

Cookie Cart youth employment program Evaluation summary

The Cookie Cart, a youth employment program in North Minneapolis provides quality, paid, first-time employment training for neighborhood teens. Through the retail bakery, youth age 14-17, get hands-on job training and learn basic employment skills such as appropriate work behavior, time management and problem-solving.

Since 2006, the Cookie Cart has contracted with Wilder Research to survey participants and their parents to help Cookie Cart assess the program's value. This is a summary of 2009 survey findings.

Survey participants

This year 44 youth completed surveys. About half of the respondents were female (52%) and half male (48%). Most (87%) were in 10th or 11th grade. About half were African American (51%); a quarter (23%) were of mixed racial background; and a quarter were Hmong (12%), Asian (9%), Native American (2%), and Latino (2%). Seventeen parents completed a survey

Survey results

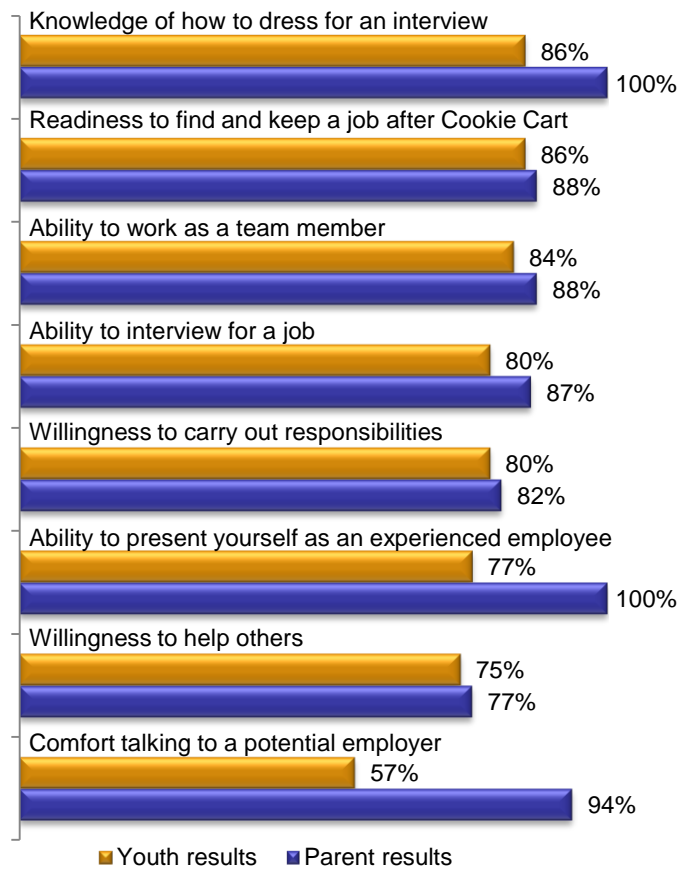
Improved skills and attitude

Most youth (86%) reported they were better prepared to find and keep a job after working at the Cookie Cart. At least three-quarters of the youth reported they had increased skills and attitudes in several areas related to job readiness including willingness to carry out responsibilities and help others, and able to interview for a job, work as a team member, and present as experienced employees.

One thing I like most about the Cookie Cart is that it's not just a bakery. It's actually a doorway to the future as in jobs, college, etc., and we get to learn life skills in the 360 class.

At 86 percent, youth who said they increased their knowledge of how to dress for an interview was up from 65 percent a year ago. However, the percentage of youth who felt comfortable talking to a potential employer fell to 57 percent from 80 percent a year ago. According to program staff, one possible explanation for this finding is that youth may have felt discouraged in their current job search efforts. Staff report that more youth in the current study phase are coming up short in job searches because of few employment opportunities.

YOUTH AND PARENT RATINGS OF POSITIVE CHANGE IN YOUTHS' SKILLS AND ATTITUDES



Continued

Cookie Cart Captains

The Cookie Cart offers eligible youth in the program the opportunity to develop and strengthen their job skills by promoting youth who have demonstrated leadership skills to a Cart Captain position.

Although not a focus of the evaluation, the following comments from youth reflect the value they believe they get from the opportunity:

One thing I like is getting to know others and work as a team.

What I like most is the will to help others and be a leader.

Parents' perceptions

As in previous evaluations, parents' ratings in job-related skills and abilities were even more positive than youth ratings. Areas that were most similarly rated were readiness to find and keep a job, willingness to carry out responsibilities, able to interview for a job and ability to work as a team member.

The teens get job experience. The Cookie Cart teaches them about the value of money, how to interview, and how to be better people in society.

What youth and parents like best

Youth and parents were asked to report in their own words what they liked most about their Cookie Cart experience. The top things youth said they liked best fell into these categories:

- Working with and having fun with peers.
- Having helpful and understanding managers.
- The environment (like family).

The top things parents said they liked best fell into these categories:

- Provides a job experience/opportunity to work.
- Gives my child a place to go/safe environment.
- Teens are understood and given a chance
- Young people can go out in the world and learn new things

Youth perceptions of supervisors

Youth value the relationships they have with their Cookie Cart supervisors. When asked what they thought of their supervisor as a teacher, over three-quarters (77%) reported that their supervisor was a great teacher up from 65 percent a year ago. Almost all youth (90%) of youth said they definitely could ask their supervisor for help if they needed it.

Issues to consider

Parents and youth both would like Cookie Cart to provide opportunities to work more hours. In addition, more than half (56%) of youth mentioned changes they would like to see in themselves, most commonly comments such as:

...for me to work at a faster pace at packing cookies. It's because I feel like I need to move faster and more accurately.

...it would be learning the cash register. I feel as though many other jobs will need a requirement to know skills as cashier to get the job.

In response to requests, cash register training is now offered regularly and more youth are participating.

Efforts to increase parent participation for the next survey appear to be working.

Conclusion

Results of the survey show both youth and their parents find considerable value in the program for the job training and related skills it provides. In addition, youth especially seem to value the relationships they develop with peers and program staff. Overall, the findings of the survey suggest that Cookie Cart is fulfilling its mission of offering North Minneapolis youth the opportunity to develop life, leadership and employment skills.

For more information

This summary presents highlights of the *Cookie Cart* report. This report and other reports on related topics are available at www.wilderresearch.org.

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MARCH 2011

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