

Helping At-Risk Youth to “Think Big:”

A Partnership between a College and a Community Agency

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Abstract

Research suggests that youth community service programs have the potential to be an interesting and engaging means to promote stronger self-image among adolescents who take a part in these activities (Shumer, 2005). Moreover, having at-risk youth engage in community service activities can be an opportune vehicle for promoting positive youth development and outcomes. The present study attempts to meet this need by promoting empowerment and a sense of community among a group of vulnerable adolescents via a partnership between a liberal arts college and a community agency which serves underprivileged families and youths. Quantitative results show that empathy and general self-efficacy scores increased among the adolescent participants from pre- to post-test. Although the quantitative results did not show an increase in a sense of community, the qualitative findings did indicate that this project proved beneficial in other ways. Implications for this study are outlined as well.

Keywords: adolescent development, community service, empowerment, sense of community

The increase in the number and types of after-school programs over the past decade can be attributed, at least partially, to increased support and spending on after-school programs by the U.S. government. Between 1998 and 2004, federal funding for after-school programs increased from \$40 million to over \$1 billion primarily due to increased funding from the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (Roth, Malone, & Brooks-Gunn, 2010).

After-school programs offer a promising avenue for building resilience and promoting mental health among vulnerable youth (Frazier, Cappella & Atkins, 2007). Fifteen percent (8.4 million) of U.S. children participate in after-school programs, with higher rates of participation for African American (24%) and Hispanic (21%) children (Afterschool Alliance, 2009). Participating in structured after-school programs predicts improvement in school attendance: test scores and grades: and health and safety. Gains are highest for youth at risk for negative outcomes (Afterschool Alliance, 2013).

Many of these after-school programs were initially created based on the idea that young people's participation in organized activities after school would be beneficial for their personal and social growth. While other factors have influenced the growth of after-school programs in the U.S., one of the goals of many current programs is to foster personal and social development through a range of adult-supervised activities. Moreover, substantial developmental research suggests that opportunities to connect with supportive adults and participate with peers in meaningful and

challenging activities in organized after-school programs, can help youths develop and apply new skills and personal talents (Eccles & Templeton, 2002). In other words, after-school programs can be a prime community setting for enhancing young people's development.

The greater effect of autonomy and relatedness for younger students suggests that early middle school might be a crucial time in adolescent development. By high school, youths may have already resolved these issues for themselves and would therefore be less impacted by a program designed to promote such development. Moreover, promoting a strong sense of community may be particularly important in oppressed populations (e.g., minorities, the urban poor) as there is a dearth of research in this area. Thus, the need to promote empowerment and a stronger sense of community with a vulnerable population of adolescents involved in an after-school program was addressed in the present study.

Literature Review

Empowerment of Youth

Historically, a primary function of youth programs was rehabilitation or containment (e.g., keeping youths off the streets). An initial shift from these risk-based preventive approaches was in the direction of fostering healthy youth development and capacity building through active community participation (Kim, Crutchfield, Williams & Hepler, 1998; Small & Memmo, 2004). More recently, positive youth development approaches have been expanded to incorporate a focus on youth

empowerment.

In the broadest sense, empowerment refers to individuals, families, organizations, and communities gaining control and mastery, within the social, economic, and political context of their lives, in order to improve equity and quality of life (Rappaport, 1984; Zimmerman, 2000). The concept of empowerment has been addressed at both theoretical and practice levels in specific reference to youths. There are various models of youth empowerment, and the one the current project drew upon is the Empowerment Education Model.

The Empowerment Education (EE) Model specifically emphasizes the development of skills and knowledge that support youth efforts toward social action and change, and links individual empowerment to community organizing (Wallerstein, Sanchez-Merki, & Velarde, 2005). The ultimate outcomes of the EE processes are increased self-, collective-, and political-efficacy, resulting in both self-protective individual behaviors as well as other-protective socially responsible behaviors. Thus, fostering the development of empathy, self-efficacy and active participation toward a goal within a safe group context, EE can bridge individual behavior change and group efforts for social change (Wallerstein et al., 2005). This next section discusses empathy, one of the desired outcomes of Empowerment Education, in more detail.

Empathy

As adolescents develop higher order emotional and cognitive reasoning abilities, they also gain increased opportunities to participate in prosocial behavior due to changes in social context and interpersonal relationships (Fabes, Kupanoff, & Laible, 1999). These developmental changes make understanding prosocial behavior among early adolescents particularly important, yet negative outcomes tend to be much more researched than positive outcomes, particularly among urban, at-risk youth. Indeed, most of the literature on prosocial behavior is focused on white, middle-class populations.

Theoretically, empathy has been proposed as a prerequisite skill that fosters prosocial behavior (Roberts & Strayer, 1996), yet few empirical studies have examined this hypothesis. Empathy incorporates several components, including the ability to recognize, take the perspective of, and respond to another's emotions (Eisenberg, Shea, Carlo, & Knight, 1991). Whereas the majority of studies that have linked empathy and prosocial behavior focus on young children or young adults, the few studies that have examined this relationship with adolescent samples have found a positive association between empathy and prosocial behavior (e.g., Eisenberg, Miller, & Shell, 1991; Roberts et al., 1996).

The importance of empathy-related

responding and prosocial behavior toward other people has been investigated by only a few researchers, and even fewer investigators have examined empathy itself in adolescence (Eisenberg & Fabes, 1990). Few researchers have focused on positive youth development and how to promote empathy during adolescence. However, interest in empathy and its socialization has been increasing (Eisenberg et al., 2002; Eisenberg & McNally, 1993), which is probably because of the theoretic and empirical association between empathy and children's prosocial behavior (Eisenberg & Fabes, 1990). This line of research has developed as researchers are interested in defining and assessing the underlying social skills that are necessary for prosocial behavior. These social skills include getting along with peers, being well liked, being generous and thoughtful, being perceptive about others' feelings and perspectives, or being empathic (Epps, Park, Huston & Ripke, 2005).

Empathy is defined as "an affective response that stems from the apprehension or comprehension of another's emotional state or condition and that is identical or very similar to what the other person is feeling or would be expected to feel" (Eisenberg, 2000b, p. 677). Individuals exhibit empathy if they are able to grasp how a friend or classmate would be feeling in a particular situation. In addition, if people empathize, they will seek to reduce their own distress and alleviate harm by not engaging in antisocial behavior (Miller & Eisenberg, 1988). Furthermore, if individuals are able to empathize with others, then they are more likely to behave prosocially because acting antisocially would be incongruent with being empathetic and may result in emotional dissonance. Researchers have substantiated a positive link between empathy and prosocial behavior (Eisenberg, 2000a; McMahon, Wernsman, & Parnes, 2006; Strayers & Roberts, 2004).

Empowerment Theory in Collaborative Partnerships

Models of empowerment can also apply to and improve collaborative partnerships. Community partnerships serve as catalysts; that is, members act to effect changes in programs, policies, and practices throughout the community. Collaborations may be more effective since partners share responsibilities, risks, and resources (Himmelman, 1992). One particular model of community empowerment which was drawn from models of health promotion and community development (Fawcett, Paine, Francisco, & Vliet, 1993) served as a framework for the community partners involved in this project. This model involves five elements: collaborative planning, community action, community change, community capacity and outcomes; and adaptation.

Collaborative planning, the first element of the empowerment process, is a critical and ongoing aspect of community partnerships. In this ongoing planning, community partnerships bring together persons and organizations from diverse economic, experiential, and employment backgrounds to collaboratively plan and implement changes in the community (Fawcett et al., 1993). Key steps involved in the planning process could include: (a) establishing a common understanding of the goals you are trying to achieve; (b) designating agency roles and responsibilities aligned with their interests and capacity; (c) developing a clear timeline; and (d) designing a means of data collection so that the results of the efforts are demonstrated.

Community action and community change are among the desired proximate outcomes of partnerships (Fawcett et al., 1993). Community action consists of actions taken by leadership and membership to make changes related to the mission of the initiative. Community change consists of new or transformed programs, policies, or practices related to the mission of the initiative. Community partners collaborate on collecting and communicating information about the process and accomplishments that can be used to promote continuous improvement (Gabor, 1990).

Community capacity and related outcomes, such as reduction in adolescent pregnancy or high school dropout rates, are the ultimate goals of the collaboration. Community capacity is the community's ability to pursue its chosen purposes and course of action both now and in the future. Community capacity may be affected by a variety of personal or group and environmental factors. For instance, an initiative to prevent adolescent pregnancy may not be effective without forging ties with many sectors and agencies such as schools, health organizations, and religious organizations. Community partnerships need to continue to adapt in order to address new issues and conditions. For example, partnerships that lose key leadership and other resources may need to renew themselves. The key to successful partnerships is building long-term, sustainable relationships. This takes effort and time, but the outcomes for the partners and the community can be extremely beneficial.

Cultural Competence

Being culturally competent is another important issue to weave throughout any partnership and interventions that are developed. Ensuring a culturally competent workforce, including competent professionals and a culturally competent organization greatly facilitates the development and maintenance of community and inter-organizational partnerships by ensuring that all organization members are on the same page. Given the

degree to which communities of color mistrust established organizations, partnerships are delicate at best. A poorly trained youth worker or teacher, or a non-welcoming receptionist or meeting room can easily turn interested parties away from the agency or the school. On the other hand, workers who are flexible and open to cultural differences promote the continuity of partnerships.

Cultural competence involves the nature of practice with diverse populations. In addition to having a heightened awareness about the issues that clients from minority populations experience, Sue (1998) stated that culturally competent practice involves integrating information and data about the individuals, families, and communities from these minority groups into delivery approaches. Thus, cultural competence refers to the ability to acknowledge the impact of oppressive histories, unique life experiences, languages, beliefs and customs (Sue, 1998). Service organizations need to be mindful of these factors.

College's Relationship with the Local Community

Historically, the relationship between our small liberal arts college and the local community can be characterized as tenuous at best. Former administrations did not promote engagement with the community, and in fact, many local organizations felt alienated and not respected by the actions of previous college leaders. However, this is no longer the case. The new president at the college is eager to form partnerships with the community and have faculty and students, the majority of whom are Caucasian and from middle- to upper-middle class upbringings, engage with the local community, a small city with a population of approximately 43,000.

The private college is situated on a lush, 190-acre campus and is surrounded by beautiful historic homes, yet less than one mile down the road, the landscape is strikingly different. More than 25% of the city's residents fall under the national poverty level and approximately 50% are African American. In 2009, the residents' per capita income was \$13,433, while the median family income was \$30,712. The unemployment rate is 8.4%, significantly higher than the 4.8% rate in the county (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017). This statistic does not accurately reflect the magnitude of the unemployment issue as it does not account for those who have given up looking or are underemployed. Moreover, the school district is ranked one of the lowest in the state due to its consistently low performance in math and reading. High school graduation rates are significantly lower than the national average. Rates of gang violence and drug addiction continue to rise as well.

Current Study

The local chapter of an international and faith-based charitable organization approached the Chair of the Behavioral Sciences Department at the small liberal arts college about the possibility of students collaborating on a community service project with the youths in their after-school program. As a new faculty member and huge proponent of community engagement, the author was asked to follow up with the coordinator of the after-school program at the organization.

Based on discussions with the coordinator of the after-school program as well as the author's research methods students, we developed a pilot program to implement for the semester. As a component of her curriculum, the coordinator was having the youths read Dr. Ben Carson's, *Think Big: Unleashing Your Potential for Excellence*, so she asked that the pilot program relate to some of the themes in Dr. Carson's book. As such, the format and activities in the pilot program were designed to foster two important factors in positive adolescent development: promoting empowerment and sense of community. The key outcome variable conceptually linked to empowerment was the development of participants' sense of self as well as others. Specifically, it was predicted that the youths who participated in this pilot program with the college would enhance their level of self-efficacy and improve their prosocial attitudes. Prosocial attitudes were operationalized as empathy, responsibility toward others or civic responsibility, and intent to be involved in future community action. Empathy has been shown to be directly related to moral reasoning and behavior (i.e., character), with more empathic adolescents reporting greater moral maturity (Belgrave, Nguyen, Johnson, & Hood, 2011).

Components of the Pilot Program

The components of the pilot program with the youths were divided into three phases (skill building, planning, and action), with each directed toward the goal of conducting a community service project in the context of promoting empowerment and sense of community. The *skill-building phase* consisted of four 50-minute sessions exploring the concepts of community/social action, leadership, team-building, and empathy. The *planning phase* consisted of three sessions where participants chose a social problem or need in the community they wished to address and developed a plan of action. Finally, the *action phase* involved four sessions where participants planned or carried out the service activity. Small groups of the college students took turns facilitating the sessions with the youths over the course of the semester.

Method

Design

The pilot program utilized a pre-test, post-test design. The students from the author's research methods class developed the content for the sessions in each phase and then signed up to co-facilitate those sessions. Additionally, the class, with the guidance of the author, created a brief survey for the youths to take at pre-intervention and post-intervention. One of the college students who speaks Spanish fluently translated the surveys for one of the youths whose native language was Spanish. Moreover, the author conducted two focus groups upon completion of the program: one with the youths and staff, and the second with the college students enrolled in the research methods class. Once the content of the pilot program was developed and the focus group questions outlined, the college students and the author developed the protocol application and were granted permission from the Institutional Review Board to move ahead with the study.

Participants

There were 24 youths who regularly participated in the after-school program. Parents or guardians provided written consent for research purposes and written assent to use survey information was also obtained from the youths themselves. Eight (33%) of the youths were male and sixteen (67%) were female, and the mean age of participants was 13 years. Twelve (50%) were black, six (25%) were Haitian, four (17%) were Hispanic, and two (3%) were Caucasian.

Measures

The 17 students in the research methods class created the pre-post survey that was administered to participants. Demographic items included age, grade level, ethnicity, and religious affiliation. In order to gauge participants' current level of involvement in activities, questions were asked about how frequently (on a 5-point scale from *never* to *almost every day*) they participate in after-school clubs, sports, watch television, hang out with friends, participate in the after-school program at the agency, and volunteer in the community. General self-efficacy was measured with a 10-point GSE scale developed by Schwarzer and Jerusalem (1995). This scale has demonstrated sufficient internal reliability with the majority from samples from 23 nations in the high .80s. In the present study, the alpha coefficient was .87.

Empathy was measured using the 20-question Basic Empathy Scale designed by Jolliffe and Farrington (2006). Although this scale was originally designed for use with adults, it has been examined in populations consisting of youth and teenagers (e.g., Albiero, Matricardi, Speltri, & Toso, 2009; D'Ambrosio, Olivier, Didon, & Besche, 2009). A test of internal

reliability found an alpha coefficient of .72. Intent to be involved in future community action was assessed with three questions created for this study that asked respondents how certain they were that they would be involved in their community when they became adults. A test of internal reliability for the current study found an alpha coefficient of .76. Civic responsibility involves placing a high value on the well-being of other people. Four items were created for this study to assess this construct. The first two questions were used by Mesch (2001) and asked about how important it was to help others and contribute to society. Two additional questions were added to assess how important respondents feel their actions and those of others are to the future of their community and the world. A test of internal reliability using the present data found that the four items had high internal reliability ($\alpha = .81$).

Ongoing feedback from the participants during the process and a focus group following program completion were also gathered to assess whether the program met its goal of being an empowering process that allowed participants to connect with their community and with each other. The questions that were asked of each focus group included what went well in terms of the planning and executing of the project, suggestions for improvement, and what they learned through this experience.

Results

The community-service project

Program participants collectively chose, through group brainstorming and voting, what social issue they wished to address and how they wished to address it. Participants elected to host a fundraising event, a round-robin basketball tournament between the youth and college team basketball players (from the men's and women's teams), in the gym at their main site.

The basketball event was open to the public,

and youths from the community who are not participants of any of the after-school programs were able to play basketball after the round-robin tournament. During the event, baked goods provided by the college students, staff and some of the youths and their families were sold to attendees of the event. The money raised from this bake sale in addition to any donations made during the event were then donated to a local agency which serves homeless veterans.

Program participants and students from the college designed and printed 8,000 flyers which were distributed to all of the students in the city school district. The agency also posted the event on their social media and the college students got the message out through informal and formal avenues at the college. The total number of attendees was not recorded, but there were approximately 40 to 50 youths, parents, and other local community members, including faculty and other students from the college, who attended the event. Almost \$200 in proceeds was raised and donated to the agency that serves homeless veterans in the community.

Quantitative findings

Participation in the community service project was expected to promote youths' self-efficacy, intent to be involved in future community service, empathy, and sense of responsibility. The quantitative results showed that participants did indeed report statistically significant increase in empathy and self-efficacy from pre- to post-intervention. The mean increase in empathy was 4.17, $t(23) = 18.73$, $p < .001$, a 26.1% increase (see Table 1). In addition, the mean increase in self-efficacy for participants was 0.88, $t(23) = 4.53$, $p < .001$, a 5.48% increase (see Table 2). Statistically significant differences were not observed, however, in community involvement or civic responsibility from pre- to post-intervention.

Table 1

20-Item Empathy Scores of Participants from Pre-Test to Post-Test

	n	M	SD
Pre-Test	24	16.00	1.67
Post-Test	24	20.17	1.09

Table 2

10-Item General Self-Efficacy Scores of Participants from Pre-Test to Post-Test

	n	M	SD
Pre-Test	24	15.88	1.45
Post-Test	24	16.75	1.60

Qualitative findings

In an effort to allow everyone to reflect on the semester-long project, two focus groups were conducted at the end of the semester, after the round-robin basketball tournament. One focus group was made up of the youths in the after-school program as well as the key staff who were involved in this project. Hence 14 of the youths and four adult staffers from the agency participated in the first focus group. The second focus group included 12 out of the 17 college students from the research methods class who were available to meet outside of their regular class time. Questions that were posed to each focus group included what went well in terms of the planning and executing of the project, suggestions for improvement, and what they learned through this experience. Each focus group was audio recorded so the author could transcribe the recordings.

The qualitative data collected in this phase of the project was analyzed using framework analysis (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994; Srivastava & Thomson, 2009). Framework analysis has been used in a variety of settings. With framework analysis, the gathered data is sifted, charted, and sorted in accordance with key issues and themes. This involves a five-step process: familiarization; identifying a thematic framework; indexing; charting; and mapping and interpretation (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994). Using this framework to guide the analysis, the author first familiarized herself with the transcripts by reading and rereading the transcripts. At this point, key ideas and themes became familiar. Using these notes, emerging themes arose. The themes were classified, then portions of the transcripts that corresponded to the themes were color coded. The color coding allowed the primary investigator to easily identify which parts of the transcripts corresponded to the different themes. The final step was to arrange the indexed, color-coded data into charts of the themes. This is where the actual quotes of the

focus group attendees were charted according to the themes that emerged from the process. Thus, the emerging themes that developed from the focus group with the youths and agency staff as well as the emerging themes from the focus group with the college students are highlighted below.

Collaboration/support

The three themes that emerged for the youth participants were: the opportunity to contribute as a team, the emotional and informational support they received from the college students, and the desire to participate again the following year. Thirteen out of the fourteen youths indicated they were proud of the fact they “all came together to work toward a goal.” They really enjoyed the group process and feeling their input was valued. One of the youths said, “It was cool that we got to come up with the idea for the basketball tournament” and another added, “Yeah, I liked having a say in what we did ‘cuz usually we don’t.”

Additionally, the youth participants enjoyed interacting with the college students and developing relationships with them over the course of the semester. The college students seemed to provide the youths with emotional support. For example, one youth stated, “I can go to her and talk to her at any time and talk about most things. I’m not afraid to go and talk to her whenever I have a problem or something, or an issue that I would like to discuss. I would say she’s the adult in my life.” Another youth described the emotional support that she received from one college student in particular as something that her mother was unable to provide her. She reflected, “I have someone that I can look up to now; she encourages me to do my best and to try new things. She’s just there for me. She’s someone that’s there for me now.” The college students also provided help with career direction. This was demonstrated by comments from the youths on discussing future goals. On the topic of her becoming a doctor, one

youth stated, “We talk about it; we talk about the classes that I need to take in high school, and the classes that I need to take in college, and the schools that I need to go to after that because that’s going to be a lot.” Another youth said, “It was helpful to learn more about college and talk about my goals. I never thought college was an option for me, but now I’m thinking that it might be.”

Lastly, all 14 of the youths exuberantly mentioned how they want to work with the college students again and hold another basketball tournament next year. They shared ideas for how to improve upon the event next year including having a half-time show where the youths could perform a song or dance. One young person summed up the group sentiment well when he said, “We want to do this again next year. Can we? This was *so* awesome!”

Partnership potential

Of the four staff members present during the focus group, two main themes emerged from their participation: how beneficial the experience was for the kids and the agency, and how they want to continue this partnership with the college. For example, one staff member articulated it well when she said “how positive this experience was for the kids as well as the agency as a whole. There was so much positive energy in the building that night. It was great to see it and to have so many community members here. Usually we deal with negative, difficult things on a day-to-day basis so this (the basketball tournament) was refreshing to experience.” Another staff member said, “The kids had a great time. The college students were great with them (the youth) and are such positive role models.”

The second theme to emerge was that the staff, like the youths, want to continue to build on the relationship that was started with the college. This sentiment was confirmed by the four staff members as well. “We want to continue doing this kind of thing.” Even the Executive Director of the agency, who was not present during the focus group, but who reached out to the author after the event said, “We appreciate the relationship we have formed with the college and definitely want to continue partnering. Doing this helps to promote hope among the youth that we serve who unfortunately face many challenges in their daily lives.”

Cultural and communication competence

The college students also benefited from the experience. Three themes emerged from their responses: they became more culturally sensitive, developed more confidence in themselves, and felt rewarded by the growth of their relationships with the youths.

Their perspective changed as they were exposed to poverty-stricken youth who are

growing up in a world very different from the one in which they grew up. They believed “it opened their eyes to what others experience” and inspired them “to be less judgmental” and “more open.”

The college students also learned to be more confident in themselves. Communication seemed to be the main skill that the students believed had improved throughout the experience. They found that communication may be difficult at first, but it improved over time and became more comfortable. As one student mentioned: “It was awkward at first because I am a little shy at first, but then after we started coming to the program every week, we started to get more comfortable with each other and we talked more about our likes and interests and hobbies.”

The third theme to emerge among the college group was how rewarding their relationships with the young people were. A few of the college students mentioned how the youths were always excited to see them and would run up to them and then not want them to leave. As one student described the excitement, “She remembered who I was just after the first day of sitting down and talking to me and then she always was excited to see me and everything.” Another student shared how the kids did not want her to leave.

On the last day she wrote me a card and it was really nice, she was I don’t want you to leave and she just never really wanted me to go which is sweet. They said they would never forget what we like all did together and so it made an impact on them, and I felt the same way.

Common interests also created a bond between the college students and the youths. As one student described:

I think he saw me as a really good role model and good person and he liked me and we had things in common, and liked the same color, food, sports. He kind of was really happy that I knew soccer and he always really wanted to play soccer with me and that’s kind of how our relationship became strong.

Overall, the qualitative findings from the focus groups were positive and encouraging. The youths, college students and staff learned from the experience.

Discussion and Implications

Research suggests that youth community services programs have the potential to be an interesting and engaging means to promote positive youth development. Moreover, having at-risk youth engage in community service activities can be an opportune vehicle for promoting positive youth development and outcomes. The present study attempted to meet this need by promoting adolescent empowerment and a sense of community via a partnership between a college class and a community agency which serves underprivileged families and youth.

One of the major limitations of the current

study was the small sample size. Even though the quantitative data did not indicate any significant changes in participants' reports of civic responsibility and intent to be involved in future community action, participants indicated they enjoyed developing the relationships with the college students and benefited from the emotional and informational support they received. There was a significant increase in level of empathy and general self-efficacy reported by participants from the beginning of the semester to the end. This result is encouraging since empathy is correlated with prosocial behavior (Cotton, 1992). Perhaps continued engagement with the youths would build upon the level of empathy of these youths, to the point that with more time, their sense of civic responsibility would increase.

Adult staff at the agency indicated what a positive experience this collaboration had been, for the youths, the agency, and the community as a whole. As a result of this project, the author plans to continue this partnership and develop a more formal mentoring program between the college and the youths in the after-school program. This mentoring program will also include having the youths take ownership of a community service project each semester, with guidance from the college students, the adult staff, and the author. The development of a more formal mentoring program with this partner will provide us with the opportunity to design longitudinal studies where positive development outcomes can be measured over the course of the adolescents' middle school and possibly high school years. There is a dearth of research in this area, so future research will yield more promising results in terms of examining positive youth development for at-risk youth. Another area for additional research is to study the impact of the service-learning activity on the community partner. Some data was captured by the staff of the agency who participated in this project, but it would be helpful to more thoroughly examine the impact the service learning and relationship with the college has on the agency as a whole, as well as its consumers.

In the future, more activities can be included in the program to further enhance empowerment and sense of community. For example, despite best efforts, it is possible there were times during the program when youth participants were not given as much power and control as they could have (i.e., when the college students, the author, or staff at the agency stepped in to provide support and structure). Determining those boundaries and talking about those issues before the next project will be important. Moreover, incorporating arts-related activities might be beneficial. By affording young people the space to address social problems, questions, and solutions, the arts can offer a safe context for youth to critically examine their world

(Conrad & Sinner, 2015). Nevertheless, it appears that a youth service activity that is thoughtfully designed and implemented might benefit both the community and the young participants, making youth service programs, especially for at-risk youth, a true win-win situation. Incorporating college students into the formula to act as mentors to the youths also adds an additional benefit, leading to a win-win situation.

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