was unlikely that there would be change among their peers. Administration of comparison or peer group surveys will be postponed until Cohort Three in order to focus on developing instruments that accurately capture change in program participants.

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