

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 2008 survey findings.

Survey participants

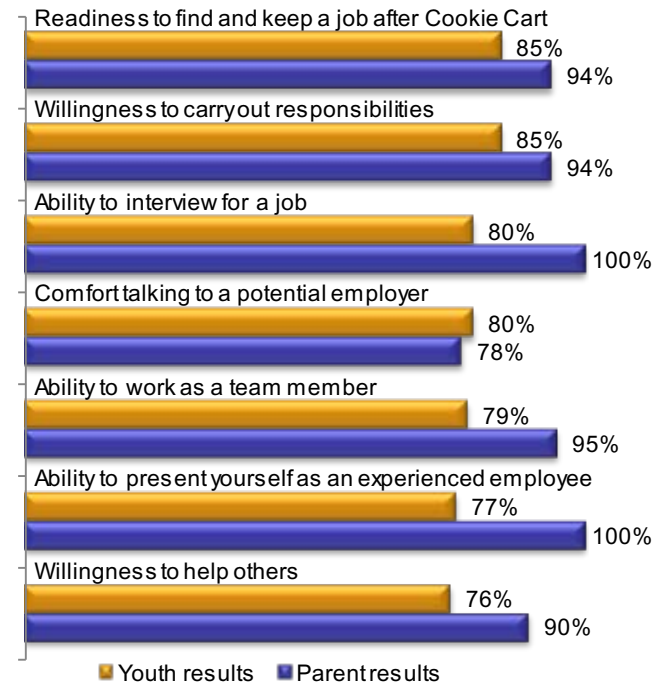
This year 49 youth completed surveys. Half of the youth were female; half were male. More than three quarters (79%) were in the 10th or 11th grade. Sixty percent of the youth were African American, 19 percent were Hmong, and 10 percent were of mixed racial background. The remaining youth identified themselves as Asian, Native American, and Latino. Nineteen parents completed a survey.

Survey results

Improved skills and attitude

Both youth and their parents were asked a series of questions about whether the skills and attitudes of youth participants showed positive changes as a result of the program. Overall, youth and parents both saw improvement in most areas, with parents reporting especially positive ratings. Both youth and parents said the youths' ability to interview for, find, and keep a job was the area showing most improvement. Youth newer to the program (participated for 3 months) tended to report more positive changes than veteran participants (1 year or longer).

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



What youth and parents liked 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.
- Meeting nice people from different backgrounds.
- A good job experience and learning a lot.

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.
- Provides structure in my child's life/clear expectations.
- Parents also liked the cookies.

continued

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, about two-thirds (65%) reported that their supervisor was a great teacher. The remaining one-third reported that they were good or okay teachers. Almost three-quarters of youth (73%) said they definitely could ask their supervisor for help if they needed it.

Recommendations

Parents and youth had similar views about ways to strengthen or improve the Cookie Cart experience. In keeping with their positive reception of the program, almost half of the parents surveyed this year said they do not want to change anything. However, about one-quarter would like Cookie Cart to provide opportunities for their children to work more hours. One-third of the youth said they would not change anything about their Cookie Cart experience. However, 13 percent suggested having more work hours and having a set work schedule.

Parent participation in the program is a challenge for the Cookie Cart staff. The program might want to consider providing an incentive to complete the survey. Another way to increase parent involvement may be to have a “Bring your parent to work” day, with children providing their parents “on-the-job” training.

Cookie Cart may also want to consider surveying staff who work with the youth.

Conclusion

Parents and youth value the program for the employment and social skills training it provides, and the increased job readiness. Seventy percent of the youth reported seeing positive changes in themselves, and 30 percent would like to work harder, learn all they can, and hopefully advance. 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.

WHAT PARTICIPANTS SAY

I like that it is only people your age that work with you. We can relate most of the time, and it's not hard to talk and get along with each other.

How fun it was working with other kids from different schools and different backgrounds.

My managers are not afraid to tell you the truth about what they see in you, and they are very easy to talk to when you need them, and they will also understand you and are glad that they can help you.

Just being able to come to a good environment that I can call my job where I work at. Yes, I have a job I can say truthfully with a smile on my face and money in my pocket.

For the readiness or practice I need for other jobs, like the skills needed for customer service, leadership, and the ability to work as a team with my peers at the Cookie Cart.

WHAT THEIR PARENTS SAY

She is getting out into the work force and is getting experience with an employer.

It makes her busy and allows her to serve the public and get along with others and respect people.

It gives structure in her life and flexibility. They understand teenagers' problems nowadays and she gets a second chance.

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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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