

YOUTH MEDIA TRAINING PROJECT REPORT

Ensworth Foundation

The Ensworth Foundation provided funding to the Village for Families and Children for a Pilot program training youth in the use of video, web, and print media. The Pilot was conducted by High Impact Quality (High IQ) Media Productions and aimed at building upon the plans and ideas that emerged from a city-wide Youth Forum of over 70 Hartford youth ages 8-18. At the end of the Forum consensus was reached by the participants to continue working together and find ways to make their voices heard in issues that directly affect their lives. *The theory of change behind this initiative is that if youth are allowed to have their own voice and opinion, they will make improvements in their skills and behaviors.*

The young people engaged in the Pilot worked on media products that were agreed upon at the Forum. They also developed strategies for communicating with other Forum participants not directly engaged in the Pilot. The media products are a newsletter, a basic web site, and the production of a television show based on the Forum. The Pilot began as planned, and through the experience working with the young people, several new strategies and plans emerged and are described in this Report. **The Project Evaluation and Report is based on the Results-Based Accountability Model developed by Mark Freedman.**

WHAT WAS DONE

In the initial stages of the Pilot, all of the Forum participants were contacted by telephone and given an update of current and future plans. Those who had special interest in Media Training were given dates and times for the first training sessions. Over the first five months of training, twenty different young people participated based upon their interest, availability, transportation and other factors. Out of the initial group of participants, a core group of five young people were selected for the Pilot's intensive training. The other fifteen remain in contact in varying degrees and provided input into the products and ideas for ongoing youth involvement, especially youth leadership.

Participants

Of the original twenty participants, there were thirteen males and seven females, nine of whom are African American and the remaining eleven are Puerto Rican. They are from neighborhoods in south, north and central Hartford.

The final core group was primarily self-selected based on degree of interest in one or more areas of media, regular participation, and level of productivity. All of the remaining fifteen participants continued to participate in the Pilot, but on a less intensive basis. No one was denied additional training opportunities. The final core group of five fully-trained participants is three males and two females; two are age fifteen, two are age thirteen, and one is age eighteen. They again represent the three main geographic areas of Hartford.

There were three Adult mentor-trainers. The Director provided the training in video, editing, and related media areas. He worked with all participants, and most intensively with the core group. He organized the schedule, provided transportation, tracked training progress and needs, collected data, and provided oversight for the contacts with other Forum participants. The Assistant (in-kind) provided training on web and print design and additional editing software. In addition, a second adult assistant was recruited (in-kind) and provided assistance with daily training, scheduling and one on one support to the trainees.

Over the course of twelve months, there were two training sessions per month in the first six months and in the final six months there were one to two training sessions per week for a total of forty-seven two-four hour sessions.

Training and Products

As planned, instruction was given to the trainees for camera operation, filming, editing, and basic software use for print graphics, animation and video production. The young people selected projects for practice using the equipment and techniques. Each of the five young people chose an area of concentration (e.g., video, web, print, or editing) and their work in those areas is reflected in the final products. Three of the trainees were given internships filming and editing special events, including the Open House for The Village South.

The core group of trainees completed their own products as well as the products outlined in the Pilot Proposal. These are: a newsletter, design and development of the basic web site for the Youth Organization, and a half-hour television program about the Youth Organization. The television program begins with footage taken at the Youth Forum with a focus in the issues raised there. It continues with current ideas and plans for addressing those concerns with new footage and interviews with Forum participants. The core group has contacted Hartford Cable Access Television to request time for the program to be shown.

During the course of the training, the five trainees in the core group assisted with telephone calls and visits to the other Forum participants in order to assure their input into the products. Those contacts also assured their input into developing ideas and strategies leading to the proposed Youth Organization.

HOW WELL DID WE DO IT: *Strategies for Success*

During the course of the training Pilot, it became apparent that changes in the original plans were needed to assure a successful project and success for those young people with high levels of interest but also with significant barriers to full participation. These changes represent what was learned and will be important in developing and implementing a successful Youth Media Program beyond the Pilot.

- During the first five months of the Pilot, twenty young people had varying levels of interest in and commitment to completing their project. The core group of five was

selected in the sixth month using the basic criteria of attendance, level of interest, and motivation.

- During the same period of time it became apparent that the participants had a range of needs and, due to situations in their lives, not all could participate fully without additional supports. This required that the staff implement a triage system that allowed those who could not be in the core group to remain connected to the project.

The participants fell into three groupings based on criteria reported by the young people themselves and staff observations:

1. Skills and Interest: these young people are able to maintain a high level of interest and participation in the project. Of the five in the core group, two reported stresses in their lives, but were able to maintain a high level of participation in spite of those stresses.
 2. Life Stresses: a number of the young people reported stresses at home, school and/or in their communities, including parent/family conflict, financial stresses, difficulty with school performance, and peer issues. The reports were documented in the training notes and are confidential. While these stresses are significant, two of the participants who fall into this category were able to continue as core members. They reported to the director that the support of the group and adult mentors was critical to their ability to cope with the stresses.
 3. Risk: of the original twenty participants, eleven fell into this category. The criteria used to define this category are based on degree of stress and the potential negative outcomes for the young people. The criteria include crisis or near-crisis level issues including family or peer conflict, family or neighborhood violence, significant problems with school performance, discipline, suspension and/or expulsion, and encounters with the judicial system, including arrests, and incarceration and other behaviors that lead to such.
- It is significant to report that even given the described stresses in their lives all of the other fifteen participants remain close to the Pilot even though their contact varies in frequency. They provide input into ideas for the media projects, as well as plans for an ongoing Youth Organization. They report that they enjoy the media training; it gives them a support network, and they feel hopeful about obtaining a future job.
 - The director and assistants report that it was necessary for each of them to provide time to listen to the young people in the “risk” category and provide support at the time of their crisis. However, more significant support and services will need to be built into the Media Training Program.
 - Transportation was an ongoing need for the Pilot especially for three of the five in the core group.
 - The majority of the young people reported both informally and formally on the pre and post testing that media training provided for them an exciting learning

opportunity that allowed them to develop their creative ideas and also kept their attention and interest. It will be important to collect more information in the next stages of this Media Training program to document the elements that attract the young people, keep their attention, and result in their improved participation and performance. These elements can be compared in measurable terms to the more traditional learning experience that the young people have in school.

- During the course of the Pilot, weekly contacts were made with the core group of participants' parents that opened a dialog and options for future planning. Parents were informed about where the young people were going and what they would be doing, and were assured that supervision was provided. Parents gave their permission to participate and reported back to the Director and Assistants that they valued this project. In the next stages of the Media Training program more information about the specific value of the program to parents and their observations about changes or improvements in their children should be documented.

HOW WELL DID WE DO IT? *Are the Young People Better Off?*

This question is answered in the Pilot around three areas: Skills/Knowledge; Attitude; and Behavior. All findings are based on young people's report, observation by staff, and pre and post testing. In pre and post testing, the Director and each young person reported progress in each of the areas on a scale from 1-5.

- Skills and Knowledge in each of the media areas and production: beginning and ending assessments were very close with a beginning average of 1.8 from the young people's assessment and director's average of 1.4, and ending assessments of 4.2 and 3.8 respectively. These results are confirmed by direct observation and staff evaluation of the media products.
- Attitude: criteria for assessing changes or improvements in attitude are based on the young people's reports, staff observation, and pre and post testing of the following:
 - (1) feeling respected by peers and leaders in the group;
 - (2) feeling empowered to organize efforts on their own behalf;
 - (3) feeling competent to produce "good" media products;
 - (4) skills not recognized previously by themselves or others;
 - (5) feeling hopeful about finishing school and future employment; and
 - (6) successful contacts with other Forum participants with strategies for continued communication and participation.

The young people's average beginning self-assessment in this area is 2.4 compared to the director's beginning assessment average of 1.8 and ending assessments of 4.4 and 4.0 respectively.

- Behavior: criteria for assessing behavior changes and improvements are based on the young people's reports, staff observation, and pre and post assessment of the following:
 - (1) better attendance at the media project sessions than in school or other activities currently or previously committed to;
 - (2) improved school attendance;

- (3) decision to stay in school after planning to drop out (during the Pilot period);
- (4) strategies learned and used during the training that were carried out at school and/or at home, for example, *when starting to react, stop and count, think, and then respond*.
- (5) listening to adult opinion before taking action or making a decision.

The young people's average beginning self-assessment in this area is 2.8 compared to the director's assessment average of 2.4 with ending average assessments of 4.4 and 4.2 respectively.

The pre and post testing results demonstrate not only improvements in skills, attitudes and behaviors, but also that the self-assessments are likely to be fairly accurate as compared with very similar beginning and ending ratings by the director.

An example of specific behavioral change occurred during the last few weeks of the project when two of the participants had an encounter with the police that they characterized as a form of "police brutality" and "unfair arrest". They reported that instead of reacting immediately, they shared their story and discussed the incident with other core group members and media training staff. Together they developed and evaluated alternative strategies for addressing the situation. They reported that they recognized their own responsibility for the situation, and at the same time, felt valued, trusted, and supported. They are currently working on specific actions to remedy the situation.

WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED FROM THIS PROJECT-*Indicators of Success to be included in the Media Training Program*

We know from the Pilot experience, supported by the Ensworth Foundation, that a full Media Training Program is needed to follow the Pilot now coming to an end. The Media Training Program will need added components:

1. Administrative staff: to coordinate the program, record documentation and other data, arrange transportation, recruit additional youth, and provide triage linking to wrap-around support services for youth at risk.

The administrative support will require additional resources given that 100% of the young people involved required at least 30% of their time spent in the project for sharing and processing daily circumstances that otherwise could have interfered with their participation in the training program

2. Program Integration and Partners are needed to broaden the media and social support components of the Media Training Program. For example, the Village for Families and Children offers Outpatient, Neighborhood and Family Support Services, Permanency Support Services and other recreational activities. Media internships may be arranged with the Greater Hartford Academy for the Performing Arts, Capitol Community College, Hartford Cable Access Television and others. These

and other partnerships can be fully explored in developing a full Media Training program; and

3. Youth leadership development is a critical component of the Media Training Program giving the young people their *voice through media*. The young people at the Forum and in the Training Pilot unanimously agree that an ongoing youth organization needs further development. In the immediate future, there is consensus that an enhanced web site can form the basis for connecting the young people already involved and for bringing in more.

Proposed indicators of success for a full Media Training program with a strong youth leadership component are:

- Improved school attendance and performance
- Decreased school drop out
- Decreased conflicts with the judicial system
- Increased skills and preparedness for the job market with good-paying jobs

NEXT STEPS

Immediate Need:

The young people in this project were successful in contacting the majority of the Forum participants. However, it was time consuming and many moved or changed telephone numbers. All of those reached expressed commitment to continue developing the proposed Youth Organization while building a permanent Media Training Program--bringing together the theme of *Youth Voice through Media*.

The outcome of those discussions is a consensus that the youth organization needs to be further developed while plans and a proposal for an ongoing Youth Media Training Program are being completed.

1. Web Site: as this Pilot comes to an end, there is a need for the Web site to be further developed in order for the young people to continue contact with each other. Through a more advanced web site the young people can continue building the youth organization. The web site would be used as follows:
 - A special Sign-In page for current and new young people to officially “join” the Youth Organization, and to indicate interest in media training, youth leadership opportunities, and other area of interest.
 - Listing of options for working on upcoming television shows and/or other media products on topics of interest.
 - Announcements about Youth Leadership Training opportunities, and about youth-related events in the community

- Method for beginning to organize youth in neighborhoods as they sign on to the project.
2. **Youth Media Training Program**: while the young people continue to develop the youth organization through an enhanced web site and continue developing strategies for making their voices heard, plans for a permanent Youth Media Training program need to be made, ideally with an advanced professional job training component. This program should be developed based on the findings of the Pilot as described above in order to build upon the current success and give a voice to Hartford youth. The young people involved in the Pilot have identified the first issue they wish to address: RESPECTING YOUTH—*at home, at school, and in the community.*

Based on the findings in the Pilot, a successful Media Training Program will include the following.

- Administrative and support staff
- Partners for linking services and training options
- A full training program with tracks in video, editing and animation, web design and print media
- Opportunities for personal growth and development through media (e.g., video about “My Family” or “Cultural Heritage, etc)
- Natural peer and adult mentor support
- Formal links to wrap-around and other services
- Connections with media, youth leadership, and workforce internships
- Guidance to workforce connections
- Periodic forums for youth to express their voices on issues important to them
- Location in central place(s) in Hartford
- Transportation and/or access to transportation